Protecting the Flame:
Overcoming Violence as a Barrier to Education in Namibia

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AND MAŠA POPOVAC
Acknowledgements

This monograph is the result of a project funded by the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (Osisa), which is examining ways of overcoming violence as a barrier to education in Namibia, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) acknowledges the important contribution of its research partner in Namibia, the Urban Trust of Namibia, for collecting the data used in this study.

The authors extend their thanks to the following individuals for their invaluable contributions:

- The close to 500 young people who voluntarily participated in the study (this number includes those who were surveyed and those who participated in focus group activities at the schools).

- Ruanne Fensham for capturing and validating the data.

- Tracy Seider at Tyrus Text & Design for editing and layout.

- Wendy Chetty at the CJCP for managing publication of the monograph.
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<td>CJCP</td>
<td>Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organisation</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early childhood development</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td>Osisa</td>
<td>Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVCs</td>
<td>Orphans and vulnerable children</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory rapid appraisal</td>
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The right of children to education is arguably one of the most significant of all human rights as it allows individuals access to a wealth of opportunities that might otherwise not be within their reach. For many children, however, their right to education is not threatened primarily by a lack of access to schools or by discrimination, but by violence occurring in and around their schools. Violence is one of the major contributing factors to non-enrolment and non-completion of schooling. While a global phenomenon, this is particularly the case in a number of sub-Saharan African countries where primary school enrolment rates are among the lowest in the world.

Namibia’s history is marked by colonialism and apartheid. This resulted in an unequal education system characterised by vast discrepancies between the population groups in terms of access to education, quality of education, curricula and facilities. Since Namibia’s independence in 1990, the government has embarked on a comprehensive reform of the education system. Education in Namibia is now a right of all citizens. However, despite a 95% primary school enrolment rate in recent years, many children in Namibia are still not afforded an education or, more importantly, a quality education.

Experiences in South Africa have drawn attention to the importance of an informed, locally specific and evidence-based approach to formulating interventions that address violence in and around schools, thereby enhancing access to education. Very little nationally representative data on the experiences of violence against children as a barrier to education and as an infringement on human rights exist in the region. In order to close the gap in the literature, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention embarked on a three-country study that explores the impact of violence on access to education. The three participating countries – Namibia, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo – can be considered post-conflict, although each is at a different stage of development and reconstruction. Both quantitative (household survey) and qualitative (focus group activities with learners and key stakeholder interviews) research methods were used to collect the study data.
A total of 381 youths between the ages of 12 and 19 years were surveyed in four predominantly rural regions in the north of Namibia, namely, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto. Of those interviewed, 11 had never attended school before and 59 were not attending school at the time of being interviewed for the study. The primary reasons for not attending school were failing a grade (30.2%), teenage pregnancy (11.6%) and the inability to afford school fees (10.5%). Violence in and near schools was also found to have impacted on learners’ access to education.

The study found that children and youths experience various forms of violence, both as victims and as witnesses, across a range of settings, including the school, their home and the broader community in which they live. Experiences of victimisation at school ranged from being verbally teased, insulted or intimidated (22.6%), to having been physically hit, kicked or punched (18.8%), scared or threatened with harm (17.3%), forced to do something they felt was wrong (11.6%) and forced to do things with their body against their will (5.7%). Most of this violence was perpetrated by classmates or other learners at the school. However, learners and classmates were not the only perpetrators of violence against youths within the school environment; corporal punishment was reported by an alarming 72.6% of the sample. Furthermore, respondents expressed an acute awareness of transactional sexual relationships between educators and learners – a scenario exacerbated by the poverty-stricken conditions that characterise communities in northern Namibia. The socio-economic levels of the households represented in the study were very low. On average, only one household member had a permanent job or a stable source of income, while the average household comprised eight members.

Violence within the school setting seems to reflect the violence reported in the homes and communities in which the respondents live. A total of 12.4% had witnessed family members intentionally hurting one another, with more than a tenth (10.4%) of these assaults being serious enough to warrant medical treatment for the victims’ injuries. Arguments were common in these households (13.1%) and parents often used physical punishment in response to their children’s wrongdoing (67.8%). In addition, violence often resulted if the respondents failed to complete their household chores. The severe levels of poverty experienced in northern Namibia often mean that household responsibilities take precedence over education. Domestic chores are divided according to gender and are based on the traditional stereotypes of male and female roles. Household duties therefore have a far greater negative impact on the schooling of young girls than is the case for boys.

The communities in which the respondents live were also a common site of violence, indicating that many children and youth have few places where they are safe and free from violence. Just over half (51.7%) of the respondents had witnessed someone in their community being hit, kicked or punched on one or more occasion, 38.6% had seen someone being pushed, grabbed or shoved, 14.2%
had seen someone being threatened with a weapon on one or more occasion and 16.4% had seen someone being assaulted with a weapon in their community.

Mainstream literature identifies the link between violence exposure and subsequent emotional and behavioural problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicidal ideation and antisocial behaviour – all factors that make it nearly impossible for quality learning to take place. The effects of violence can only be exacerbated by the presence of other risk factors embedded in these young people’s proximal social environments, namely, poverty, unemployment, large family size, absent parents, etc. Despite the disruption in their normal developmental pathways, children and young people are expected to cope in an environment that lacks the necessary support services to facilitate healing. Parents (40.8%) and other relatives (13.2%) were the most common sources of support following traumatic experiences. The quality of support provided, however, is questionable given that many of these family members are themselves caught up in cycles of violence.

Namibia has one of the most progressive legislative frameworks pertaining to education in Africa. The issue is clear: according to the country’s Constitution, all children should have access to and should remain in school until the age of 16 years. Furthermore, Namibia has developed specific policies to ensure that educationally marginalised children are provided with an education. Namibia is also a signatory to many international and regional instruments that emphasise education as a right of all citizens. This study highlights the lack of policy implementation and enforcement in Namibia, and outlines steps to remedy the situation.
'For many children, the biggest threat to their right to education is not discrimination or lack of access to schools, but violence within or near their schools that undermines their ability to learn, puts their physical and psychological well-being at risk, and often causes them to drop out of school entirely. Children’s right to education entails not only the presence of schools and teachers, but also an environment that allows them to learn in safety.'

Human Rights Watch

A child’s right to education is arguably one of the most significant of all human rights as it allows access to a wealth of opportunities that might otherwise not be within the child’s reach. Clearly, all children have the right to education,¹ but this must be provided in a safe context that is free from violence. The issue is particularly relevant in countries characterised by poverty, underdevelopment and high levels of inequality. Where violence in any form inhibits or prevents equitable access to education, young people’s right to dignity, security and safety is also inhibited.²

Violence in and around schools is a major contributing factor to non-enrolment and non-completion of schooling. While a global phenomenon, this is particularly the case in a number of sub-Saharan African countries.³ In fact, enrolment rates in primary schools on the African continent are among the lowest in the world.⁴ Even for those children who remain in school despite experiences or fears of violence, the ability to achieve within the classroom and to perform academically is likely to be compromised. Violence thus negatively impacts on education in terms of access, retention and achievement.

Violence as an inhibitor to education effects both boys and girls; however, the nature and form of the violence often affects girls differently. Gender-based
violence, acts of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape are experienced at far higher levels by girl children than boys, usually as a result of existing systemic and institutionalised gender inequalities. Yet much of the emphasis in addressing this phenomenon (where it has received attention at all) has been on how girls should protect themselves, rather than addressing the fundamental and systemic drivers of this violence.

The violence experienced by children at school in many countries in the region share some common characteristics. Violence may occur at school – that is, on or immediately surrounding the school premises – and on the way to or from school. The violence may be inflicted by fellow learners, other children not at school or adults (educators or principals). The latter may include instances of criminal violence or institutionalised violence, such as corporal punishment. The violence related to school is not limited to physical violence and includes bullying, verbal abuse and emotional violence or abuse.

While legislation throughout the region has banned corporal punishment, this practice is still commonly used as a means of punishment and control in the classroom. Recent studies conducted by Save the Children (Sweden) in Zambia, for example, showed that 38% of children reported being hit with an object as punishment in the classroom, while 32% reported being beaten by hand. A 2008 study in South Africa reported that 70.1% of primary school and 47.5% of secondary school learners were physically punished at school. Educators may be complicit in violence in other ways. In Malawi, a 2005 study revealed that almost one-third of children at school reported that their teachers demanded sex from learners in return for good grades, entering into so-called ‘love relationships’.

Emerging forms of indirect violence – such as human trafficking, child labour and adults using children to commit crimes – are found in countries throughout the region and result in both short-term tangible injury and long-term harm to children. Violence in different forms experienced by caregivers, parents or other family members also impacts on the well-being of the child. In addition, a child who has been emotionally abused at home, for example, is unlikely to feel motivated to attend school and is unlikely to perform well at school. Children’s ability to form positive attachments is negatively impacted by violence at home, and they are less likely to trust and form pro-social relationships. In this way, violence not only endangers their health and well-being but prevents them from engaging in normal childhood activities, particularly the right to schooling and education. Violence thus affects the entire psycho-social development of young people.

Furthermore, high levels of violence against learners have longer term societal and economic consequences. As children grow into adulthood, their failure to develop adequate pro-social behaviours and positive social capital undermines the development of healthy, caring communities. Young adults who are poorly equipped emotionally and socially are more likely to act aggressively towards those around them, including their own families, thereby perpetuating violent environments. Stunted educational outcomes also limit the economic
opportunities (formal and informal) available to children as they mature. This has long-term and intergenerational implications for both them and their families. Simply stated, violence against young people, on any scale, is likely to undermine efforts to reduce poverty and promote democracy in the region.

Recent experiences in South Africa have pointed to the importance of an informed, locally specific and evidence-based approach to formulating interventions that address violence at schools and enhance children’s access to education. With the exception of South Africa and Malawi, very little nationally representative data exists in the region on the experiences of violence against children as a barrier to education and as an infringement on human rights. Where studies have been conducted, these have tended to focus on quantitative methodologies or limited qualitative methodologies that do not address the real scale of the problem and which, more importantly, do not allow for the formulation of a coherent, integrated strategy to deal with violence.

For this reason, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in 2009 embarked on a three-country study aimed at exploring violence as a barrier to education in Namibia, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While all three countries can be classified as post-conflict, each is at a different stage of development and reconstruction.

Namibia gained independence from South Africa in 1990 and is now a multiparty democracy. While the country has relatively sound and stable governmental structures, available data indicates rising levels of crime and violence over the past five years.

Overall, the study was guided by four objectives, namely:

- to collect scientifically based, reliable quantitative and qualitative data on the extent, nature and implications of school-related violence against children in three Southern African Development Community countries;

- to add substantially to the local and regional body of knowledge on children, young

Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975. Its early years of independence were, however, marred by civil war and violence related to the apartheid struggle in South Africa and the fight for independence in Zimbabwe. Substantial progress has been made in rebuilding the Mozambican economy following decades of economic collapse. Mozambique is also for the first time currently engaging in comprehensive data collection on crime and violence at a community level.

The DRC is the most fragile of the three countries in this study in both political and economic terms. Despite the signing of a peace accord in 2003 and later political agreements, political violence and instability still exist in many of the more rural areas of the DRC, particularly in the east. Civil society is recovering from what many consider to be the most violent war since the Second World War, characterised by gross human rights violations.
people, violence and education within each selected country, through a process of data collection, analysis and dissemination;

- to contribute to the sharing of research skills and capacity building within each selected country by developing local partnerships with identified non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academic institutions; and

- to further regional and international advocacy efforts that focus on the prevention of violence against girls, such as the Plan International strategy and the Osisa Action Aid campaign.

The study in Namibia commenced with a one-day roundtable discussion held on 13 October 2009, which brought together sector experts, academics and civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in the education field. The purpose of the roundtable, which was run in partnership with the Urban Trust of Namibia, was to disseminate information about the study to relevant stakeholders and to collect existing information, data and in-country experiences relating to the topic under study.

A desktop collection of all available data on existing research relating to school violence, violence against girls and violence as a barrier to education in each of the three countries was undertaken, facilitated by the roundtable discussion. This was followed by the primary fieldwork component, which comprised quantitative and qualitative research methods.

**Figure 1: Data collection process**

- **Schools-based research** – participatory rapid appraisals with learners and surveys with principals
- **Desktop research** and in-depth engagement with sector experts, academics and civil society organisations involved in education
- **Household survey** administered to 381 young people aged 12–19 years in four regions in northern Namibia
For the quantitative component, a household survey was administered to 400 young people between the ages of 12 and 19 years in four regions of northern Namibia. Following the quality control processes, 19 questionnaires were excluded from the data analysis process. Access to the communities was sought by engaging with community or traditional leaders and informing them about the intended study and the various processes involved in it.

Following these consultations, 100 households were surveyed in Ohangwena, Oshikoto, Oshana and Omusati. The questionnaire used was designed to elicit information on young people’s experiences of violence – both direct and indirect – at school, in the home and in the broader communities in which they live. The regions selected for the survey are predominantly rural (96.3%) and occupied by the Ovambo (99.5%) ethnic group, which constitutes half of Namibia’s population demographic. Females (59.8%) and participants between the ages of 16 and 19 years accounted for more than half of the study sample.

The quantitative component was complemented by a number of participatory rapid appraisals (PRAs) conducted at various schools (one school was selected per region). This ensured that the experiences and perceptions of children both at school and those not attending school were captured in the study. School-based surveys were also administered to the school principals to explore their perceptions of violence at school. This approach provided the advantage of capturing and quantifying experiences, as well as obtaining perceptions that allowed for a richer description of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohangwena</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omusati</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshana</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshikoto</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12–13 years</td>
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<td>14–15 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>16–17 years</td>
<td>33.5</td>
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<td>18–19 years</td>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ovambo</td>
<td>98.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caprivian</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herero</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40.2</td>
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Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample (n=381)
THE PAST

Namibia’s education system is characterised by vast differences between the population groups in terms of access to education, quality of education, curricula and facilities. This unequal system is a legacy of Namibia’s colonial and apartheid past. Namibia’s education system stems largely from the Bantu Education Act of 1953 that was enforced while the country, known then as South West Africa, was under South African rule.

The then apartheid state used education as an oppressive tool and education was compulsory only for Namibia’s white population. Since it was believed that ‘non-whites’ required nothing more than a basic education, only two schools for ‘non-white’ learners had been built in the country by 1940. Both schools were situated in central Namibia, even though the majority of Namibia’s black population resided in the north. Not only was access limited, but the quality of education afforded to Namibians was very poor.

After independence from South Africa in March 1990, priority was given to creating an equitable education system and curriculum that addressed Namibia’s cultural diversity and worked towards reversing the effects of inequality and minority privilege that existed under apartheid. In order to rectify the injustices of the past, the new government declared that all Namibians should have access to education and that basic education shall be free and compulsory.

Article 20 of Namibia’s Constitution states that:

- All persons shall have a right to education.

- Primary education shall be compulsory and the state shall provide reasonable facilities to render effective this right to every resident within Namibia, by establishing and maintaining state schools at which primary education will be provided free of charge.
Children shall not be allowed to leave school until they have completed their primary education or have attained the age of 16 years, whichever is the sooner, save insofar as this may be authorised by act of parliament on grounds of health or other considerations pertaining to the public interest.

The Namibian Minister of Education and Culture’s 1993 document entitled ‘Towards education for all: A development brief for education, culture and training’ provided a clearer vision of the legislation. The document outlined five goals for education, namely: access; equity; quality; efficiency; and democracy. Essentially, all aspects of the old education system would be overturned. This included unequal access to education, segregation of quality education along racial and ethnic divides, a curriculum and teacher education programme that failed to meet the needs of the broader Namibian population, and exclusion of the views of teachers, parents, administrators and workers in the decision-making process. It stated unambiguously that education was a fundamental right and that basic education should be provided to all. As a result, primary education was made compulsory and free for all individuals.16

To further this agenda, Namibia has developed specific policies to ensure that

Namibia is a signatory to many international and regional instruments that emphasise education as a right of all citizens.

**Education for All (EFA) National Plan of Action 2001–2005**

EFA Goal II (p.30): ‘Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality.’

**Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

(i) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education.
(ii) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:
   (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;

**Article 17 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights**

(i) Every individual shall have the right to education.

**Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
   (a) Make primary education compulsory and free for all;

**Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**

(v) State parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is subjected to school and parental discipline shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the child in conformity with the present Charter.
marginalised children are provided with an education, specifically children in rural areas, street children, orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), children of farm workers, children in squatter areas and resettlement camps, children of families living in extreme poverty and children with disabilities.

Namibia is currently the highest investor in education in Africa, with 10% of its gross domestic product going to education.¹⁷ Namibia’s commitment to achieving the objective of education for all is further reflected in government policies and its ratification of various international and regional conventions and charters (see text box, opposite).

THE PRESENT

In recent years, Namibia has achieved a 95% enrolment rate at primary school level. In theory, education has become more accessible to Namibian citizens; however, many children are still not accessing basic education and, more importantly, quality education. A number of factors coalesce to impact on the quality of education provided to school-going children and youths in Namibia, one of which is violence.

Violence in its many forms not only prevents equitable access to education but infringes on young people’s right to dignity and security, as well as on their right to live in social environments that are safe and free from violence.¹⁸ The systemic forms of violence characterising the current Namibian education system, and which are known to impact on access to education, include:

- poverty;
- lack of policy implementation;
- lack of mother-tongue education; and
- the dearth of early childhood development (ECD) programmes in the country.

POVERTY

Although it is considered to be a middle-income country, Namibia has one of the highest Gini-coefficients (0.63) in the world.¹⁹ The Central Bureau of Statistics reported in 2008 that two out of five Namibian households are either poor (27.6%) or extremely poor (13.8%). These figures vary significantly by region, with the northern region being the least resourced in terms of economic and social development.

Poverty is a major inhibitor of access to education. Although Namibia allocates approximately 25% of its national budget to education, this prioritisation has not resulted in desirable outcomes for education in the north of the country. Schools there continue to be under-resourced both in terms of physical infrastructure and financially. Other factors inhibiting access to education in these areas are poorly trained educators, high learner–teacher ratios, long distances to school, poor
school management and administration, and the poverty-stricken conditions in which many families are compelled to live. All this inhibits access to education and impacts negatively on the quality of education provided to learners where access has been granted. The Namibian government has adopted a number of programmes in an attempt to remedy the situation. These include mobile schools, school feeding programmes and the exemption of school fees. However, these interventions address only one aspect of a multifaceted problem, and in the case of the latter has not worked as well as was intended.

The inability to afford the costs associated with schooling has led to non-attendance or non-completion of schooling and has also given rise to other forms of violence perpetrated against learners. This highlights the symbiotic relationship between poverty and other forms of violence. An example of this is the phenomenon of transactional sex whereby female learners engage in sexual activities or relationships with male educators as a way of obtaining passing grades or school materials that they could otherwise not afford. Child trafficking has also been linked to poverty. This involves children in rural areas being taken from their parents’ homes (sometimes by family members) and promised a quality education in urban areas.

**LACK OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT**

Namibia has a progressive legislative framework aimed at increasing access to free education; however, much of this legislation is not enforced. One example is the Education Policy Act of 2001, which makes provision for the national Education Development Fund and, at a more local level, a school development fund.

The schools development fund, which is essentially a school fee since it is paid by the parents, was intended to raise the standard of education by enabling schools to provide extra-curricular activities, with that cost theoretically being carried by

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The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights devoted General Comment No. 11 to article 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Commenting on the actual meaning of free education, it states:

> that the nature of the right to primary education free of charge is unequivocal. This right is expressly formulated so as to ensure the availability of primary education without charge to the child, parents or guardians. Fees imposed by the government, local authorities or the school, and other direct costs, constitute disincentives to the enjoyment of the right and may jeopardize its realization. They are often highly regressive in effect. Their elimination is a matter which must be addressed by the plan of action, required by article 14 of the Covenant. Indirect costs, such as compulsory levies on parents (sometimes portrayed as being voluntary, when in fact they are not), or the obligation to wear a relatively expensive school uniform, can also fall into the same category, according to the Committee.
the fund. However, owing to the poor allocation of resources to schools by government, principals often rely on the money collected by the fund to cover the schools’ running costs and they have resorted to inflating the fee requested from parents.

Given the poverty-stricken conditions in which many Namibian families live, many children are prevented from accessing an education because they cannot afford to pay the fee. Although the Education Act makes provision for poor learners to be exempted from paying the contribution, principals are often reluctant to enforce this policy, especially when most of the learners are poor and unable to contribute to the fund – a scenario true for many schools in northern Namibia.

The umbrella fund – the Education Development Fund – was developed to lend financial assistance to schools where learners were unable to afford the fee due to poverty or other circumstances. Namibian education policies also make provision for OVCs. However, government has experienced problems with the allocation of resources largely because there is no standard funding formula to inform the allocation of money to needy schools. The difficulty in accessing the national Education Development Fund has discouraged many principals from exempting poor and other marginalised or vulnerable learners from the school contribution.

**Education Act (Government Gazette, No. 16 of 2001)**

Article 25 of the Education Act directs that:

(10) Subject to subsection (9) the school board may partially or fully exempt any parent from the payment of the school development fund contribution.

(11) If a parent is partially or fully exempted by the school board from the payment of the school development contribution, the school board may apply to the [Education Development] Fund for aid to pay such contribution.

Other forms of violence have persisted as a result of poor enforcement of legislation and lack of information about the policies protecting children and their right to education. These include corporal punishment within schools and the treatment of pregnant learners and their re-entry into the schooling system (see pages 47 and 48 for more detail). This highlights the need, on the one hand, for enforcement and implementation of the legislation and, on the other hand, for the education of learners, educators, principals and parents in order to render effective the rights of children.

**LACK OF MOTHER-TONGUE EDUCATION**

Namibia has 13 official languages, of which 10 are of African origin. According to
Namibia’s language policy, mother-tongue education is only provided in primary schools, generally from grades one to three, after which English is the medium of instruction. The decision to use English as the official medium of instruction was based largely on international criteria, despite the fact that only 7% of Namibians spoke English at the time of independence. Other national languages are taught as subjects from Grade 4 onwards, with the exception of the San languages.

CSOs and educators have raised concern about the issue and believe that it renders the culture and language of certain ethnic groups in Namibia inferior. In addition, learners experience difficulty in achieving desired educational outcomes when they are compelled to learn in a language that is foreign to them. Furthermore, the introduction of English in Grade 4 has been found to be problematic because learners and their teachers may not be adequately proficient in the language to facilitate the understanding of more complex topics. This obviously affects the quality of education received. In Namibia, this issue has been linked to higher failure rates, lower school attendance and higher drop-out rates among learners whose mother-tongue is not English. The problem is exacerbated when children have not been exposed to pre-primary educational stimulation (see below).

DEARTH OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

ECD forms the basis for later primary and secondary schooling. Research has highlighted the link between early educational stimulation and the ability to meet cognitive and developmental milestones later in life. Lack of early education therefore often results in stunted educational outcomes once a child is in the formal schooling system. One way to remedy learning difficulties and to reduce the failure and repetition rates that affect Grade 10 learners in Namibia in particular, is to provide educational programmes aimed at stimulating the intellectual growth of children before they enter the formal education system at the age of six years.

The Ministry of Education’s Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme specifically highlights the needs of OVCs with regard to education. The programme proposes increasing access to pre-primary education for OVCs and providing specialised training on OVCs to caregivers in the ECD sector by 2011. However, our research noted a lack of ECD institutions or centres, particularly in remote areas of the country, and recognised the need for ECD for all children, not only vulnerable children.

Clearly, while the Namibian government has made remarkable strides in reforming its education system and making education more accessible to its citizens, access to quality education is still impeded by a number of factors. These systemic factors inevitably prevent quality learning from occurring – a scenario that is exacerbated by the incidence of violence in its numerous forms.
LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Of the 381 youths interviewed, 370 (97.1%) had attended school ever in their lives, while 11 (2.9%) had never been enrolled in a formal education institution. Of those who had ever been to school, the majority (85.1%) were scholars at the time of being interviewed for this study. With regard to their highest level of completed education, 38.5% of the participants had some primary schooling, 30.3% had completed their primary education, 27.5% had some secondary schooling and only 3.7% of the respondents had completed their secondary education.

For nearly a third of the 59 young people who were not attending school at the time of the interview, the main reason for this was having failed a grade. Repetition rates were common for the entire study sample. More than half (56.5%) of the 370 young people who had ever been to school reported having failed a grade. Of these, one in three learners (34.2%) had done so on more than one occasion. Overall, females (57.2%) were found to have higher failure rates compared to males (42.8%). This finding is consistent with national findings in Namibia, which show that 16.9% of learners repeat a grade twice and 6.4% repeat a grade three or more times during their school career.

Repeating a grade is common in developing countries and most often affects poorer children, working children and children in rural areas. This is due to the cost of schooling, remoteness, illness and malnutrition, as well as the quality of teaching and the language of instruction. Interestingly, females were significantly more likely ($p<0.05$) to have ever attended school (61% of females and 39% of males) and to have completed a higher level of education compared to males. More specifically, a third (33.6%) of females had completed their primary education compared to a quarter of males (25.2%), and 5.1% of females had completed their secondary schooling compared to only 1.4% of males.
psychological implications as it affects self-esteem and motivation and may also lead to bullying and teasing by other children. This explains why pupils who repeat a grade at school are between two and 11 times more likely to drop out of school than those who are promoted.27

Teenage pregnancies were cited by one in ten (11.6%) young people as their reason for not attending school. According to available research, the four regions that form part of the current study have the highest school drop-out rates in the country as a result of teenage pregnancy.28

Teenage pregnancy is a cause for serious concern given that young girls in this predicament are less likely to complete their schooling. This not only impacts negatively on the future prospects of the young mothers, but studies have shown that children born to mothers who have not completed their education have a lower chance of enrolling and completing school themselves.

In Namibia, schools have been known to exacerbate the situation by excluding pregnant girls from schooling as punishment for their actions. However, a new policy that focuses on the management and prevention of learner pregnancies was approved by Cabinet in 2009. The policy (described in more detail later) focuses on giving young mothers a choice and prevents schools from compelling young girls to leave. Group discussions with learners revealed that pregnant schoolgirls often choose to leave school for fear of victimisation by other learners and teachers.

A tenth (10.5%) of participants were not attending school due to an inability to afford the costs associated with schooling. To reiterate, the Namibian government makes provision for poor learners to be exempted from contributing to the school development fund – a contribution that was intended to allow schools to improve the standard of education received by learners. Principals, however, are reluctant to enforce this policy within their schools, particularly when most of the learners are poor and unable to contribute to the fund. Schools have come to rely on this

Figure 2: Reasons for not attending school (n=59)
money to cover running costs given the poor resource allocation to schools, especially those located in northern Namibia. This is a serious issue since it infringes on children’s constitutional right to free education.

Other less commonly reported reasons for not attending school included illness (8.1%), thinking of it as being unimportant (8.1%), lack of finances to pay for school materials (e.g. books, pens, etc.) (4.7%) and having to stay home to care for younger siblings (3.5%) (see Figure 2).

Absenteeism varied. Most respondents (42.9%) had never missed a day of school in the year prior to the study. More than a third (37.4%) of learners admitted being absent from school one to three times in the past year, while more than a tenth (14.8%) of learners had been absent from school four to nine times in the past 12 months (see Figure 3).

VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

Violence within the school environment is an international phenomenon. Earlier research studies have demonstrated that some learners are directly victimised at school, while others, although not personally affected by violent incidents at school, are keenly aware of the victimisation experienced by their peers at school. Findings show that learners in Namibia are no exception.

School violence takes on many forms. For these participants, experiences of personal victimisation at school ranged from being verbally teased, insulted or intimidated (22.6%), to having been physically hit, kicked or punched (18.8%), having been scared or threatened with harm (17.3%), having been forced to do something they felt was wrong (11.6%), and having been forced to do things with their body against their will (5.7%) (see Figure 4, next page).
For the most part, females reported higher rates of bullying within the school environment compared to males, with the exception of being forced to do things they felt were wrong (see Figure 5).

This finding is interesting given that mainstream literature identifies males as the most likely victims of bullying at school. Nonetheless, other researchers have...
acknowledged the increasing prevalence of bullying among girl learners in some developing countries.\textsuperscript{31}

When sharing their experiences of verbal violence at school, many children spoke directly to the issue of HIV/AIDS and the stigma and discrimination they experienced at the hands of other learners.

Fleming and Jacobsen explored bullying trends in low- and middle-income countries and found that, overall, bullying tends to decrease with age. More specifically, while those aged 12–13 and 14–15 years had the highest victimisation rates, the lowest rates of bullying were observed among respondents 16–17 years of age.\textsuperscript{32} The Namibian sample, however, revealed contrasting findings. For this sample, respondents aged 18–19 years experienced the same levels of victimisation (if not higher) as their 12–13-year-old counterparts (see Figure 6).

Importantly, the data revealed the alarming frequency with which respondents fall prey to victimisation within the school environment. Half of the interviewees

\textbf{Figure 6: Victimisation at school, by age (n=369)}
(50.8%) who had been scared or threatened with harm have been subjected to this form of mental abuse two to five times, while one in four (24.6%) had been victimised in this way more than 10 times. Physical violence was also often not a one-off incident, with more than a third (35.7%) of those who had ever been physically hit, kicked or punched at school indicating having been victimised in this way two to five times, while one in five (22.9%) youths had been physically attacked at school more than 10 times.

The frequency with which young people fall prey to physical violence within the school environment was further borne out by the extent to which this form of violence dominated focus group discussions with learners. The posters drawn by learners during the group activities clearly depict the plight of children and youth at some Namibian schools (see images 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Even more alarming was the recurrent rate of sexual victimisation at school. While most of these victims had only experienced sexual assault once (45.5%) while at school, 31.8% – nearly a third – had been victimised two to five times and 18.2% had been sexually assaulted more than 10 times while at school. These findings should not come as a surprise given the proximity of victims to offenders, who have most commonly been identified as classmates and other learners. This proximity provides opportunity for further victimisation, underscoring the need to implement and enforce effective school safety policies.

For many learners, school is often associated with feelings of fear and is not seen as an environment where quality learning can take place. A total of 8.7%
(nearly a tenth) of learners reported being fearful when travelling to and from school. Nearly all the respondents walk to school (97.3%). For three out of five learners (60.9%), the journey to school lasts approximately 30 minutes or less, while 26.5% reported a longer journey time – approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Still, a tenth of respondents (10.7%) reported spending one to two hours a day travelling to school. Young people are thus at risk of victimisation both within the school grounds and when travelling to and from school.

During the group discussions, children spoke fervently about the long distances they must travel to get to school. Children in Oshana said that during the rainy season younger children are not able to get to school because of flooding rivers.

In order to assist with the journey, Miss Namibia 1992 sponsored the donation of bicycles to schools in Omusati. The bicycles are given to learners who excel at school and can be kept on condition that they continue to get good grades. If a learner’s grades begin to slip, the bicycle is given to a more deserving learner. This initiative encourages children to do well at school and facilitates access to education.
A total of 7.7% of the sample indicated there was a particular place at school that they were fearful of. Classrooms (44.5%) and the principal’s office (24.1%) emerged as the most feared places at school, followed by school corridors and school toilets – each reported by a tenth of respondents. Females expressed higher levels of fear within the school environment, while males exhibited higher levels of fear when travelling to and from school.

Learners and classmates were not the only perpetrators of violence. Corporal punishment was reported by most learners, with an alarming 72.6% of the sample reporting having ever been caned, spanked or hit by a teacher or principal for their wrongdoings. Corporal punishment is defined as the use of ‘physical force with the intention of causing a child pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child’s behaviour’.33

Despite being abolished in Namibia since 1990,34 male (71.7%) and female (71.3%) participants were equally likely to have experienced corporal punishment at school. This form of behaviour modification was found to be most commonly used among youths aged 14 and 15 years (see Figure 8).

During the PRA activities, learners also spoke emotionally about the issue of corporal punishment. The plight of children and youth is clearly illustrated in the following quotes and focus group posters:

- The teachers at school do not teach. We make notes for ourselves from books. Teachers beat us up if we do not do the homework ... We want this abuse to end.
Teachers sometimes punish us if we come late or fail a test, exercise or homework. The punishment they give is too hard and not made for your age. For example, telling a 14-year-old student to remove a tree with its roots or to weed the whole school yard.

Most of the learners are beaten up very badly by their parents at home and by teachers at school. No one should tell this to their friend or whoever, otherwise you will be beaten again.

The findings suggest that the fear of being victimised is associated not only with other learners but with the adults at school as well (i.e. educators and principals).

Images 5 and 6: Posters depicting corporal punishment at schools in Ohangwena and Oshana
making the school environment hostile, insecure and threatening. Physical punishment by caregivers at home also appears to be high, with 67.8% of respondents reporting being caned, spanked or hit when they did something wrong at home. This is not surprising as Morrell claims that one of the reasons why corporal punishment still exists in schools, despite it being banned, is the continued use of physical punishment at home and the support of its use at school.

Studies indicate that corporal punishment has undesired effects because, rather than reducing inappropriate behaviour among children, it teaches children that physical aggression is normal and is an appropriate means of conflict resolution and expression of anger. In contexts where violence is prevalent at the community, home and school level, corporal punishment acts as another means of modelling aggressive behaviour to children. These children are then more likely to engage in similar behaviour as adults, inflicting physical punishment on their own children and through gender-based violence. Corporal punishment is therefore seen as a contributor to broader societal violence.

Violence in Namibian schools often manifests as transactional sexual relationships between male teachers and female learners – a scenario that is exacerbated by the poverty-stricken conditions characterising communities in the north. Learners spoke about male teachers propositioning female learners, promising them higher marks or passing grades in exchange for sexual relations (see images 7 and 8). These educator–learner relationships often result in unwanted pregnancies.

The findings suggest that for many children and youth in Namibia, schools are common sites of violence. Being taught in a violent environment infringes on an individual’s basic right to education and undermines young people’s right to dignity and security, and to live free from violence.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL

Despite the prevalence of violence within the school environment, the study
found that attitudes towards school were very positive. To explore youths’ attitudes towards their schooling, interviewees were presented with a series of statements and were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

On the whole, three out of four youths strongly agreed that they enjoy going to school (76.4%) and that getting good grades is important to them (76%). More than two-thirds of the sample strongly agreed that they enjoyed what they learn in class (67.4%) and try to work hard at school (73.8%). Furthermore, 65.5% strongly agreed that they actively participate in class by asking or answering questions. The overall positive attitude towards school was further attested to by the high percentage (71.4%) of respondents who strongly disagreed with the statement that school is boring.

Research has shown that a positive attitude towards school is an important protective factor for children and youths. Any intervention strategy aimed at improving the safety of children should therefore foster a positive attitude towards education among Namibian learners, given the reduced likelihood of such youths becoming involved in substance abuse, dropping out of school and engaging in other delinquent activities – all factors that negatively impact education.

When comparing the views of males and females with regard to these statements, the biggest discrepancy in responses was observed for the statement ‘Education is more important for boys’. Overall, 33.7% of respondents disagreed and 21.5% strongly disagreed with the statement, while 13.6% agreed and 31.3% strongly agreed. As can be expected, males were significantly more likely (p<0.05) to agree with the sentiment (52.9%) compared to their female counterparts (38.9%). This may be indicative of the traditional gender roles that are entrenched in the culture of these communities. Despite this, the remaining 47.1% of males and 61.1% of females disagreed that education was more important for boys. These findings suggest a positive shift towards gender equality in democratic Namibia.
HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS

While the size of the households represented in the study ranged from one to 23 members, 66.7% of the sample reported living in households comprising five to 10 individuals and 12.4% – more than a tenth – of the sample lived in households comprising less than five members. The number of children under the age of 18 in these households ranged from one to 16, with an average of four children per household. Furthermore, there was an average of three (SD=2) children of school-going age in these households, most of whom attended school.

Figure 9: Number of people per household (n=381)
Nine out of ten (92.1%) respondents live in traditional homes or homesteads. The main source of water for these households comes from communal taps (40.9%), 15% have water piped into their home and 12.3% collect water from boreholes or wells. Eighty percent of these households have no toilets in their homes and generally rely on pit latrines or ventilated pit latrines for sanitary purposes (15.5%).

Close to a third (31.6%) of the families were two-parent households, while a fifth were single-parent households headed by females (mothers) (22.4%). Additionally, one in five (22.4%) interviewees reported living with their grandparents. Of the respondents who did not live with their parents, more than a quarter (28.3%) cited the reason for this being because their parents had died as a result of natural causes or illness, 22% were displaced, 6.8% had deceased parents as a result of violence or war, 4.4% had deceased parents due to other reasons, 1.9% did not know and the remaining 36.5% cited other reasons.

The economically stressed conditions affecting many households in the north of Namibia were clearly borne out by the fact that two out of five (39.8%) households have no permanent source of income. Furthermore, an average of only one (SD=1) household member has permanent work or a stable source of income.

**EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE**

Namibian youths experience various forms of violence in the home, both as victims and witnesses of the violence. One in ten respondents (12.4%) reported having ever seen a member of their household intentionally hit, kick, push, slap or attack another member of their household with a weapon. The victims in these attacks were most likely siblings (34.1%) or other relatives (43.9%) besides parents and grandparents. Siblings (36.4%) were the most common perpetrators in these attacks (see Table 2).

Physical assaults within the home often included the use of weapons (36.7%), commonly sticks (43.8%), axes, pangas or bush knives (31.3%). The severity of

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<th>Victim (%)</th>
<th>Perpetrator (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Other relative</td>
<td>43.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>34.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Father</td>
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these domestic disputes was evident in the percentage (10.4%) of attacks that warranted medical attention for the victim’s injuries. Alcohol and drugs were found to be a contributing factor in nearly a third (31.3%) of these incidents, as well as fights and arguments in the family (17.1%). Internationally, addictive substances such as alcohol and other drugs have been linked to a large number of violent incidences, often resulting in the higher likelihood of a violent incident occurring as well as more severe incidences of violence. Many children in the focus groups also spoke about the beatings that children suffered following their parents’ visits to shebeens.

Violence in the home also commonly manifested as frequent arguments (13.1%), physically hitting one another when angry (13.1%), threats of violence (7.1%) and forcing members out of the household (6.1%). The use of physical punishment for wrongdoings was widespread in these homes, with two out of three (67.8%) interviewees reporting having been physically hit as punishment for their transgressions. Despite these acts of violence, more than three-quarters (77.4%) of those interviewed believed that people in their family look out for one another.

**DOMESTIC CHORES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

People in northern Namibia are involved mainly in crop and livestock production and rely on this as their main economic activity. These activities are, however, labour intensive and children are often required to help out. The results show that more than a quarter (27.7%) of the sample indicated having to do household chores before school all five days of the (school) week. Three out of five respondents (59.7%) do household chores after school all five days of the week.

During the focus groups, children spoke about being beaten when they arrive late for school, even though the most common reason for being late is having to complete household chores before leaving for school. To avoid being late for school, children often decide to leave their chores until after school, but they then
run the risk of being beaten when they return home for not having completed their chores – clearly an impossible situation.

One-fifth (20.8%) of the respondents work in the fields before school all five days and just over half (52.9%) of the sample reported having to work in the fields every day after school. Furthermore, 12.3% sell or trade goods at the market and nearly a third (31.5%) of the interviewees take care of younger siblings every day of the school week.

Due to the high levels of poverty in the region, children usually do not have a choice of whether or not to work. Household responsibilities often take precedence over school obligations. Since more than a quarter of children are required to do chores before school, they may arrive at school late. In other instances children may be kept out of school in order to meet household obligations.

The following extracts depict the harrowing consequences for children who fail to complete household chores.

- **During harvesting time they wake me up early in the morning before I go to school to collect mud. If I do not do it, when I come home from school, I do not eat.**

- **I would like to tell you about kids who are abused by their parents in the community. Sometimes the children are not given food to eat or even water to drink or clothes to wear. Sometimes you find a child working in the village ... you find children not given food at home, cultivating the land.**

- **There is a grandmother in our village abusing her granddaughter. When the granddaughter comes home from school, she is not given any food to eat at home and if she does not do any chores in the evening, she does not eat dinner either. She will just sleep hungry and in the morning she will have to go to school.**

- **One day I was left in the house alone while my mom and dad went out. Before they left they told me to crush Mahangu (millet) and crush it again for flour. I did what they asked me to do and I even went to collect firewood and brewed the traditional drink called Oshikundu (yoghurt-type drink). Then I cooked and went to bed. When my mom got back she asked me if I crushed Mahangu and I told her I did. Then she asked if I collected firewood and I answered yes. She then asked if I collected the cattle and I said I did not. Then she started arguing, asking why I did not do so. Then she asked me to get up to go look for the cattle in the middle of the night. When I got up she grabbed me, took off my clothes and started beating me with a palm tree branch until I got wounded.**

Participants were acutely aware of the abuse suffered by OVCs for their failure to complete domestic chores and the impact this has on their ability to learn at school.

- **There is a kid that is forced to go fetch water in the dark. The kid is beaten very badly**
and then chased out of the house at night. The kid does not have a school uniform but other kids in the house have school uniforms.

There is a young girl being abused by the parents. The girl is asked to go fetch water at night and when she gets back home she is ordered to pound Mahangu (millet). When the parent comes home from the shebeen, she beats up the child, saying: ‘I did not give birth to you, why did you come live in my house in the first place? I will treat you bad because I did not give birth to you.’

One day when I was eating, my grandfather chased me away from the food. I am an orphan. I thought maybe he is doing it because my mother died. He told me I must not eat his food, I should go and get food from my mother’s grave. I just starved and I was thinking a lot about the hurtful words he said to me. I started crying, thinking of many things. Thinking of whether this would happen if my mother was alive and why we orphans have to suffer as if we were the cause of our parents’ death. No one wants to be without his/her parents. It makes me feel so sad and I miss my parents. The next day I woke up and went to school with an empty stomach. I did not even have breakfast and I could not concentrate on the school work.

GENDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Before independence, Namibia was a deeply patriarchal society. The man was the head of the household; his wife was subordinate to him and was his ‘property’. Namibia has, however, made considerable strides towards gender equality and women’s rights are entrenched in the Constitution. According to Ambunda and De Klerk, the legal mechanisms necessary to ensure gender equality have been implemented, but progress is slow due to the conservative nature of the greater part of Namibia’s population.

In various Namibian cultures, duties and responsibilities in the household are divided according to gender and are based on traditional stereotypes of male and female roles. In most cases the male has resource control and the power to overrule his wife’s decisions, while the wife is consulted only for suggestions and advice. Her contribution to decision making is recognised only on matters pertaining to child rearing. Hence, she has no power to control household resources.

This is also the case in Oshiwambo-speaking communities. A man’s role is to look after livestock, build huts and storage barns for crops, dig wells and plough the field, while a woman’s role is to cook, plough and weed the crop fields, harvest crops and pound the grain into flour, care for the family, collect water and make clay pots. Given the male’s prominent position, he is responsible for all household decisions.

To assess perceptions of gender roles, respondents were presented with a number of statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement.
with each of the statements. On the whole, the results show that there are some gender stereotypes among the respondents. This mirrors the broader cultural beliefs about gender roles and responsibilities. Nearly a fifth of the respondents (18.4%) thought it was more important for boys to do well at school than girls; 36.8% agreed that the father should have greater authority in making family decisions; 43.2% did not think that girls are as smart as boys; and 32.5% did not think that girls should be afforded the same freedom as boys. The last two statements are in line with the universal justification for treating women as inferior, since they are seen as being intellectually immature and unable to make proper decisions.\textsuperscript{45}

Differences emerged between the male and female participants’ views regarding these statements. Three times as many males (32.7%) compared to females (9.1%) agreed that it is more important for boys to do well at school than girls; twice as many males (6.1%) compared to females (2.7%) agreed that it is sometimes okay for a man to hit his wife; and twice as many males (23.3%) compared to females (10%) agreed that women should be more concerned about becoming good wives and mothers than desiring a professional career. The results are presented in Figure 11.
Older respondents were also significantly more likely to agree that girls should have the same freedom as boys, but they were less likely to agree that girls are as smart as boys compared to the younger respondents \((p<0.05)\) (see Figure 12, next page).

Girls are often prevented from enrolling in or completing school due to their lowered status in society. In cases where parents cannot afford to send all their children to school, males would more likely be chosen to receive an education. Girls are also more likely to be expected to work from an early age and to care for younger siblings, which prevents them from accessing education. Even where girls are able to access education, teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about gender roles may result in biased views of the learners they teach.

Teachers are socialised in the same society as these young girls and their stereotypical views may be reproduced in the classroom by unintentionally spending more time interacting with male learners.\(^{46}\) Hence, girls learn to become passive and disengaged from the learning process. Since society places a low value on girls’ education, girls internalise this view and often fail to complete their schooling.\(^{47}\)

Stereotypical notions of gender are argued by some to be a form of power and a means of maintaining the status quo.\(^{48}\) These attitudes are learned by children in
the home and are reinforced in the community and at school. Generally, there is a largely passive acceptance that these beliefs are ‘the way things work’, but they become dangerous if they are later used to perpetuate dominance over and violence against women. Gender-based violence stems from these cultural beliefs and practices. According to Flood, rates of violence against women are higher in cultures where masculinity is defined by dominance, toughness, entitlement to power or male honour, where there are rigid gender roles, and where violence is condoned to settle disputes.

Figure 12: Gender stereotypical beliefs, by age (n=365)
INTRODUCTION

Incidents occurring in one’s immediate environment shape one’s view of what is acceptable, unacceptable and normal. Findings show that much of the violence occurring at home and at school reflects what is happening in the broader community in which these young people live. Overall, fights seem to be a common occurrence in the communities represented in the study, with more than a fifth (22.5%) of the respondents maintaining that there were many fights in their neighbourhood. Similarly, crime was frequently reported in these communities; approximately a fifth (18%) of the sample believed that crime was widespread in their residential areas.

The following quotes taken from the group activities with learners clearly depict, from a learner’s perspective, the manifestation of crime and violence in their communities.

- There are too many robberies in our village; people being killed and people being raped.

- There are children being abused, there are men raping young girls and some people beating kids, especially girls.

- In our community people are insulting each other badly; sometimes people insult small kids by saying: ‘Hey, go to your mom and dad.’ But mom and dad died a long time ago and they know about it. They make kids scared.

Fights were reportedly more common in Ohangwena (29.6%), while crime seemed to be more prevalent in Oshikoto (21.4%) compared to the other three regions. Of those who reported empty or abandoned buildings in their neighbourhood, 62.5% were resident in Ohangwena. Similarly, individuals from
this area were significantly more likely to report that there was a lot of graffiti in their neighbourhood ($p<0.05$). See Figure 13.

EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

Witnessing other people’s experiences of violence seemed to be a routine occurrence for the youth represented in this study. One in two respondents (51.7%) had witnessed someone in their community being hit, kicked or punched on one or more occasion. More than a third of respondents (38.6%) had seen someone in their community being pushed, grabbed or shoved. Furthermore, a total of 14.2% had witnessed someone being threatened with a weapon on one or more occasion and 16.4% had seen someone being assaulted with a weapon in their community. Still, a fifth of the sample surveyed had witnessed someone being sexually harassed or assaulted in the area in which they live (see Figure 14).

The following narratives shared by learners participating in the group activities highlight the widespread incidence of sexual abuse and rape in these communities:

- **One day I saw a girl being raped. She was coming from school. I was also coming from school. The guy showed me a knife and I ran away.**

- **Girls cannot say anything if they go home raped by someone.**
Figure 14: Ever witnessed someone in the community being ... (n=381)

These quotes highlight the extent of the violence that children, specifically young girls, are exposed to. In addition, girls who have been sexually violated suffer from the stigma and discrimination associated with this kind of victimisation and from the lack of support services available to them. Families – ordinarily one’s primary support network – are reluctant to discuss these issues and to access the necessary support services for fear of discrimination. The families’ and community’s silence on this type of violence serves to reinforce the non-reporting of these crimes.

Transactional sex, while most common in the school setting, also occurs in the respondents’ communities.

The older guys in our community like propositioning young girls. Some of these guys force the young girls to have sex with them and they give them money, cell phones or just force them. In that way these guys violate the right of the girl.
In our village there is a man who always propositions school girls. He had a lot of money, a very nice car. Unfortunately this man was HIV positive. He wanted to pass the virus to school girls. One day I was going to a small town near our village where there are a lot of shops. On the way I met this man. The man was driving his expensive car. He stopped his car in front of me and asked if he could talk to me. The moment this man got out of his car he started touching my breasts and buttocks. I started to scream ‘no’ and asking for help. The man tried to stop me from making a noise. He told me that if I make him happy he will give me lots of money and nice underwear. Then I asked: ‘Make you happy how?’ The man answered: ‘By having sex with me without a condom.’ I told him that I am not willing to do it and I have never and will never do this kind of thing in my life. He started to put some money in my hands and I threw the money away and ran away from him. I was so scared and ran to a nearby house and told the people in the house what happened. The lady in the house came with me to see if the man was still there but he was gone. She told me not to go to the shops but to go home and tell my parents. From that day, this incident is always on my mind and sometimes I do not concentrate at school when I’m thinking about it. That’s a horrible thing for such big men to do to innocent children.

ACCESS TO ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

The incidence of violence is known to be exacerbated by the availability of alcohol and drugs in a community. Results show that alcohol was freely available in these
communities, with two out of five young people interviewed reporting that alcohol was easy to obtain in the areas in which they live. In addition to their neighbourhoods, a few young people were able to access alcohol at school (2.2%). The proximity of shebeens to schools was identified as a key factor facilitating access to alcohol within the school environment.

*In our community there is a danger of school kids going to shebeens during school hours, which is not allowed in our school. ... They drink beer, ‘tombo’ and traditional Ovambo liquor and then come to school drunk. They fight when drunk; sometimes they beat up the poor men and women who did not do anything to them.*

Both learners and educators were believed to be guilty of consuming alcohol during school hours.

Other drugs (4.6%), including marijuana (3.8%), were less accessible in these communities. Knives and other weapons (excluding firearms) were also found to be easy to access in these communities, as reported by 40.2% of the youths interviewed. Even more alarming was the ability of children and youths to access firearms in the areas in which they live. Nearly a tenth – a total of 8.3% – reported easy access to guns in their communities. These findings were confirmed in the group discussions where learners were found to demonstrate a keen awareness of other learners who have brought weapons such as knives with them to school (see Figure 15, *next page*).

Alcohol was easiest to access for respondents living in Oshikoto ($p<0.001$), with three-quarters of youths interviewed from this region indicating easy access to alcohol. With regard to gender, while males found it significantly easier than females to obtain alcohol in their community ($p<0.05$), females reported easier
access to other drugs (excluding marijuana) and firearms at school ($p<0.05$) compared to males. See tables 3 and 4.

Although older youths indicate easier access to alcohol, knives and other weapons, it is important to highlight the ease with which young respondents are able to access alcohol, drugs and weapons in the communities in which they live. Two out of five 12–13-year-olds (40.7%) and a similar proportion of 14–15-year-olds (41%) reported easy access to alcohol, while more than a quarter of 12–13-year-olds (25.3%) had easy access to knives in their communities. Of more concern

Table 3: Easy access to alcohol, drugs and weapons in the community, by gender and region (n=381)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Marijuana</th>
<th>Other drugs</th>
<th>Firearm</th>
<th>Knives and other weapons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Marijuana</th>
<th>Other drugs</th>
<th>Firearm</th>
<th>Knives and other weapons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohangwena</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omusati</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshana</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshikoto</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is the proportion of 14- and 15-year-olds (12.8%) who indicated the ability to obtain firearms in their community with relative ease (see Figure 16).

Table 5 (next page) reveals that there is a strong association between access to alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, and access to firearms, knives and other weapons in the community and at school ($p<0.001$). Those who had easy access to alcohol were five times more likely to indicate easy access to firearms compared to those who indicated difficult access to alcohol. The association is even greater between those with easy access to marijuana and other drugs, and access to weapons. More specifically, four out of five respondents who have easy access to

**Figure 16: Easy access to substances and weapons in the community, by age (n=381)**
marijuana in the community also have easy access to firearms, knives and other weapons. Of those who have easy access to other drugs besides marijuana in their community, three in five have easy access to firearms and more than three-quarters have easy access to knives and other weapons.

Children and youths in Namibia are subjected to violence across many different settings. They are both the direct victims and witnesses of violence in their homes, schools and the broader communities in which they live. The social spaces that these individuals occupy are therefore seldom safe and free from violent incidents. Mainstream literature consistently identifies the link between exposure to violence and subsequent emotional and behavioural problems, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and antisocial behaviour.\textsuperscript{50} Victims of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Easy access to firearms</th>
<th>Easy access to knives and other weapons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (%)</td>
<td>Easy access in community</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard access in community</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy access at school</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard access at school</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana (%)</td>
<td>Easy access in community</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard access in community</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy access at school</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard access at school</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other drugs (%)</td>
<td>Easy access in community</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard access in community</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy access at school</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard access at school</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Relationship between access to addictive substances and access to weapons (n=381)

- Females are significantly more likely to report knowing where to turn to for help (70.8%) compared to males (59.2%) (\(p<0.05\))
- 52.6% know where to access information on how to protect themselves from harm
- 52.4% know what assistance is available to them if they are victimised
- 97.1% know where the nearest health clinic is
- 13.9% do NOT know where the nearest police station is
- 77.6% do NOT know where the nearest social welfare office is
- Older youths between the ages of 18 and 19 years are significantly more likely to know where to find the nearest police station, health clinic and social welfare office (\(p<0.05\))
- 24.9% reported that there are NO adults at school who care about their feelings or about what happens to them
violence are also known to be at greater risk for substance abuse— a likelihood that is even greater when substances such as alcohol and other drugs are easily accessible within one’s community.

The effect of this violence is exacerbated by the other risk factors embedded in these young people’s proximal social environments, namely, poverty, unemployment, large family size, absent parents, etc. Despite the disruption in their normal developmental pathways, young people are expected to deal with the consequences of the violence in an environment that lacks the necessary support services to facilitate their coping and healing.

Although many respondents (65.6%) knew where to go for help if they were ever a victim of crime, one in three indicated not knowing where to go for assistance. Parents (40.8%) and other relatives (13.2%) were the most common sources of support following traumatic experiences. However, the quality of support they are able to provide is questionable given that many of these family members are themselves caught up in cycles of violence.
INTRODUCTION

Following independence in 1990, Namibia embarked on a comprehensive reform process to remedy the injustices of the past associated with education. Namibia now has one of the most progressive legislative frameworks pertaining to education in Africa. The issue is clear: according to the country’s Constitution, all children should have access to and should remain in school until the age of 16 years. Although the Namibian government now boasts a national enrolment rate of 95%, many children are still not accessing an education. Where access is granted, the quality of education provided is often compromised due to violence, which assumes many forms.

This chapter discusses the policy development and implementation that has taken place in Namibia in response to the issues highlighted in the monograph.

EDUCATION

‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.’ Nelson Mandela

Article 20 of Namibia’s Constitution clearly states that primary education is a right of all citizens and that the state is obliged to provide reasonable facilities to schools to render effective this right. Namibia is a large country with a low population density. Learners are therefore often compelled to travel long distances to access an education. In some remote areas, transport has been provided and mobile schools have been used to facilitate access to education; however, the interventions have limited reach and some have not worked as well as was hoped.

Despite the government’s financial prioritisation of education, many schools in northern Namibia are not achieving the desired outcomes for education. This is
attributed largely to the poor allocation of resources, poorly trained educators, high learner–teacher ratios, long distances to and from school, poor school management and administration, and the poverty-stricken conditions that characterise many households in the north. These factors not only impact on access to education but compromise the quality of education that schools are able to provide to their learners.

As mentioned earlier, the Education Policy Act, 2001 makes provision for a national Education Development Fund and for local school development funds. The latter was intended to allow schools to improve the standard of education by providing much needed extra-curricular activities for learners. The contribution could, however, be perceived as a school fee since it is payable by parents. Given the poor resource allocation to schools in the north, many principals have come to rely on the development fund to cover basic school running costs. Although the act makes provision for poor learners to be exempted from paying the fee, some principals have been reluctant to enforce the policy, particularly when the majority of learners at the school are poor. When faced with this scenario, poor families in rural areas have had to withdraw their children from school. This violates children’s right to free primary education.

According to a civil society activist with the Namibia Girl Child Network, Ottile Abrahams, the Namibian Constitution specifies a right to primary education only, and in so doing overlooks the significance of early education programmes. Early educational development provides an integral foundation for formal schooling. Without these programmes, all the money and resources allocated to education will not remedy the existing crisis in education in Namibia.

The present educational system is resting on a foundation that is totally inadequate, weak, fragmented and totally unable to support educational structures as it should.53

As mentioned earlier, one way to address some of the problems seen in the Namibian education system would be to provide educational programmes aimed at stimulating the intellectual growth of children prior to their entering the formal schooling system at the age of six years.

A further advantage of early education programmes is that they capitalise on a child’s window of opportunity for learning a second language. Abrahams maintains that second-language acquisition is best in the first six years of a child’s life.54 The known consequences associated with switching to English as the medium of instruction at Grade 4 – which include high failure rates, non-attendance and non-completion of schooling – could be addressed if educational programmes were implemented as early as possible.

Currently, ECD programmes are privatised in Namibia and are thus available only to the few who can afford them.

Language policy in education exists in many Southern African countries and is
considered one of the most widespread and devastating contextual disadvantages to learning.\textsuperscript{55} This is because most children are compelled to learn and be tested in a language that they are neither proficient in nor comfortable with. According to Marsh, Ontero and Shikongo, this is referred to as ‘subtractive bilingualism’ and arises in situations where both the teachers and learners are not fluent in the language of instruction.\textsuperscript{56} Subtractive bilingualism compromises the quality of education provided to many learners.

Bilingualism can be positive and can enrich the learning process; however, it must be done properly, especially in communities where exposure to the second language is low. Language has an impact on school attendance, school completion and grade repetition. The transition to an English medium of instruction must therefore be gradual and the language proficiency of teachers must be improved.

**CHILD LABOUR**

‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.’ \textit{Nelson Mandela}

Child labour is a universal issue and ranges from extreme exploitation, such as slavery and forced prostitution, to milder forms such as expecting children to perform unreasonable household chores and take on responsibilities that interfere with education and other rights of the child. Poverty-stricken communities and households create an environment in which child labour can flourish. There is a fine line between helping to provide for one’s family and maintaining the welfare and dignity of the child affected by labour.

In Namibia, the overwhelming majority of child labourers live in rural areas, with two-thirds working on communal farms.\textsuperscript{57} According to Mapaure, child labour persists despite being illegal and is frequently surrounded by a wall of silence, indifference and apathy.\textsuperscript{58} The findings in this study demonstrate the impact of household responsibilities not only on access to education but also on the child’s ability to learn at school.\textsuperscript{59} The narratives documented in this monograph draw attention to the violence inflicted on children by their parents if they fail to complete household chores and responsibilities in the allotted time. Children are also physically punished by educators for arriving late for school as a result of having to complete these chores.

According to Article 15 of Namibian Constitution:

\begin{quote}
(2) Children are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation and shall not be employed in or required to perform work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. For the purposes of this Sub Article children shall be persons under the age of sixteen (16) years.
\end{quote}
Section 3 of the Labour Act, entitled ‘Prohibition and restriction of child labour’ also makes provision for children and states:

(1) A person must not employ or require or permit a child to work in any circumstances prohibited in terms of this section.

(2) A person must not employ a child under the age of 14 years.

(3) In respect of a child who is at least aged 14, but under the age of 16 years, a person –
   (a) must not employ that child in any circumstances contemplated in Article 15(2) of the Namibian Constitution;
   (b) must not employ that child in any circumstances in respect of which the Minister, in terms of subsection (5)(a), has prohibited the employment of such children;
   (c) must not employ that child in respect of any work between the hours of 20h00 and 07h00; or
   (d) except to the extent that the Minister by regulation in terms of subsection (5)(b) permits, must not employ that child, on any premises where –
      (i) work is done underground or in a mine;
      (ii) construction or demolition takes place;
      (iii) goods are manufactured;
      (iv) electricity is generated, transformed or distributed;
      (v) machinery is installed or dismantled; or
      (vi) any work-related activities take place that may place the child’s health, safety, or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development at risk.

(4) In respect of a child who is at least aged 16 but under the age of 18 years, a person may not employ that child in any of the circumstances set out in subsection (3)(c) or (d), unless the Minister has permitted such employment by regulation in terms of subsection (5)(c).

Namibia has ratified the following international and regional legal frameworks that prohibit child labour:

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930
- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973
- Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976
- Labour Administration Convention, 1978
- Termination of Employment Convention, 1982
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999
Namibia has also ratified a number of international and regional legal instruments that regulate child labour (see text box, opposite page).

Despite the policies and legislation in place, child labour persists and is particularly problematic in remote rural areas of Namibia.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

‘I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.’  
Mohandas K. Ghandi

Corporal punishment, like other violence, has serious psychological effects including aggression, poor mental health, weak academic achievement and poor relationships with parents. It has been shown to be an ineffective behaviour modification tool or method for teaching children the difference between right and wrong. Despite being abolished within schools, this practice continues in many regions in Namibia.

Article 8(2) of Namibia’s Constitution dealing with human dignity states that:

(a) In any judicial proceedings or in other proceedings before any organ of the State, and during the enforcement of a penalty, respect for human dignity shall be guaranteed.

(b) No persons shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

The ruling was codified in section 56(1) of the Education Act of 2001, which makes the administering of corporal punishment a form of misconduct. This extends to children in places of safety, places of care, ECD centres and residential care facilities for children. Namibia is also a signatory to several international and regional agreements that prohibit this form of punishment (see text box, next page).

Morrell claims that one reason why corporal punishment still exists in schools, despite being banned, is the continued use of physical punishment at home and the support of its use at school by parents. Many individuals who subscribe to customary law believe that corporal punishment is an effective means of discipline and is useful for teaching people how to behave. They also believe that corporal punishment is useful for restoring and maintaining peace in the community and that its use symbolises belief in a good and proper life. Corporal punishment is believed to be an effective tool for teaching and maintaining children’s respect for elders and it is the traditional belief that parents are obliged to beat their children to ensure they do not misbehave.

While Namibia’s Constitution makes provision for some customary laws, these cannot be in conflict with the Constitution or with any statutory law. So although everyone has a right to culture, a limitation is attached to this right.
Namibia has signed several international and regional agreements that guarantee respect for human dignity and prohibit the use of degrading treatment or punishment. These include the:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- African Charter on Human and People’s Rights
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- International Covenant on Civil, Political and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights
- Convention Against Torture

The clearest statement on corporal punishment is contained in Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires that State Parties take ‘appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has the care of the child’. The Convention’s committee stated that addressing the widespread acceptance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it in the family, school and other settings is a ‘key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in society’ (Legal Assistance Centre, 2010).

According to Article 19 of the Namibian Constitution:

Every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of this Constitution and further subject to the condition that the rights protected by this Article do not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest.

The continued use of corporal punishment is thus in direct violation of both the 1991 Supreme Court ruling and the Education Act of 2001. Once again, there appears to be a problem whereby sound policy is not being implemented effectively.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

‘Educate a woman, you educate a nation.’

Deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, 4th annual Women’s Parliament Conference, Cape Town, South Africa, 28 August 2007

Teenage pregnancy emerged as one of the key reasons why young girls fail to complete their education. In this study, one in ten youths attributed their leaving school to unplanned pregnancies. According to Hubbard, in 2007 the northern region of Namibia had the highest drop-out rate due to pregnancy, with 300 females dropping out in Ohangwena, 173 in Omusati, 136 in Oshikoto and 95 in
Oshana. Nationally, between 2006 and 2007, 13% of females aged 15–19 years were mothers and a further 3% were pregnant at the time. Teenage pregnancy has severe ripple effects in society because children whose mothers have not completed their schooling are less likely to enrol in and complete school themselves. Schools have been known to be complicit by assuming a punitive stance and excluding pregnant learners from attending classes. This often results in pregnant learners not completing their schooling.

In 1997, Namibia’s policy regarding teenage pregnancy was that girls would be allowed back to school a year after they had given birth, provided they could prove that someone responsible was looking after the child. This also applied to boys; but schoolboys who father children are seldom identified and older men who impregnate girls rarely face any consequences. According to the policy, girls would be allowed to attend classes only until the pregnancy became visible, whereafter they would have to attend afternoon or evening classes. The problem with this arrangement was that not all schools offered these special classes, forcing girls to travel long distances to get to the participating schools. This, however, posed a risk to young girls’ safety and acted as a barrier to education since parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school because of safety concerns.

The Minister of Basic Education drafted a new policy in 2001 entitled ‘Implementation of the policy on pregnancy among learners’. The policy was approved by Cabinet in 2009 and places emphasis on management of the issue. It does this first by ensuring that schools do not exclude pregnant girls from accessing an education and, second, by focusing on pregnancy prevention and providing learners with information about contraception and support services. The new policy affords pregnant schoolgirls the opportunity to choose where to attend classes and write their examinations – provisions that were overlooked in the previous policy. Pregnant girls are now allowed to attend classes up until the time of delivery and are no longer expected to wait a year before re-entering the formal schooling system. They can return to school as soon as they are ready.

The new policy emphasises support rather than punishment in response to learner pregnancies within the school environment.

In line with this, Namibia is a signatory to several international and regional instruments that specifically address the issue of teenage pregnancy and education (see text box, next page).

The government’s new policy has, however, been implemented inconsistently: some schools allow pregnant schoolgirls to attend school right up until the time of delivery, while others refuse to allow attendance once the pregnancy becomes visible. Females also suffer discrimination as a result of their pregnancies even though many pregnancies resulted from coercion through physical force, economic pressure or school pressure. In these cases, the babies’ fathers may be teachers, ‘sugar daddies’ or relatives. Even in cases where the sex was consensual, many girls do not have the power to negotiate sexual behaviour or contraceptive use due to pervasive gender inequality in the community.
Article 144 of the Namibian Constitution states that ‘unless otherwise provided by this Constitution or Act of Parliament, the general rules of public international law and international agreements binding upon Namibia under this Constitution shall form part of the law of Namibia’. The following instruments signed by the Namibian government are therefore legally binding:

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**
This convention requires the government to take all appropriate measures for keeping girls in school and to provide programmes for females who have left school prematurely. CEDAW expressed concern with the previous policy as it required girls to spend one year with the baby before they could resume their studies, and this was often a deterrent to re-entering school.

**Convention on the Rights of the Child**
This convention emphasises the need to provide support to adolescent parents and to support the development of policies that allow young mothers to continue with their education.

**Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child**
This charter requires governments to encourage regular attendance at school and to provide opportunities for pregnant teenagers to complete their schooling.

**Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa**
This protocol requires that young girls be given opportunities and that the government commits itself to eliminating barriers to education.

**Education for All (EFA)**
EFA was established at a world conference in Thailand in 1990 and identifies several activities to decrease drop-out rates due to pregnancy and motherhood, including:

- publicising and implementing the policy on teenage pregnancy and encouraging girls to continue with their studies for as long as possible;

- sensitising teachers, principals, school boards, community leaders and inspectors in order to reduce the stigma of pregnancy and motherhood; and

- exploring options that would allow pregnant girls to complete their education, and increasing access to reproductive health services.
implementation of the new policy is therefore critical to ensure that young mothers are not punished and deprived of an education and that they are instead encouraged to complete their education, thereby promoting autonomy and gender equality.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

‘A woman’s hopes are woven of sunbeams; a shadow annihilates them.’
George Eliot, a.k.a Mary Anne Evan, 19th century English novelist

Gender-based violence encompasses a wide range of abuses including physical, sexual and psychological violence, battering, sexual abuse of children, rape, sexual harassment, intimidation and forced prostitution. Statistics show that 2,000 cases of domestic violence are reported to the police in Namibia each year, which accounts for a fifth of all violent crimes in the country. A further 1,100 rapes and attempted rapes are reported every year, with one-third of cases involving children under the age of 18 years. These crimes, and many others that constitute gender-based violence, are said to be under-reported.

This type of violence affects women disproportionately and is largely attributed to unequal power relationships. Gender-based violence stems from many underlying issues, including poverty, gender inequality, women’s limited access to education and decision-making bodies, alcohol abuse and the cultural belief that gender-based violence is a ‘private matter’.

The National Conference on Gender-based Violence found that this form of violence has far-reaching implications on the lives of children who bear witness to such violence within their homes, with 60% of children believing that they are in some way responsible for the violence. These children are more likely than those who are not exposed to such a scenario to turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism. They are also more likely to become emotionally withdrawn or may look for love in inappropriate places. Speakers at the conference highlighted the need to improve the status of women in society and to address the dominant culture by challenging and rejecting traditional norms and practices that are known to perpetuate gender-based violence.

The conference prompted the introduction of a ‘zero tolerance’ campaign by the government, which called on all Namibians to put a stop to gender-based violence. In a 2009 keynote address, Namibian prime minister Nahas Angula said: ‘Let us commit ourselves to a nation where women’s voices are heard, their words are validated, and the necessity for community and freedom become more important than tradition.’

The national media awareness campaign linked to the conference included a series of radio dramas, posters, newspaper and television advertisements and billboard messages in English, Oshiwambo and Afrikaans. In addition, several
parliamentary acts were simplified and translated into local languages in order to make the information more accessible to ordinary citizens. Traditional and religious leaders were approached to address cultural beliefs and practices that perpetuate gender-based violence.

The Namibian government has set up a national legal framework for the advancement and equality of women in Namibian society. In addition to equality and rights under the Constitution, policies such as the Married Persons Equality Act 1 of 1996, the Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003 and the Combating of Rape Act 8 of 2000 have been designed to protect women. The Married Persons Equality Act 1 of 1996 gives women equal power in a marriage and allows women to enter into contractual agreements and to own property. This act also stipulates that both husband and wife share responsibility as the head of household and that this role is not the sole preserve of men. However, the act has not resulted in changed circumstances for many women living in rural areas.

The Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003 was directed at protecting women and children and allows for several measures to be taken (such as protection orders and seizure of weapons) to protect family members from violent spouses and partners. This act also defines several crimes related to violence in the home. It introduces the concept of domestic violence into the Namibian legal system and widens the definition to include physical, sexual and economic abuse as well as intimidation, harassment and serious emotional, verbal or psychological abuse.

The Combating of Rape Act 8 of 2000 was rewritten in gender neutral terms, acknowledging that young boys are also at risk of this kind of victimisation. The act extended protection against sexual exploitation, molestation and rape and widened the definition of rape. Previous acts that would have constituted the crime of indecent assault would now be considered rape. The act also criminalises marital rape. Related to this, the Combating of Immoral Practices Amendment Act 7 of 2000 provides penalties or imprisonment for a person who commits a sexual act or attempts to do so with a child younger than 16 years and who is more than three years older than the child. Furthermore, the Criminal Procedures Amendment Act 24 of 2003 provides special arrangements in court to minimise

Namibia is a signatory to international and regional laws that address violence against women, including the following:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- UN Convention against Transnational Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol)
- African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
- SADC Protocol on Gender and Development
- SADC Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children
the trauma of proceedings for vulnerable witnesses, including victims of rape and domestic violence.

In addition to the policies and legislation in place, the Namibian government has implemented a number of programmes that further attest to its commitment to root out all forms of violence against women and children. These include the following:

- A Women and Child Protection Unit has been set up by the Ministry of Safety and Security with the aim of providing medical support, counselling services and police assistance to abused women and children.

- A national database on gender-based violence has been created to provide the necessary data for planning and designing interventions through laws, policies and financial and human resources.

- The 16 Days of Activism, which occurs annually before Human Rights Day on 10 December, highlights different forms of gender-based violence.

- A Gender-based Violence Committee comprising various stakeholders has been established to discuss and plan ways in which to combat gender-based violence.

- Therapeutic group work programmes targeting male perpetrators of gender-based violence have been established to prevent further violence and explore non-violent and non-controlling means of relating to women in a bid to change abusive behaviour.

Despite the legal landmarks and programmes, a number of challenges inhibit effective policy implementation and limit the reach of the programmes. These programmes and interventions will have a greater likelihood of success if the root causes of gender-based violence – such as poverty, unemployment, alcohol abuse and traditional views on gender – were also addressed.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

The government is the primary duty-bearer to ensure that its citizens are protected and afforded their rights. Namibia is a signatory to numerous international conventions and has adopted a human rights approach in ensuring equitable access to quality education. However, many of the country’s policies exist on paper only and have not been implemented at a practical level. The following recommendations for government are therefore made:

➢ *Enforce legislation and policies aimed at protecting children and at providing equitable access to education*

- In line with this, government needs to ensure that legislation is converted into practical policies and laws that can be implemented and enforced by key authorities.

- Government should provide the relevant training and technical support to stakeholders who will be responsible for implementing these policies at grassroots level.

- Mechanisms should be put in place to monitor and hold these stakeholders accountable and the relevant parties should be penalised if found guilty of non-compliance.

- Government should channel the necessary financial and material resources to enable the implementation of policies and legislation. According to Article 20 of the Constitution, government is committed to providing ‘reasonable facilities to render effective’ the right to education for ‘every resident within
Namibia, by establishing and maintaining State schools at which primary education will be free of charge’.

- Engage in ongoing monitoring and reviews of existing policies and legislation to ascertain continued relevance to the Namibian educational context.

- **Invest in professional training and skills development of educators**
  
  Teacher training should extend beyond academic content and should include modules on the psycho-social development of children. Relevant classroom and behaviour management techniques should be taught to teachers, specifically positive disciplinary methods that can be used instead of corporal punishment – a practice that continues despite it being against the law.

  Teachers need sufficient training on legislation and policies that are relevant to education, violence, child protection and safety so as to prevent the infringement of children’s rights within the school environment. In order for changes to be effected within the education system, educators need to share in these objectives and support their implementation. Educators therefore need to be provided with user-friendly guidelines on how to implement the policies.

  Educators should be adequately trained to identify any tell-tale signs of abuse and violence. They should also be knowledgeable on how to respond in the event that cases of school-based and other violent incidents are brought to their attention. This is particularly important given the incidence of violence in these young people’s other proximal environments.

- **Recruit qualified educators**
  
  In order to address the high number of poorly trained educators, government should remunerate teachers adequately and ensure opportunities for their promotion. This will go some way in addressing the sexual violence that is perpetrated against learners within the school environment vis-à-vis transactional sexual relationships.

- **Explore alternative informal education programmes and systems to meet the educational needs of children who are out of the formal schooling system**

- **Ensure the coordination of key stakeholders to facilitate engagement around issues of school safety**
  
  These stakeholders should include school bodies, the police, CSOs and community leaders who have a shared vision of school safety.
This shared vision should form the basis for a coordinated response to violence and school safety and should be included in the training of government officials and civil servants responsible for child protection and safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND OTHER COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Government is not designed to function as a community interface. Instead, CSOs provide the link between government and the community at large. CSO and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) therefore play a crucial role in ensuring that policies and legislation filter through and impact on the lives of ordinary citizens.

- **NGOs and CSOs in Namibia need to work in a coordinated manner to hold government accountable for its commitments**

- NGOs and CSOs need to be aware of the country’s legislative framework and the provisions made within the framework. Only once they are familiar with the policies can they advocate for the implementation thereof.

- NGOs and CSOs should mobilise communities to claim their rights from government.

- **Provide input into the review, development and implementation of legislation and policies**

- NGOs’ and CSOs’ experience at grassroots level enables them to highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and to suggest possible alternatives by drawing on international and local best practices.

- **Participate in targeted awareness campaigns at national and regional level**

- These campaigns should be aimed at educators, learners, parents and the general public. They should focus on raising awareness about human rights, specifically the safety and protection of children and their right to education.

- Awareness should also be raised on the legislation and provisions made by government and how to ensure the uptake of these rights.

- The information should be user friendly and should be disseminated via various forms of media that are easily accessible to the general public, including youth magazines, the radio, television and pamphlets.

- Other topics covered in these campaigns should enable parents, educators,
learners and the general public to identify what constitutes violence, and they should be informed of the appropriate responses to violence. In line with this, communities, and specifically children, should be made aware of the importance of reporting violence perpetrated against them, thereby encouraging a culture of reporting.

- Assist in the development of standards and practical guidelines for policy implementation
- Assist government in building the capacity required to enforce the relevant policies

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS
- Develop policies and procedures that are consistent with national guidelines on child protection and safety within the school environment

Schools should develop codes of conduct for learners and educators, as well as other policies and procedures relating to learner safety.

Schools should develop and implement training tools for school safety.

This will ensure that educators and principals are aware of the appropriate responses to violence against learners.

- Involve educators, parents and learners in decision-making processes at the school
- Develop and implement anonymous reporting mechanisms

Schools should ensure that these mechanisms are monitored on a regular basis.

Schools should ensure that action is taken when cases are brought to their attention.

- Incorporate human and children’s rights in teaching plans

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS, PRIMARY CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES

The involvement and encouragement of primary caregivers, other family members and the communities in which children live is critical for ensuring that children are afforded the education that is rightfully theirs. Key stakeholders
working towards effecting the right of children to education have highlighted the lack of parental involvement in children’s education and the dire consequences this has on access to education. Since families function within broader communities, communities should:

➤ *Take ownership of the schools located in their areas*

- It is important that parents and communities become active participants in their children’s education, thereby communicating to their children the importance of education.

- This can be done by becoming involved in school-related activities (e.g. joining a school board, assisting with fund-raising activities, etc.), showing an interest in the content taught at school or by responding to incidents that violate a child’s right to learn in a context free of violence.

➤ *Hold authorities (i.e. school) accountable for their rights*

- Children in Namibia are often not sent to school because their parents cannot afford to pay the school development fund. Many parents are unaware that the government has made provision for poor learners to be exempted from contributing to this fund. Parents, families and communities therefore need to be made aware of their rights. This highlights the need for communities to work in collaboration with CSOs.

➤ *Encourage and support traditional and religious leaders in advocating for violence-free schools*

- Community leaders should advocate for access to education for all children as well as for school environments that are free from violence of any form. Traditional and religious leaders should become involved in these advocacy campaigns, given their prominent role in communities and their influence on what is considered acceptable and unacceptable in society. In this way, community leaders will reinforce the importance of education and the need for a safe school environment that encourages quality learning.
Endnotes


5 There are indications, however, that gender-based violence is becoming more of an issue for boy children at school, with increasing reports of various forms of gender-based violence both on the way to and at school. See Burton P, Experiences of School Violence in South Africa. CJCP Monograph Series No 4, Cape Town, 2008; and Burton P, Suffering at School: Results of the Malawi Gender-based Violence in Schools Survey, ISS/NSO Crime and Justice Statistical Division, Pretoria, 2005.

6 The region here refers to sub-Saharan Africa.


8 Burton, Merchants, Skollies and Stones, op cit.

9 Burton, Suffering at School, op cit.

10 Children who experience violence at a young age are at greater risk of engaging in violent or anti-social behaviour as they mature.


Shemeikka R, ‘Education in Namibia’. In Fuller B & Prommer I (eds), Population-Development-Environment in Namibia: Background Readings. IIASA Interim Report, 2000; Nekhwevha F, No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come: Culture and educational transformation in post colonial Namibia and post-Apartheid South Africa, International Review of Education 45(5/6), 1999, pp 491-506.


Nekhwevha, op cit.

Ipinge, op cit.

Amnesty International, op cit.


Under the new approach to setting a poverty line, ‘poor’ households are those that have monthly expenditures of less than N$262.45 per adult equivalent, and ‘severely poor’ households as those with monthly expenditures of less than N$184.56.

The StateUniversity.com Education Encyclopedia, op cit.


Shemeikka, op cit.


32 Fleming & Jacobsen, op cit.


34 Gonzales, op cit; Nekhwevha, op cit.


38 Amnesty International, op cit.


41 Shemeikka, op cit.


43 Ibid.

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46 Kasanda & Shaimemanya, op cit.

47 Ibid.


51 Ibid.


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61 Ibid.

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65 Hubbard, op cit.


67 Hubbard, op cit; Kasanda & Shaimemanya, op cit.

68 Legal Assistance Centre, op cit.

69 Hubbard, op cit.

70 Legal Assistance Centre, op cit.


72 United Nations definition as cited in Anguala’s keynote address at the launch of the Zero Tolerance Campaign, 2009.

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
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