



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

INTERNATIONAL DAY

against violence and bullying at school including cyberbullying



Q & A: School violence and bullying

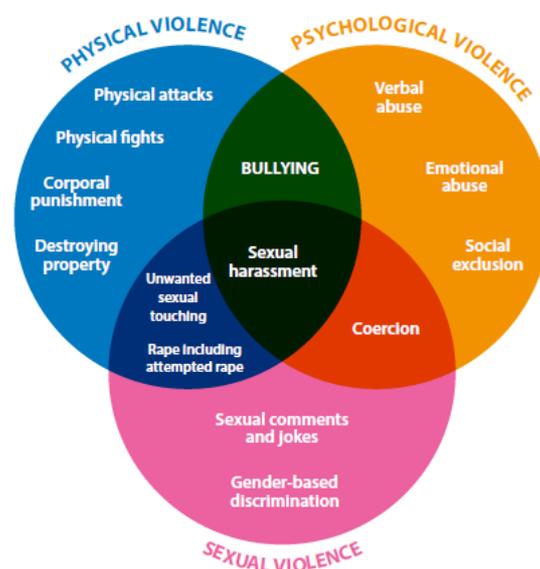
1. What is school violence?

School violence refers to all forms of violence, that takes place in and around schools and is experienced by students and perpetrated by other students, teachers and other school staff. This includes bullying and cyberbullying. Bullying is one of the most pervasive forms of school violence, affecting 1 in 3 young people.

2. What forms may school violence take?

Based on existing international surveys that collect data on violence in schools, UNESCO recognizes the following forms of school violence (recognising crossover between categories):

- **Physical violence**, which is any form of physical aggression with intention to hurt and includes:



- Physical violence perpetrated by peers, including physical fights (two students of about the same strength or power choosing to fight each other and physical attacks (one or more people hitting or striking a student with a weapon such as a stick, knife or gun).
- Physical violence perpetrated by teachers, which includes the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury or harm, regardless of whether it is used as a form of punishment (corporal punishment) or not.
- **Psychological violence** as verbal and emotional abuse, which includes any forms of isolating, rejecting, ignoring, insults, spreading rumors, making up lies, name-calling, ridicule, humiliation and threats, and psychological punishment.
- **Sexual violence**, which includes intimidation of a sexual nature, sexual harassment, unwanted touching, sexual coercion and rape, and it is perpetrated by a teacher, school staff or a schoolmate or classmate, and affects both girls and boys.
- **Bullying** as a pattern of behaviour rather than isolated incidents, which can be defined as *intentional and aggressive behaviour occurring repeatedly* against a victim where there is a real or perceived *power imbalance* and where the victims feel vulnerable and powerless to defend themselves. Bullying can take various forms:
 - **Physical bullying**, including hitting, kicking and the destruction of property;
 - **Psychological bullying**, such as teasing, insulting and threatening; or relational, through the spreading of rumours and exclusion from a group; and
 - **Sexual bullying**, such as making fun of a victim with sexual jokes, comments or gestures, which may be defined as sexual ‘harassment’ in some countries.
- **Cyberbullying** is a form of psychological or sexual bullying that takes place online. Examples of cyberbullying include posting or sending electronic messages, including text, pictures or videos, aimed at harassing, threatening or targeting another person via a variety of media and social platforms such as online social networks, chat rooms, blogs, instant messaging and text messaging. Cyberbullying may also include spreading rumours, posting false information, hurtful messages, embarrassing comments or photos, or excluding someone from online networks or other communications.

3. Is ‘school violence’ a term widely used by the international community?

Other people and organizations may not use the same terminology. In many regions, people do not use ‘school violence’, but rather ‘bullying’ or ‘physical violence’. In other regions, people prefer to use school violence or school-related violence. In certain languages, there is no term for bullying.

4. Bullying is a form of violence, but why do we use ‘school violence and bullying’

instead of 'school violence' or 'school violence including bullying'?

We use school violence and bullying for the following reasons:

- Available evidence shows that bullying is the most common form of school violence and that it therefore requires specific attention;
- The main international surveys monitor bullying separately from other forms of violence; and
- In some countries, violence in schools is never referred to as 'violence' but as 'bullying', when it is repeated, or 'aggression' when referring to individual incidents of school violence.

5. Who perpetrates school violence?

School violence is perpetrated by students, teachers and other school staff. However, available evidence shows that violence perpetrated by peers is more common than by teachers and other school staff.

6. What are the main reasons why children are bullied?

All children can be bullied, yet evidence shows that children who are perceived to be "different" in any way are more at risk. Key factors include: physical appearance; ethnic, linguistic or cultural differences including migrant and refugee status; gender, including not conforming to gender norms and stereotypes; social status including poverty; disability; and age.

7. What are the consequences of school violence?

Global comparable data are available only for the consequences of bullying, not for the consequences of other forms of school violence.

- **Educational consequences** – Being bullied undermines the sense of belonging at school and affects continued engagement in education. Children who are frequently bullied are more likely to feel like an outsider at school, and more likely to want to leave school after finishing secondary education. Children who are bullied have lower academic achievements than those who are not frequently bullied.
- **Health consequences** – Children's mental health and well-being can be adversely impacted by bullying. Bullying is associated with higher rates of feeling lonely and suicidal, higher rates of smoking, alcohol and cannabis use and lower rates of self-reported life satisfaction and health. School violence can also cause physical injuries and harm.

8. Is school violence prevention the same or part of violent extremism prevention?

No. UNESCO's work to prevent violent extremism addresses ideologically motivated violence, and aims to build learners resilience to violent extremism and undermine the various "conditions that are conducive" to its spread. There is no evidence showing that prevention of violent extremism contributes to curb school violence, and that the prevention of school

violence helps prevent violent extremism. Some characteristics of programmes to prevent violent extremism and to prevent school violence may be similar, for example strengthening the social and emotional skills of children.

9. Are gang-related violence and violent attacks on schools part of school violence?

There is very limited evidence about the links between gang violence and school violence and bullying. Gangs are usually formed in the community and not in schools. However, it is true that in some countries gangs can recruit members amongst school children, which affects them and may also affect the school community.

Likewise, violent attacks on schools (including massive school shootings and indiscriminate or targeted attacks on schools) are not seen as school violence but rather violence against schools.

10. Does child protection equate to responses to school violence?

No. UNICEF defines a 'child protection system' as the set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors to support prevention and response to protection-related risks. In practice, it focuses more on preventing violence against children perpetrated by adults. These interventions are essential to protect children and foster a safe learning environment. However, evidence compiled by UNESCO shows that effective national responses to school violence are led by the education sector and involve a range of different interventions. Data also show that there are coordination mechanisms between the education sector and the child protection system in most countries where the response to school violence is effective.

11. What are the linkages between school violence and bullying (SVB), school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE)?

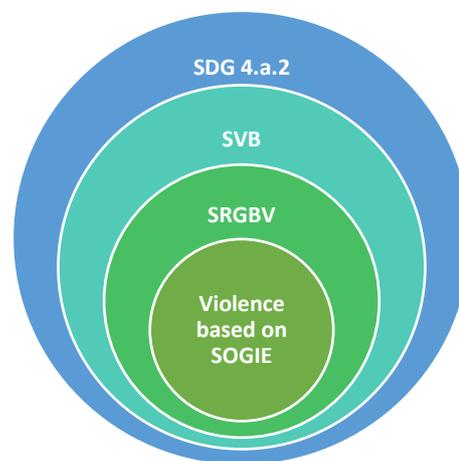
Over the past years, UNESCO has developed programmes and publications on school violence and bullying, school-related gender-based violence and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, and other initiatives for safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments. These initiatives are closely interlinked.

School violence may be perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics – it is referred to as **school-related gender-based violence**. It includes, in particular, a specific type of gender-based violence, which is linked to the actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression of victims, referred to as **violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression**, including **homophobic and transphobic bullying**. School-related gender-based violence is a significant part of school violence that requires specific efforts to address.

Addressing school violence constitutes is integral to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) for inclusion and equitable education for all, and in particular Target 4.a.2 for **safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all**.

The figure at right illustrates how the thematic areas of UNESCO's ongoing SVB programmes link with each other:

- Responding to school violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression is part of the work to prevent and address school-related gender-based violence; The work on school-related gender-based violence is part of the work on school violence and bullying; and
- The broad work to prevent and address school violence and bullying contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 4.a.2 on *safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*.



12. Does school-related gender-based violence refer to sexual violence against girls only?

No. School-related gender-based violence refers to all forms of school violence that is based on or driven by gender norms and stereotypes, which also includes violence against and between boys.

13. Is school violence always gender-based?

There are many factors that drive school violence. Gender is one of the significant drivers of violence but not all school violence is based on gender. Moreover, international surveys do not systematically collect data on the gendered nature of school violence, nor on violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Therefore, there is a lack of clarity on how much school bullying and violence can be defined as gender-based violence. However, it is important to use a gender lens when observing patterns of school violence and devising interventions to:

- Better understand differences in how school violence affects girls, boys and students who do not conform with existing gender norms, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students
- Design responses to school violence that take into consideration the specific needs and vulnerabilities of girls, boys and students who do not conform with existing gender norms.

Based on the analysis of global data, there are no major differences in the prevalence of bullying for boys and girls. However, there are some differences between boys and girls in terms of the types of bullying they experience. Boys are much more exposed to physical bullying, and to physical violence in general, than girls. Girls are slightly more exposed to psychological bullying, particularly through cyberbullying. According to the same data sexual bullying (sexual jokes, comments and gestures) affects the same proportion of boys and girls. Data coming from different countries, however, shows that girls are increasingly exposed to sexual bullying online.

In sub-Saharan Africa there is more data on the prevalence of sexual violence in schools. All data confirm that sexual violence is usually perpetrated by other students, both against boys and girls. The prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated by teachers is relatively low. However, it is widely recognised that incidents of sexual violence may be under-reported.

Even if there are no major differences between boys and girls when it comes to the prevalence of violence in schools in most regions, all programmes aimed at preventing and addressing school violence should be gender-sensitive and transformative, as in most of the world, violence in the community including domestic violence tends to affect girls and women disproportionately. Education has a key role to play in preventing gender-based violence in general, particularly through comprehensive sexuality education.

14. How is school violence and bullying related to UNESCO's mandate?

UNESCO is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (SDG 4), which includes a target for ensuring safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments for all learners (Target 4.a.2).

Addressing school violence and bullying is essential in achieving this goal and target, given its scope, negative consequences on education, and the drivers for it that can be influenced in and through education, as summarized in the UNESCO publication [*Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying*](#).

15. What approach does UNESCO support for preventing and addressing school violence and bullying?

The best available evidence shows that responses to school violence and bullying that are effective should be comprehensive or holistic, i.e. made of a combination of policies and interventions. Often this comprehensive response to school violence and bullying is referred to as a whole-school approach. Based on an extensive review of existing conceptual frameworks that describe that whole-school approach to SVB, UNESCO identified the key components of a response that goes beyond schools and could be better described as a whole-education system or whole-education approach. These components are the following:

- Strong political leadership and robust legal and policy framework to address school violence and bullying;
- Training and support for teachers on school violence and bullying prevention and positive classroom management
- Curriculum, learning & teaching to promote, a caring (i.e. anti- school violence and bullying) school climate and students' social and emotional skills
- A safe psychological and physical school and classroom environment
- Reporting mechanisms for students affected by school violence and bullying, together with support and referral services
- Involvement of all stakeholders in the school community including parents
- Student empowerment and participation
- Collaboration and partnerships between the education sector and a wide range of partners (other government sectors, NGOs, academia)
- Evidence: monitoring of school violence and bullying and evaluation of responses

16. How does UNESCO's work on school violence and bullying relate to the work on violence against children (VAC)?

UNESCO's works on school violence and bullying focuses on preventing and addressing violence against children in educational institutions and through comprehensive education sector approach, to ensure safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments for all children. It contributes to the broader effort to prevent and address violence against children. 'Education and life skills' is one of the seven strategies identified for ending violence against children in the INSPIRE initiative <https://www.end-violence.org/inspire>

17. Where can I find more information about what UNESCO does against school violence and bullying?

Visit <https://en.unesco.org/themes/school-violence-and-bullying/action>, which includes an overview of UNESCO's programmes, initiatives and resources for supporting Member States to prevent and address school violence and bullying.
