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Gender based violence in schools: Addressing inequality and harm

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Background: Gender-based violence (GBV) in schools is a serious issue that undermines student safety and reinforces gender inequalities. It includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as bullying and discrimination based on gender identity or expression. Although schools are intended to be safe spaces, they often become environments where harmful gender norms are reproduced.

Method: This study adopts a deductive approach and uses a qualitative methodology to explore students' lived experiences of GBV in school contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and case study reviews from a purposive sample of 20 middle school students (10 girls, 8 boys, and 2 LGBTQ+ students) from government, semi-government, national, and international schools. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and themes.

Results: Findings reveal that girls frequently face verbal and sexual harassment, boys are commonly subjected to physical violence and bullying, and LGBTQ+ students experience exclusion and stigmatization. Many students are reluctant to report incidents due to fear of victim-blaming and lack of trust in school authorities. Teachers often lack proper training to respond to GBV, and school policies sometimes reinforce gender stereotypes, making students feel unsafe.

Conclusions: The study highlights the urgent need for comprehensive sex education, gender-sensitive school policies, teacher training, and safe reporting mechanisms. Promoting a respectful, inclusive school culture is essential to ensuring that all students can learn and grow without fear of violence or discrimination.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence (GBV), school-related gender-based violence, bullying, discrimination.