

Improved safety and wellbeing of learners

Information brief

Assessing Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices around School-Related Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health



Photo: Leh Wi Lan

Introduction

Strengthening safety and wellbeing at school is key to ensuring that learners can concentrate on their studies and improve their learning outcomes. Creating these conditions must mean addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) and building understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), so that teachers and learners understand their rights and are protected in school.

Leh Wi Lan is working in partnership with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education on number of activities and trainings with school communities that focus on these issues. To measure the effectiveness of these interventions, an annual Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey is carried out with learners and teachers in schools across Sierra Leone. The first of these was carried out in February 2024 to provide a baseline of data that will be used to measure progress every year throughout the programme.

This Information Brief highlights the approach and methodology of the survey, key findings from the teacher participants and an overview of our conclusions for future work in the area.



Another information brief on findings from the learner participants is available.

About the survey

255 teachers

86% male, 14% female

All grades represented in JSS and SSS.

Five districts sampled: Bombali, Kambia, Kenema, Moyamba and Western Area Rural.

Summary of findings

Only 15.7% of teachers achieved the desirable threshold in all three of the domains.

Female teachers were more likely than males to achieve the desired threshold (22.9% compared with 14.5%).

Teachers scored well on their Knowledge but need most support to improve Attitudes and some support to improve their Practices.

Geographical differences were not significant enough to demand location-based interventions, but are important to recognise and monitor in future surveys.

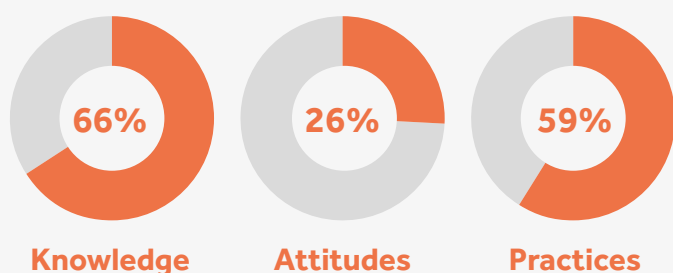
Teachers in Senior Secondary Schools tended to achieve slightly higher scores than those in Junior Secondary Schools (63.9% compared with 62.8%).

The age of teachers appeared to influence the results across the three domains: teachers aged 41-50 were the most likely to achieve the threshold while teachers aged 18-30 were least likely. Specifically, older teachers tended to have better Knowledge scores and, to a lesser extent, better Attitude scores, too. Some learning may be taken from this pattern for planning interventions.

Methodology

The study consisted of a student assessment and a teacher assessment, which was divided into three areas (or domains): Knowledge, Attitude and Practices. The domains were explored via questions that had a desired response (i.e. an answer that would demonstrate good understanding and customs towards violence and sexual health). The actual answers from participants were compared with these desired responses and the number of correct matches determined a score. A higher score reflects a greater alignment with the expected answers. Where a participant answered eight or more questions with correct responses, they were considered to have achieved the desirable threshold.

% of teachers who met threshold (selected 8 or more desirable responses)



Violence and safety at school

Teachers have good knowledge of what is forbidden in relation to violence and the Teachers' Code of Conduct though – worryingly – Attitudes and Practices often differ to policies. For example, although a high percentage of teachers (81%) agreed that it is forbidden to harm and threaten students, and most of them know that sexual and romantic relationships should not be tolerated (84%), a concerning 53% of teachers think that corporal punishment is acceptable. Meanwhile 74% of female teachers reported that they have witnessed or suffered violence in the school, compared to 59% of male teachers who reported the same. Interestingly, a greater proportion of female teachers (83%) answered that boys can suffer from sexual violence than male teachers (68%).

There is also a clear gap in teachers' understanding of alternative violence reporting mechanisms, with only 30% recognising that students have means to report violence beyond directly approaching teachers or the principal.

Stigmatisation of pregnant learners

Teachers are strongly against inclusion of pregnant learners in school: a concerning 41% of teachers believe that pregnant learners are banned from attending classes and 42% believe pregnant girls should not be attending school – despite the law being changed in 2020.

83% think pregnant learners are a distraction

70% believe pregnant girls are not able to concentrate and learn in class

77% believe seeing pregnant girls in class can influence others to become pregnant.

54% think it is the sole responsibility of the girl if she becomes pregnant.

Over 60% of learners had a similar misconception and believe that pregnant girls are forbidden from attending class.

Menstruation stereotypes

While 86% of teachers support the idea of educating both boys and girls about menstruation, stereotypes and misinformation persist around female students' abilities during their periods. A great proportion of teachers (75%) believe that girls are less focused in class during menstruation and over a third (38%) believe girls should not go to school or play any sports during their period.

Though female learners were better informed than males about menstruation, there are similar levels of stigma that girls shouldn't attend school during their period (40% of girls, 46% of boys).

Consent and sexual violence

There is a strong commitment to school safety amongst the teachers alongside good understanding of consent and what constitutes sexual violence. For instance, 91% agreed that a girl has the right to refuse sex, 82% knew they shouldn't offer girls good grades in exchange for a sexual favour, and 91% recognised that touching a girl's breast is an act of sexual violence.

Learners demonstrated far lower scores in these areas, with 56% believing it's acceptable for teachers to offer grades for sex.

Inclusion

Nearly a quarter of the teachers (24%) reported that learners with disabilities experience more abuse and harassment than learners without disabilities. Similarly, 23% believe that learners who are pregnant or young mothers are also more excluded than their peers.

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)

Teachers generally take student health and wellbeing seriously, although there is room for improvement in combatting harmful stereotypes and ensuring comprehensive SRH education. Slightly more than half of the teachers (64%) think that offering planning services to students in the school is a good idea and 79% have provided SRH advice when approached by a learner. However, only half of the teachers (51%) believe learners can access SRH services without needing adult permission.



Photo: Leh Wi Lan

Conclusions

- Given that a minority of teachers (15.7%) met the threshold scores across Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices, there is considerable scope for improvements amongst teachers in Junior and Senior Secondary Schools with regards to SGBV and SRH. This underscores the importance of planned interventions to address these critical areas through the Leh Wi Lan programme.

A even smaller proportion of learners met the threshold - just 3.7%. This indicates interventions are needed for both audiences.

- Female teachers slightly outperformed their male counterparts in achieving the desirable thresholds and older teachers tend to perform better than younger ones, suggesting that experience may contribute to better Knowledge and Attitudes. This suggests that programme interventions could involve older teachers to roll-out new ideas amongst their younger peers.
- There is good recognition of the importance of consent and gender rights amongst teachers. A majority understand the dangers of teenage pregnancy, the need for family planning services and education on SRH and menstruation, the importance of consent in sexual relationships and the significance of ethical boundaries.
- Overall the survey highlights critical areas where future interventions should be prioritised to ensure a safer and more supportive environment for all learners. For example:
 - better awareness of available channels for reporting violence
 - reduced discrimination and stigma towards pregnant learners and children with disabilities
 - improved understanding of the rights of access to SRH services
 - less tolerance of corporal punishment and relationships between school staff and learners
 - shift in gender stereotypes.

Similar issues with understanding in these areas were found amongst learners indicating a need for further interventions, not only in terms of raising awareness of laws and policies but also in terms of behavioural and attitudinal change.



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The second phase of the Leh Wi Lan programme is part of the Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme II (SSEIP II), which is funded by UK International Development. This five-year programme supports Sierra Leone's Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to deliver improved education outcomes at secondary level, with a focus on schoolgirls and learners with disabilities. Leh Wi Lan is implemented by a consortium of national and international organisations led by Cambridge Education.

