

Improved safety and wellbeing of learners

Information Brief

Learners' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices in 2025: 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 improve their learning outcomes. But in Sierra Leone's secondary schools, incidents of violence, bullying and sexual abuse have impacted negatively on education indicators, especially amongst more vulnerable learners.

Leh Wi Lan is working in partnership with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to address School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) and build understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) amongst teachers and learners.

To measure the effectiveness of these interventions, an annual Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey is carried out in schools across Sierra Leone. The first was carried out in February 2024 to provide a baseline of data.

This Information Brief explores key findings from the 2025 survey, specifically in terms of learner participants, and provides learning for future work in the area.

Summary of findings

Learners across all grades show improvement in knowledge, attitudes and practices with average scores increasing by 7.2 percentage points (pp) since 2024.

The percentage of learners with desired knowledge more than doubled from 19.7% to 41.2%.

Score improvements were greater amongst senior secondary school learners than junior secondary school learners.

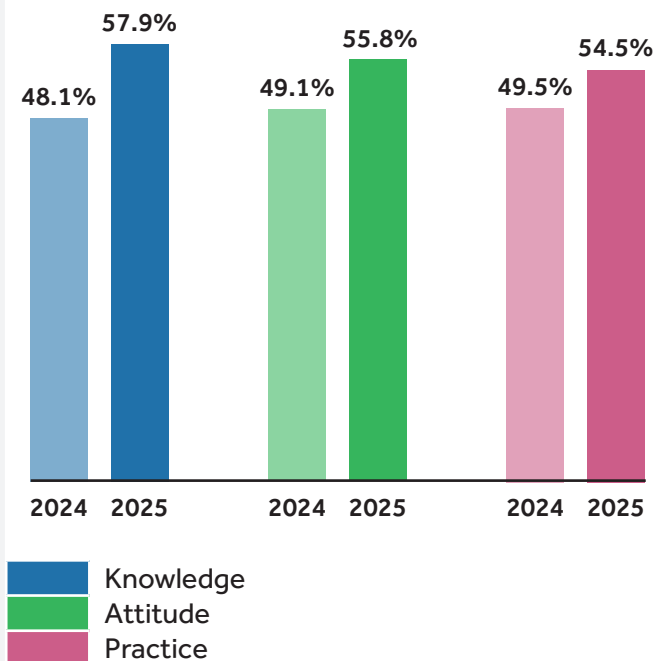
Learners with disabilities tended to achieve lower scores and the gap has worsened since 2024, indicating the need for specific support to this group.

Boys have lower scores in attitudes indicating the need for further work to sensitise boys to gender equality and rights.

Some geographical difference in scores was noted, suggesting the need for targeted interventions.

Teachers also show improvement in average scores with an overall increase of 5.1pp

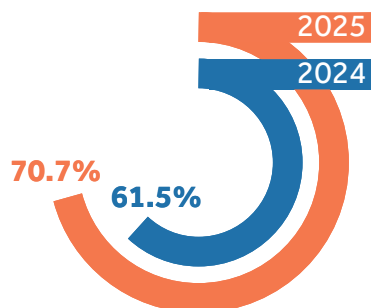
Overall Student Scores



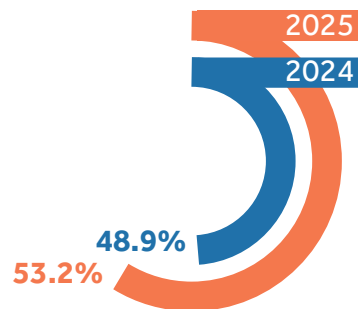
Violence in school

More learners now understand that violence is forbidden in school: 70.7%, which is an increase of 9pp. Findings also show that while the same proportion of learners say they've never witnessed or suffered a situation of violence in school in 2025, interestingly fewer learners say they don't know or don't want to answer the question. This suggests that more learners are able and confident to recognise violence at school, which is supported by the finding that two-thirds of learners say that would report violence if they encountered it.

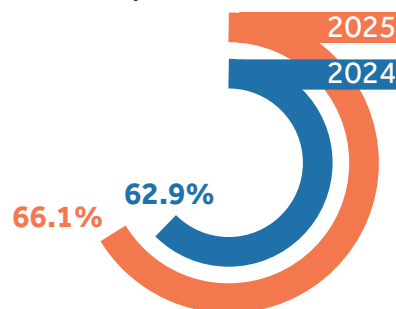
Violence is forbidden in school



Has witnessed violence in school



Would report violence



While we see improvements, there is still more work to be done in changing violent behaviours and improving understanding of reporting methods in school:



46.4% say it's normal for teachers or school staff to cane learners (down from 53.6%).



43.4% sometimes feel unsafe in school (down from 51.0%).



62.4% believe that the only way to report violence is to speak with a principal or teacher (down from 73.7%).



68.6% think teachers will be sanctioned for perpetrating violence – but more believe learner perpetrators will be sanctioned (new questions in 2025).






41.9% believe they will face negative consequences for reporting violence (new question in 2025).

More teachers understand that they will be sanctioned for violence against a learner (78.9%)

Teacher-learner relationships




There are very good improvements in understanding around teacher-learner relationships. In fact, we see the greatest shift towards desired scores in this area, indicating there could be learning in this area to be applied elsewhere:

	71.4% understand that sexual relationships are forbidden between teachers and learners (up from 56.8%).
	76.7% say that girls have the right to refuse sex (up from 61.8%).
	66.6% know that sexual touching is forbidden regardless of declarations of love or gifts (up from 49.7%).



90.1% of teachers understand that sexual relationships are forbidden and 88.8% understand romantic relationships are forbidden – this is also an improvement on 2024.

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)



Findings indicate greater need for targeted interventions that improve understanding, attitudes and practices around SRH, with some questions scoring fairly low or even worsening since the baseline survey:

	Less than half (43.7%) know they can access SRH services without an adult's permission (up from 39.3%).
	More respondents find it difficult to talk about family planning (57.0% up from 49.4%).
	Fewer believe it is a good idea to offer familiar planning services within the school (57.9% down from 65.5%).

We also see lower scores around FGM than in 2024:

	Less than a third agree that FGM is dangerous (31.4% down from 36.2%).
	A third say they don't know or don't want to answer (33.7% up from 29.5%).

However, we see an improvement in learning about menstruation:

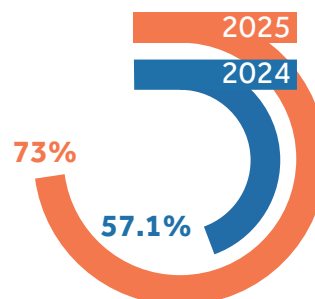
	65.9% are learning about periods and menstrual hygiene (up from 60.1%)
	Over half (51.2%) now believe girls can participate in school during their period (up from 41.6%).




Teachers did far better than learners on SRH-related questions with 63.2% understanding that learners can access services without an adult – an increase of 16pp since 2024.

Pregnancy

There are good improvements in attitudes around pregnant learners having the right to attend school. However, there is more work to be done to reduce bias against their ability to concentrate and learn in class (only 1pp increase) and the belief that girls are solely responsible for becoming pregnant (only 3pp decrease).

Pregnant girls should attend school



	More say that their sister would continue to attend school if she became pregnant (72.6% up from 60.0%).
	Fewer believe that the presence of a pregnant learner would distract others (42.6% down from 54.5%) or influence others to become pregnant (28.2% down from 40.6%).
	Fewer say teachers make fun of pregnant girls (39.8% down from 50.4%).

Teachers show a similarly substantial improvement in the belief that pregnant learners should go to school – 76.9% up from 54.5%.

Conclusions and recommendations

Significant improvements in the percentage of students achieving desired knowledge about SRH and different types of violence at school show that interventions by LWL and other partners have been effective to support a change at school level. However, there remains considerable scope for stronger understanding, better attitudes and improved practices, especially in the following areas:

Learners with disabilities: A significant effort is needed to better identify and support learners with disabilities in building understanding of SRH and violence, and their rights.

Gender inclusion: The most sensitive topics – FGM and pregnancy – need to be targeted through formal curriculum and extra-curricular activities and by community and religious leaders.

Fear of reporting: Violence in school is widely understood but there is a need to reduce the fear of reporting for both learners and teachers.

Attitudes: Changing attitudes takes time and requires investment in consistent social behaviour communications at all levels of education and community.



An information brief on teacher participants is available.

About the survey

4,478 learners (2,504 fewer than in 2024)

3% learners with disability

45% boys and 55% girls

15 Junior Secondary and 10 Senior Secondary

Five districts covered: Bo, Bombali, Kailahun, Port Loko, and Western Area Rural

Methodology¹

Learners were asked 40 questions across three domains: Knowledge, Attitude and Practices. Each question is designed with a desired response in mind (i.e. an answer that would demonstrate good understanding and customs). The actual answers from participants were compared with these desired responses and the number of correct matches determined a score. A higher score reflects greater alignment with the desired response.

¹ Note: The 2024 survey covered different districts, sampled 2,504 more learners and included a higher percentage of learners with disabilities than the 2025 survey, so any comparisons are indicative rather than direct correlations.



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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.