

Does education affect women's likelihood of experiencing sexual and intimate partner violence?

Global levels of gender-based violence, occurring at all socioeconomic levels, are unacceptably high. However, existing evidence that education can protect against gender-based violence, largely observational in nature, is mixed. A better understanding of the causal link between education and reduced risk of gender-based violence is important to inform the design of promising interventions in this area.

Increased education led to a reduction in women's likelihood of experiencing violence in Uganda but not in Malawi.

The need for better evidence is particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries, where fewer evaluations have been conducted and where there are substantial gains to be made in improving the level of education attained and the quality of schooling received.

STUDYING THE LINK

To increase the evidence base, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative funded a project looking at this link. The project used the implementation

of policies that removed primary school fees in Uganda and Malawi in the mid-1990s as a natural experiment to identify the causal effect of schooling on women's subsequent experience of sexual violence, both by any perpetrator (first study) and by an intimate partner (second study).¹ The research was intended to inform future policies and interventions in both countries.

The project used quasi-experimental methods and data collected from the Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in Malawi (2004² and 2010³) and Uganda (2006⁴ and 2011⁵). It determined the causal relationship between education and violence using a regression discontinuity design approach.⁶

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND VIOLENCE

Findings from the first study^{7,8} indicate that, in Malawi, about 34 percent of women in the sample (out of 4 413 women aged 19-31 years) reported experiencing sexual violence, compared with 40 percent of women (out of 1 028 women aged 18-29 years) in Uganda. The study found that an increase

GRANT DETAILS

PROJECT: Identifying the causal effect of education on adult women's experience of intimate partner violence and forced sex in Malawi and Uganda

ORGANISATION: Stony Brook University

PROJECT LOCATION: Malawi and Uganda



in grade attainment reduced the likelihood of ever experiencing sexual violence in Uganda but not Malawi. It also found no relationship between grade attainment and experience of sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the study in either country.





An exploration of reasons why education may help protect against sexual violence revealed that higher levels of education in Uganda led to delays in marriage and increases in literacy and working for pay (proxies for economic standing), which may in turn have decreased the risk of abuse.

Emerging findings from the second study indicate that, similar to sexual violence from any perpetrator, increased education leads to a reduction in intimate partner violence

in Uganda. In Malawi, however, results indicate that increases in education among women who have not completed primary education may increase intimate partner violence. This could be due to male backlash.

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE BASE

Keeping girls in school has several benefits; however, it only resulted in lower levels of sexual violence in Uganda. It is possible that overall higher grade attainment, particularly

at secondary-school level, is driving this stronger relationship in Uganda and thus a minimum level of schooling may be needed to reduce the risk of experiencing sexual violence. More research on this relationship is needed, including studies that examine the potential for adverse impacts among women with low levels of education, as well as evaluations of specific interventions that increase educational attainment, enrolment or educational quality and the impact of such programmes on gender-based violence. ■

¹ Behrman, J. A., Peterman, A. & Palermo, T. 2017. Does keeping adolescent girls in school protect against sexual violence? Quasi-experimental evidence from East and southern Africa. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 60(2): 184-190. Available: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.010>.

² National Statistical Office [Malawi] & ORC Macro. 2005. Malawi demographic and health survey 2004. Calverton, MD: National Statistics Office and ORC Macro.

³ National Statistical Office [Malawi] & ICF Macro. 2011. Malawi demographic and health survey 2010. Zomba, Malawi, and Calverton, MD: National Statistical Office and ICF Macro.

⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) & Macro International Inc. 2007. Uganda demographic and health survey 2006. Calverton, MD: UBOS and Macro International Inc.

⁵ UBOS & ICF International Inc. 2012. Uganda demographic and health survey 2011. Kampala, Uganda, and Calverton, MD: UBOS and ICF International Inc.

⁶ Maas, I.L., Nolte, S., Walter, O.B., Berger, T., Hautzinger, M., Hohagen, F., Lutz, W., Meyer, B., Schröder, J., Späth, C., Klein, J.P., Moritz, S. & Rose, M. 2016.

The regression discontinuity design showed to be a valid alternative to a randomized controlled trial for estimating treatment effects. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*. 82: 94-102.

⁷ Behrman, J. A., Peterman, A. & Palermo, T. 2017. Does keeping adolescent girls in school protect against sexual violence? Quasi-experimental evidence from East and southern Africa. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 60(2): 184-190. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.010>.

⁸ Palermo, T. & Mills, M. 2017. *Does keeping adolescent girls in school protect against sexual violence? Quasi-experimental evidence from East and southern Africa*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. Available: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB_2017_01.pdf [2017, May 30].

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