

RESEARCH BRIEF:

“I have less violence in my life...”

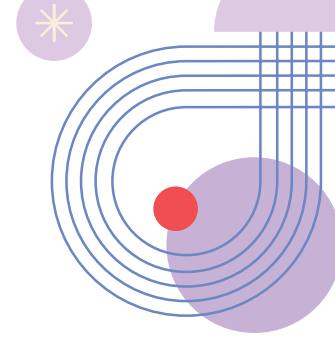
Comprehensive sexuality education and its impacts in rural Madagascar: Perspectives from students and teachers

Mihaja Raonivololona, Tahiry Anjarasoa, Sarobidy Andriambelotiana, Fandresena Anjaratodisoa,
Ravaka Randrianasolo, Laura Leeson

Projet Jeune Leader

November 2025





BACKGROUND

Globally, an estimated 115 million children and adolescents experience school-related gender-based violence (GBV) each year, including physical, psychological, and sexual forms of violence.¹ In Madagascar, 58% of youth have experienced violence at school.² Such violence in and around schools undermines learning, increases absenteeism and dropout rates, and can have a long-term negative effect on young people's development, mental health, and social-emotional wellbeing.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is an evidence-based approach that equips adolescents with knowledge, skills, and values to understand relationships, gender norms, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Evidence suggests CSE can foster safer, more equitable school environments by challenging gender-based oppression, improving students' sense of safety and self, and reducing experiences of violence.³ However, in low-resource and rural contexts, evidence remains limited on how and why CSE may or may not work, in what context and under what circumstances.⁴⁻⁵

In Madagascar, progress in CSE research and implementation is often hindered by limited political will and the perception of sexuality education as a morally sensitive topic. As a result, more documentation is needed on how CSE programs influence not only health-related outcomes but also broader impacts on education quality, school safety, and gender relations. Strengthening this evidence base can help improve the perceived relevance of CSE within education systems and inform strategies for scaling and sustainability in resource-constrained settings.

One such provider of CSE is *Projet Jeune Leader (PJL)*, a youth-founded organisation in Madagascar that has reached over 200,000 early adolescents with in-school CSE since 2013.⁶ PJL's programme is a four-year intra-curricular initiative designed for students in grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 (ages 10–15 years), taught to boys and girls together. The programme is led by highly trained and specialised young adult CSE Educators, and includes a range of topics including puberty, gender equality, communication, emotional intelligence, healthy relationships, and violence prevention.

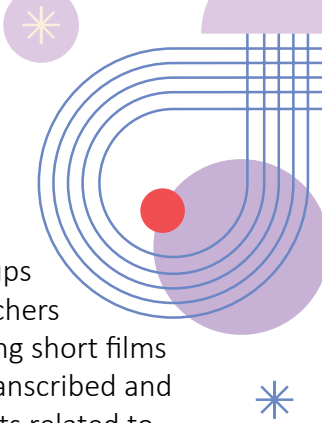
AIM

This research explores how the PJL programme directly and indirectly influences school environments and violence prevention in rural, low-resource settings where limited evidence currently exists. Using community-engaged and human-centred design approaches, we examined the perspectives of students, teachers, and CSE educators to understand how having a CSE educator and delivering PJL's programme affects students' experiences with violence, as well as educators' perceptions of school safety and wellbeing.

This research aims to generate new evidence to inform national policy engagement and advocacy for integrating CSE into Madagascar's education system.

METHODS

Different variations of community-based, participatory research methods were used to explore how the PJL's CSE programme influences school environments and violence prevention in rural Madagascar. Trained PJL facilitators conducted "Rose, Bud, Thorn" workshops — a participatory reflection tool that encourages participants to identify positive outcomes (roses), challenges (thorns), and opportunities for growth (buds) — with 162 students (aged 10-19) at five rural schools to understand how the programme shaped their experiences with violence and relationships. The average age of participants was 14 years old and 87% were girls.



Similar workshops were held with 56 teachers and 24 school principals across 10 focus groups to examine perceived changes in school safety and climate. In addition, 10 government teachers delivering PJJ's CSE programme participated in a Collaborative Filmmaking process, producing short films that reflected on the programme's effects in their schools. Across all activities, data were transcribed and analysed using inductive and deductive thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights related to education and violence prevention.

RESULTS

Students' perspective

Students described how participation in the PJJ programme helped them build relationships “far from violence” by improving their understanding of healthy relationships, increasing their confidence to seek help or intervene for others, and strengthening their communication and social skills. Central to these changes was the PJJ Educator, whom students viewed as a *zoky* — a trusted older sibling — who created a safe, approachable, and supportive environment. The Educator's relatable teaching style, openness on sensitive topics, and participatory lessons have built credibility and trust, allowing students to engage more deeply and apply what they learned in their daily lives.

“When I have a problem, I can talk to the PJJ Educator... they put aside the ‘Teacher’ label and respond like a person saying, ‘Tell me about it.’ I’m used to trusting the PJJ Educator because they’re ready to listen.”

“Before, there was no one to get advice from. Students didn’t know how to manage personal life matters, but when the PJJ Educator came, the students finally learned about it.”

“I have less violence in my life because when the PJJ Educator was there, I gained more courage... I used to be shy and embarrassed before, but after doing PJJ classes, I became brave in front of people.”

One student noted the importance of the PJJ Educator's boundaries: “[PJJ Educator's] discipline needs to be strengthened. If the PJJ Educator is too easy-going, students tend to misbehave, and the lesson being explained becomes unclear.”

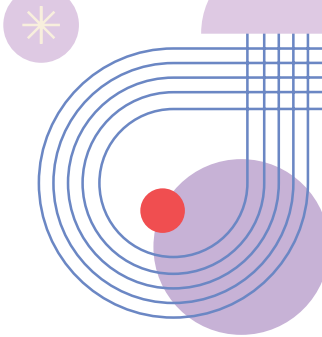
Teachers' and principals' perspectives

Teachers and school principals reported that the PJJ programme contributes to safer, more positive school environments in two key ways: 1) by strengthening students' social skills and, 2) by improving teaching practices. They observed that the presence of PJJ Educators and the CSE curriculum improved respect, communication, and unity among students, reducing bullying, discrimination, and conflict. Teachers described PJJ Educators as trusted role models who promote inclusivity through participatory, student-centred teaching.

“Through the lessons the PJJ Educator gives — like communication among students, parents, and teachers — they apply it in their lives, which brings change.”

“She [the PJJ Educator] is emotionally connected with them, which makes them respectful toward each other and the community.”

Educators also explained that the PJJ programme influenced their own teaching behaviours, prompting reflection on the use of punishment and introducing more supportive and engaging classroom management approaches.



“Before, when there was no PJJ Educator, I thought children needed corporal punishment to learn. But since the arrival of the PJJ Educator, corporal punishment has completely disappeared. Now, when you just tell a student what to do, they immediately follow.”

Some teachers highlighted that working alongside PJJ Educators changed their own motivation and mindset, inspiring them to adopt new, more confident and empathetic teaching practices.

“Personally, I feel that the PJJ Educator’s presence has sparked a change in mindset. I see him standing confidently in front of students, boldly expressing his opinions and convincingly guiding them. I compare myself to him. We are both young teachers. I wonder how he could be so confident doing all of this. It made me realize there are different effective methods of education and even changed my mentality about children’s education.”

PJJ Educators’ perspective

Through the collaborative films, PJJ Educators showcased their own experiences alongside reflections and quotes from students, teachers, parents, and school principals, illustrating how the PJJ programme strengthens student motivation, confidence, and school connectedness. Across all films, participants observed that students are more eager to attend school, participate actively, and take initiative, contributing to improved academic performance across disciplines and a more positive school environment.

“Since the PJJ Educator settled here, students dare to take initiatives... They are active in class, raise their hands, and share ideas confidently. Exam results have improved for three years in a row, reaching more than 95%.” (Principal)

Educators also emphasised that CSE lessons help students, especially girls and shy students, develop self-confidence and a stronger sense of responsibility, inspiring leadership and goal-setting.

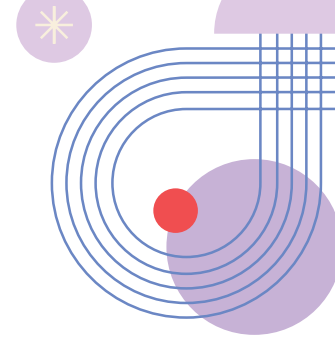
“It’s a girl who leads the group at assembly — even though she’s a girl, she’s the one giving directions. It shows that anyone can be a leader, and that girls are becoming more confident.”

“Even in small responsibilities like cleaning the school, students take initiative — it’s clear they cooperate and help one another.” (Teacher)

Finally, participants described how PJJ Educators act as bridges between students, teachers, and parents, improving communication and reducing stigma around sensitive topics. This has fostered greater mutual respect, stronger family engagement, and a more inclusive and welcoming school environment.

“Thank you so much, PJJ Educator, because it has become much easier for our children to talk about such topics with us.” (Parent)

“There’s a visible difference between schools with PJJ Educators and those without — PJJ brings progress.” (Principal)



IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE

This study shows that CSE initiatives can improve student wellbeing, teacher practice, and school environments in rural Madagascar. The findings contribute new evidence on how and why CSE programmes work in low-resource settings, emphasising the influence of trusted, relatable and well-equipped Educators. The results also align with global research showing that effective school-based interventions for violence prevention combine life skills, psychosocial support, and a whole-school approach. *

PJL is using these findings and the PJL Educators' collaborative films to advocate with Madagascar's Ministry of Education for national institutionalisation of CSE. The evidence demonstrates how CSE supports education sector goals related to school safety, teacher wellbeing, and student achievement.

For research:

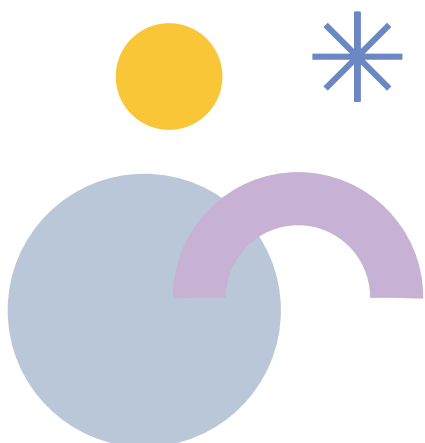
- **Broaden evidence on context and mechanisms:** Future studies should examine how CSE programmes influence school safety, relationships, and violence prevention over time, and which CSE activities are most effective for long-term change.
- **Explore diverse contexts:** Research should test and adapt models of CSE implementation in different regions and populations.
- **Strengthen study quality:** Greater investment in mixed-method and longitudinal research is needed to assess sustained outcomes and measure wider school and community impacts.

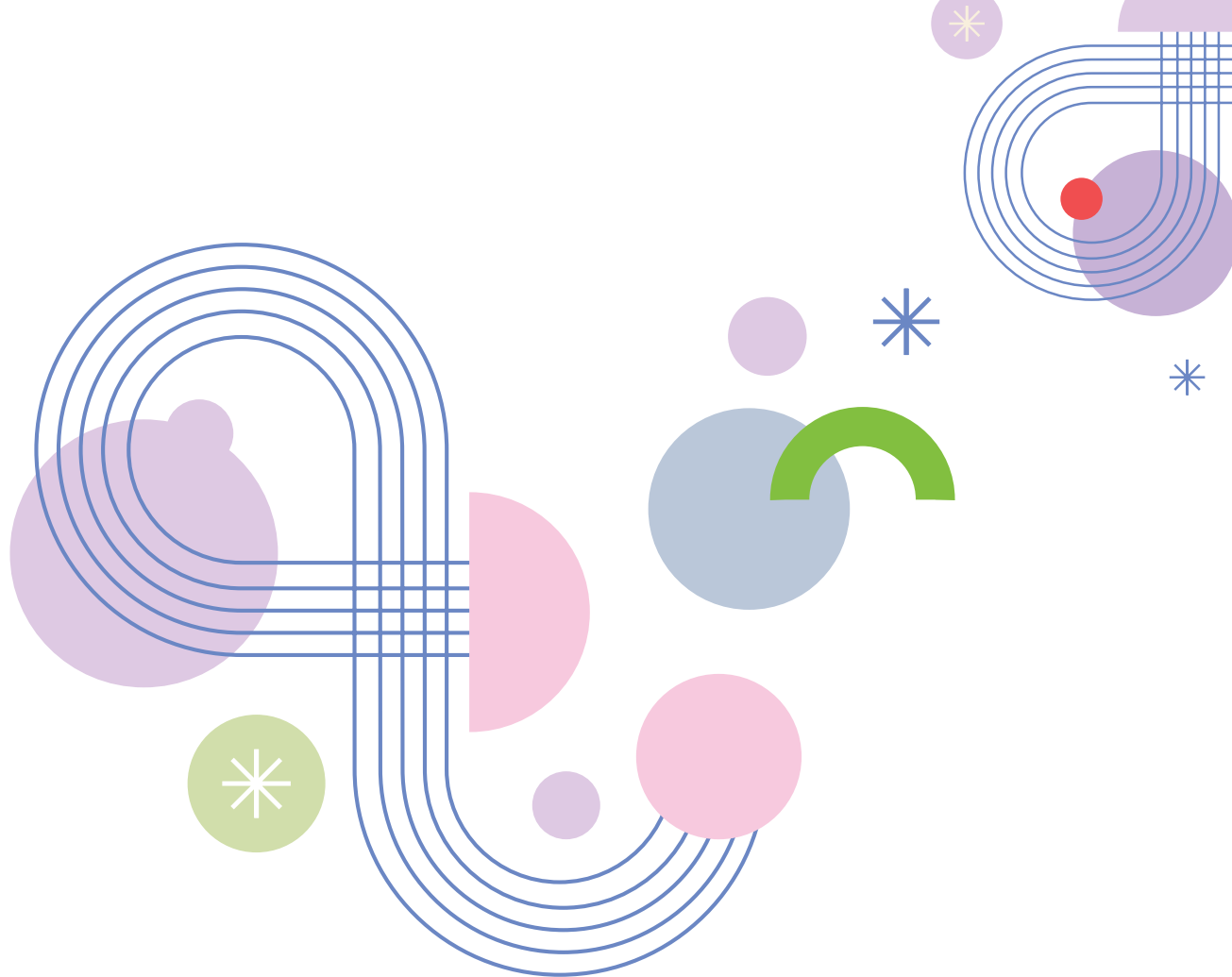
For policy:

- **Institutionalise CSE nationally:** Policymakers can use these findings to strengthen frameworks that embed CSE as a core component of school-based violence prevention and life skills education.
- **Foster multisectoral collaboration:** Ministries of Education, Health, and Youth should coordinate to ensure CSE contributes to broader national goals on gender equality and adolescent wellbeing.
- **Invest in the education workforce:** Build systems for training, supervision, and ongoing support of CSE Educators and teachers to ensure consistent quality and impact.

For practice:

- **Deliver engaging, relevant content:** Ensure CSE lessons are participatory, age-appropriate, and address real-life issues like puberty, relationships, and violence.
- **Foster whole-school engagement:** Encourage collaboration among teachers, principals, students, and parents to reinforce non-violent norms and inclusive school culture.





Suggested citation: Raonivololona, M., Anjarasoa, T., Andriambelotiana, S., Anjaratodisoa, F., Randrianasolo, R., & Leeson, L. (2024). *“I have less violence in my life...”: Comprehensive sexuality education and its impacts in rural Madagascar—Perspectives from students and teachers*. Sexual Violence Research Initiative.

REFERENCES

- 1 UNGEI. (2024). Frequently asked questions: School-related gender-based violence. UNGEI.
- 2 UNICEF Madagascar. (2018). MICS 6: Enquête nationale sur la situation socio-démographique des ménages.
- 3 Goldfarb, E. S., & Lieberman, L. D. (2021). Three decades of research: The case for comprehensive sex education. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 68*, 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036>
- 4 Sell, K., Oliver, K., & Meiksin, R. (2023). Comprehensive sex education addressing gender and power: A systematic review to investigate implementation and mechanisms of impact. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 20*, Article 13178-021-00674-8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-021-00674-8>
- 5 UNESCO. (2018). International Technical guidance on sexuality education (Revised version). UNESCO.
- 6 Even though PJL works with Madagascar’s government and Ministry of Education to deliver its CSE model, no national policies for in-school CSE exist. PJL Educators are integrated into government middle schools to teach the participatory, multi-year curriculum during students’ normal timetables. When not teaching, they provide enrichment activities and individualised socio-emotional support.