

# TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS? ASSESSING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND RESPONSES TO SEXUAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS IN BURKINA FASO

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess teachers' knowledge and reporting practices in response to sexual gender-based violence in schools. To learn more about the role teachers can play in responding to gender-based violence, this study examines teachers' perceptions of gender-based violence and their actions around reporting incidences of the violence. The study asked, "What are teachers' perceptions of gender-based violence and how, if at all, do teachers' address the violence as change agents?" This exploratory study used descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and correlations to analyze 129 self-administered survey instruments that measure secondary teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and responses to gender-based violence in schools. Overall, teachers perceived that they can be change agents but lack the knowledge, protection, and training to successfully play such a role. Respondents reported that they are unable to report sexual gender-based violence largely because it is unsafe to do so and because of the pressures of teacher solidarity.

**Keywords:** teachers, gender-based violence, Africa, change agents, schools

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## Introduction

In 2017, UNICEF published a global report called "*A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*" documenting the most extensive evidence of violence against children. It illustrates a concerning rate of sexual, physical, and emotional violence against children taking place at home as well as in and around schools. Further there are estimates that over 246 million children experienced some form of violence in schools annually

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worldwide each year (Greene, Robles, Stout, & Suvilaakso, 2013). The occurrence of gender-based violence (GBV) in schools is a global concern, prompting a growing body of research (Leach, Dunne, & Salvi, 2014).

In Burkina Faso, half of faculty and staff surveyed confirmed that sexual, physical, verbal, and psychological violence exists in Burkina Faso's secondary schools (Devers, Henry, Hofmann, & Banabdallah, 2012). Recent research (Leach et al., 2014; Porter, 2015) acknowledges that teachers play a complex role as perpetrators, victims, enablers, and/or protectors against sexual GBV in schools. Leach, Dunne, & Salvi (2014) call for additional research on teachers' experiences in addressing GBV in schools. Despite the limited research on how teachers address sexual GBV in schools, studies (Porter, 2015; Stromquist et al., 2013) demonstrate teachers' vulnerability, particularly female teachers, in protecting themselves and schoolchildren from sexual GBV in sub-Saharan Africa.

In an effort to learn more about teacher's knowledge of the occurrence of the violence and the role they play in responding to sexual GBV in schools, this study examines teachers' knowledge of incidents and perceptions of sexual GBV, as well as their action to report incidences of the violence. The study asked, 1) "What are teachers' knowledge of the occurrence of sexual GBV and did they report the incidence(s)?" 2) "What are their perceptions of sexual GBV?", 3) Are there differences between how male and female teachers report the violence?", and 4) "What factors and experiences inform teachers' perceptions of and responses to sexual GBV in schools?" In order to understand teachers' familiarity with and attitudes toward reporting sexual GBV in the school environment, this paper draws on previous research (Bhana, 2015; Porter, 2015; Stromquist et al., 2013) that demonstrates particular factors and experiences as influential on teachers' knowledge and behaviors in responding to GBV in schools. Norms, particularly surrounding gender, violence, and sexual relations contribute to teachers' unwillingness and inability to respond against GBV in Burkina Faso's education system (Devers et al., 2012).

This paper begins by defining the phenomenon of GBV and examining its root causes in Burkina Faso. Next, the paper outlines occurrences of GBV in Burkina Faso, looks at the limited research examining current interventions involving teachers, and shows the obstacles teachers face when attempting to report sexual GBV. The results of the study follow the method sections. A discussion of pertinent findings and key recommendations conclude the paper.

### **Definition of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

This paper uses a definition of GBV developed by UNESCO and UN Women (2016) that identifies anyone as potential victims of violence due to "gender discrimination, gender role expectations, and/or gender stereotypes, or based on the differential power status linked to gender." (p. 10) This paper uses this definition for two purposes: (1) to establish that *all* actors in the school community can experience violence in school, including violence of a sexual nature, and (2) to acknowledge the roots of unequal power and gender norms that perpetrate the violence. Scholars (Bhana, 2005; Connell, 2005; Mills, 2001) demonstrate the occurrence of GBV among both boys and girls. Studies focusing on children found that boys and girls experience different forms of violence at different rates. For example, globally there is a higher rate of prevalence of physical violence among boys, while girls are more often victims of bullying and sexual violence (Morrell, 2001; UNESCO & UN Women, 2016).

The focus of this study is on teachers, not as perpetrators, but as adult bystanders, employed by schools, who may have knowledge of the incidences of sexual GBV and have the ability to respond, in both formal and informal ways, against the violence. This literature

review discusses the phenomenon of GBV in the school or, as commonly referred to within the international development community, as school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV). This paper uses the terms interchangeably. However, this section does not focus equal attention on either men and boys' experiences as victims of sexual GBV nor to teachers' experiences as victims. Rather, while not denying teachers, men, and boys' experiences as victims, I draw on the available research and the contextual focus, in which the majority of attention is given to girls as victims of such violence and teachers as perpetrators, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Hopefully, future research will correct this gap.

This study focuses on sexual GBV occurring within the school environment. Sexual GBV is a result of unequal power dynamics. Violence contributes to and allows for masculine dominance (Bhana, 2013; Connell, 2005; Morrell, 2001). The use of violence is a major method of constructing a man's power over a woman (Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015). In Burkina Faso as in many cultures, men and boys are taught that to be masculine is to be aggressive, strong, and in control, while women and girls are taught to be compatible to that masculinity by creating a space for it through passivity, silence, and submission (Bhana, 2005; Dunne et al., 2006; Leach et al., 2014; Zare, Yaro, & Dan-Koma, 2008). Thus, schoolgirls are more often reported as the victims of sexual GBV in schools, while older students and male teachers are often accused as perpetrators.

Although schools are supposed to be safe places for children to learn and grow, often they are not. In the past 30 years, scholars (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Mills, 2001; Morrell, 2001) have recognized schools as complex spaces, producing and reproducing social norms, including gendered norms, often reinforced through violence. Furthermore, research (Bhana, 2015; Porter, 2015) acknowledges that the continuation of gendered privileges creates an obstacle for teachers to respond against GBV. Porter (2015) observed, "school practices reflect local challenges and attitudes to a great extent. Teachers' influence on their students is grounded in the gendered power dynamics and prevalent sexual norms of broader society." (p. 282)

### **Sexual GBV in Burkina Faso's Schools**

Despite knowledge of the existence of sexual GBV in Burkina Faso, it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the frequency and nature of sexual GBV due to underreporting (Beninger, 2013; Devers et al., 2012; Leach et al., 2014; Parkes et al., 2013). However, several international, regional, and national studies (Devers et al., 2012; Helmfrid, 2004; Zare et al., 2008) provide a glimpse into the violence endured by many schoolchildren in Burkina Faso.

In Burkina Faso, 45% of high schoolers reported in 2007 that male teachers approach schoolgirls for sexual favors, while 24% of students stated they knew of a male teacher who sexually seduced a female student. As with many African countries, there is a normalization of older men's relationships with young women and girls in Burkina Faso. This includes male teachers' relationships with students. This acceptance is complicated by power dynamics around sex, though it is unclear if it is similar for love relationships. Women and girls in Burkina Faso do not have power to negotiate sexual relationships. Thus, while they may not wish to accept sexual advances, they do not believe they can refuse and do not forcefully say "no" to unwanted sex. This makes labelling sex as violence difficult. Girls are often encouraged to protect themselves from being placed in a position that leaves them vulnerable to sexual propositions by staying in groups of girls, wearing conservative clothing, and acting submissive, further reinforcing a desirable form of feminine behavior (Zare et al., 2008).

On the other hand, the relationship between sex, love, violence, and power dynamics is further convoluted by the phenomenon of "sugar daddies." The term sugar daddies refers

to older men who provide material possessions and other items of monetary value in exchange for sex. Teachers and students report that, at times, teachers demand sexual favors in return for passing grades from students, usually girls. If the girls refuse, the teacher will fail them, often risking their ability to pass the grade or even continue with their schooling. This culture of “sexually transmitted grades” (STG) is prevalent in Burkina Faso (Devers et al., 2012). The positional power and privilege held by a teacher can be attractive to both a student and her family. Parents have been known to encourage their daughters to pursue intimate sexual relationships with male teachers. It is not rare for girls to be accused of seducing their male teachers in order to gain material and social privileges (Diawara, Compaore, De Cecco, & Rouamba, 2013). Porter’s (2015) research in Uganda demonstrates that “For girls and young women, their sexual identity and social belonging were still primarily understood through the lens of reproduction and as requiring them to access protection and material resources through men.” (p. 275)

Further complicating the ability to differentiate between a consensual relationship and one based on coercion, it is taboo to discuss sexual relationships (consensual or forced) in Burkina Faso (Devers et al., 2012; Diawara et al., 2013). While it is illegal for a teacher to have sexual relations with a minor student, it is not outlawed for teachers and students over the age of 18 to have relationships, date, or marry. Thus, with the social norms normalizing such relationships, and the practice of not discussing any type of sexual relations, violent or consensual, it may be difficult to have knowledge of sexual GBV. Teachers also may have varying perceptions of what constitute sexual violence and may define the violence differently than national policies and laws.

In addition, while verbal abuse and harassment can be a form of sexual GBV, such acts are often not recognized as violence (Zare et al., 2008). Much verbal abuse by teachers contains gender bias. School girls endure verbal abuse in the form of sexual harassment by teachers and schoolboys. Such comments are normalized and not thought of as harassment (Forsyth-Queen, Gonzalez, & Meehan, 2015).

### **Obstacles to Reporting GBV**

In the Devers et al. (2012) study of GBV in schools throughout West Africa, the authors list four obstacles that may inhibit survivors and witnesses from reporting GBV in schools: lack of knowledge of rights, ineffective judicial system, absence of support services, and stigma. Factors such as community stigma and fear of retaliation encourages a culture of silence around GBV (Leach et al., 2014; Porter, 2015). Bhana (2015) in South Africa and Porter (2015) in Uganda found a clear dynamic of silence despite female teachers working to protect children informally and serving as support. Teachers did not report incidences of GBV, but rather would only discuss particular cases with the parents of the victim.

Female teachers, often the ones pressured to respond and protect students from GBV, are even more at risk, due to their vulnerability (Bhana, 2015; Porter, 2015; Stromquist et al., 2013). Regardless of who is the perpetrator, it is difficult to address GBV based on the gender norms that often allow such violence to exist. Teachers’ realities in sub-Saharan Africa make safe, active response to GBV difficult at best and unsafe at worst. Teachers, particularly in rural areas, are outsiders and not integrated into the community. They have some dependence on the community for housing, access to resources, and social protection. Thus, teachers have limited protection when they choose to expose GBV, particularly if the community does not condone their actions. Female teachers, often the ones pressured to respond and protect students from GBV, are even more at risk of being socially rejected or physically harmed, due to their vulnerability from a gender perspective (Stromquist et al., 2013).

Despite this, research (Bhana, 2015; Porter, 2015) finds that some female teachers do act as “protectors” for school children against GBV. In South Africa, Bhana (2015) reports that female teachers actively respond against sexual GBV by providing formal and informal “caring” and social protection through developing trusting relationships and leading life skills groups. In both structured and unstructured responses, the teachers provide a safe space for students to talk about their fears and experiences, acting as trusted confidantes. Porter (2015) reports that Ugandan teachers’ responses employ informal and formal methods of protection for children against sexual GBV. Schools and teachers conduct awareness classes for girls on how to avoid GBV, thus placing responsibility on girls to avoid being victims (Porter, 2015). Both of these examples demonstrate how teachers take individual responses and work only with the victim (or potential victims) of GBV. However, these are only two studies and no study of this nature in West African schools was located.

### **Laws and Interventions against SRGBV**

Article 47 of Burkina Faso’s Education Law forbids any form of violence against any persons within school communities and declares violations are punishable according to the offense (Government of Burkina Faso, 2007). In 2012, the National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls’ Education (2012) called for a 25% reduction of GBV in Burkina Faso’s schools by 2016 and a 50% reduction by 2021, presumably using the 20 cases from the 2011–2012 of reported incidences of sexual GBV included in the document as a baseline measurement (Government of Burkina Faso, 2012). As proof of a commitment to measure violence in schools, the government of Burkina Faso created the National Counsel for the Prevention of Violence in School (*Conseil National Pour La Prevention de la Violence a l’Ecole*, CNPVE) in 2009<sup>2</sup>. The counsel is charged to collect data on violence in schools, identify the principal sources of the violence, and develop prevention and responsive measures to combat against the violence. The most frequent form of violence recorded in the annual reports was protests and walkouts, often violent. These demonstrations are political in nature and do not refer to GBV, with the exception of one teacher protest that took place to defend a male teacher from rape charges filed by a female student. There is evidence that the occurrences of violence in school in these reports are inaccurate. For example, the protest to support the teacher who was charged with raping a female student was included in the report, but curiously, the reported rape did not make it into the report. The bold targets are commendable but with the lack of reliable data on GBV to start from, it is difficult to measure if the 2016 target were reached.

Working with teachers is viewed as necessary to combatting GBV. However, despite teachers’ complex roles in GBV in schools and wide acknowledgement of the need to include teachers in implementing programs to protect against GBV, there is an absence of scholarship examining the roles teachers can and should play in addressing GBV in schools. This research explores what teachers think of sexual GBV, their reporting of the violence, and any factors that contribute their understanding and reporting of GBV. This study may help inform organizations in designing training and programs to work with teachers in combating GBV. This literature review highlights national studies that demonstrate prevalence of GBV but there is a lack of research that explores teachers’ reporting of GBV as well as their perceptions of the phenomenon. This study hopes to demonstrate teachers’ attitudes towards acknowledging and reporting on sexual GBV, and how they can be part of combating the violence.

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<sup>2</sup> It is unclear if the government of Burkina Faso sees physical, verbal, and incivility violence as gendered.

## Methodology

Using survey data, this study explored how teachers understand and respond to gender-based violence in schools. In June 2016, I spent two weeks in the regional capital of the North, Ouahigouya, in the Yatenga province, and the same amount of time in the Eastern regional capital of Fada N'Gourma, in the Gourma province. In both locations, I met with the Regional Minister of Education to obtain authorization to conduct the study. At the time of the study, classes had finished for the year, so the regional ministers suggested I survey teachers who had been selected to be graders of the national high school exam. These teachers were organized in groups of 10-15 at different schools in the city. I went to each grading group and gave the teachers information about the purpose of the survey, the location of the private classroom where I would administer the survey and offered a small payment (\$4 dollars) for participating in the study. In addition to the survey data, I drew on document analysis and my knowledge of the culture, for this paper<sup>3</sup>. I reviewed international and national laws and policies as well as national and regional reports to assist in analyzing the survey data.

The survey instrument had 43 items, including four open-ended questions. Six sections included questions on the following subjects: teachers' demographics, perceptions of and attitudes toward education, gender norms, code of conduct, school-related gender-based violence, and responses to gender-based violence. I built the survey largely from DevTech Systems Inc.'s (2006) Safe Schools Program Survey for School-Related Gender Based Violence Teacher Questionnaire<sup>4</sup>, leaving many survey items unchanged. USAID consulted with DevTech to develop this survey in order to conduct a study on teachers' understanding of gendered violence in a sub-Saharan African educational context in 2007 (DevTech Systems, 2007). It has been tested for reliability and validity and was the only survey of its kind to measure for teachers' perceptions and knowledge of gender-based violence<sup>5</sup> at the time I conducted this study. The survey was translated and retranslated for reliability and validity, from English into French by researchers from Burkina Faso. All respondents were fluent in French. I piloted the revised survey and conducted cognitive interviews with three former Burkinabé teachers. Appendix two shows the Cronbach's Alpha for scales of the survey, demonstrating reliability in its adjusted form.

This exploratory study used descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and correlations to analyze self-administered surveys completed by 129 participants. Descriptive statistics were used to address the first two research questions, which explore teachers' knowledge of the occurrences and perceptions of sexual GBV. A t-test was conducted to test the difference in the responses of the men and women participants. Finally, a correlation was conducted to examine the factors that informed the teachers' perceptions of sexual GBV in schools. An opportunistic sample<sup>6</sup> of 36 male teachers and 27 female teachers from the Yatenga Province of the North Region, and 35 male teachers and 31 female teachers from the

<sup>3</sup>The author was a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in Burkina Faso from 2008-2010 and continued to develop professional and personal relationships over the following ten years while conducting research projects in the country.

<sup>4</sup> DevTech Systems, Inc. and Centre for Educational Research and Training. (2006) "Safe Schools Program Survey for School-Related Gender-Based Violence: Teacher Questionnaire. USAID.

<sup>5</sup> USAID is in the process of testing a newer survey instrument, but it was not available in Summer 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Teachers in this sample were graders for the national exam, Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle (BEPC). This group of teachers, representing secondary schools through the respective province, is a motivated group that the Ministry of Education (MENA) selected for additional duties.

Eastern Region's Gourma Province were selected to participate in the survey. The teachers in the sample taught at the levels of lower or upper secondary education, which comprise grades that have adolescent students and are thus more likely to experience sexual violence. I chose the North and East regions as survey sites due to statistics demonstrating a high rate of GBV and gender inequalities in the two regions' schools. Throughout the country, there is no or limited reliable data on GBV; thus, I drew on indicators that designate high gender inequality, suggesting a likelihood of high occurrence of GBV. For example, the Mossi ethnic group dominates in the North region and has a 78% rate of female genital mutilation (FGM) (28 Too Many, 2015). In addition, the rates of forced marriage, particularly through kidnapping, are second highest in the East region at 76% ("Burkina Faso - Child Marriage Around the World. Girls Not Brides," 2017). While this was a large number of participants, it is a small sample size from only two regions of the country. Therefore, it is not intended to be a representative sample of the population.

## Findings

A brief description of the demographic data helps to begin a thorough analysis of the information. The sample represented a cohort of middle-aged professionals, with over half (63%) between 30-39 years of age, with no significant difference between gender or region. There was a close split between participants who were married (55%) and those that reported being single (44%). The high number of single participants in a middle-aged sample, in a country that holds a great value on marriage and in which people generally marry young, could be explained by the lack of reporting of unofficial partnerships as well as delays in marriage due to a school assignment that is away from their homes.

Each region had a higher percent of the local language and religion represented among the respondents from that region. In the Eastern region, there were a higher percentage of teachers speaking Gourmanche (30%) and practicing Christianity (69%). There was a higher majority of Moore-speaking Muslims in the North, with 52% practicing Islam and 69% speaking Moore at home, matching the regional characteristics.

Despite Burkina Faso being a Muslim-majority country, this sample is aligned with underrepresentation of Muslims in civil service jobs, with 58% of respondents (67% female and 52% male) reporting that they practice Christianity, significantly above the national average of 23% (International Crisis Group, 2016).

Men were more likely to have more years of teaching experience, with the majority of participants having taught between 3-10 years. Teachers from the North reported having more teaching experience than those from the East. On par with national requirements, all participants reported having received their Baccalaureate (BAC), which is the national exam taken at the end of upper secondary school, with 95% having some university education. Slightly more men than women had university experience.

At the time of the survey, 10 (8%) respondents were school principals. The majority of participants (72%) were classroom teachers and an additional 18% of respondents were head teachers<sup>7</sup>. Men were three times more likely to be head teachers than women; however, four out of the 10 principals were women. Forty-six percent of participants taught lower secondary school only and 49 % taught both lower and upper secondary school. Men taught upper secondary more often than women, with more women only teaching lower secondary school. Differences between men and women are aligned with international statistics that

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<sup>7</sup> Head teachers are classroom teachers who have additional responsibilities for leading the grade or subject team at the school.

demonstrate men more likely to be in positions of power, with more experience and higher levels of education.

### Teachers' Knowledge of the Occurrence of Sexual GBV in Schools

Based on survey responses, a small percentage of teachers reported knowing of sexual GBV in schools (see Figure 1). Only one respondent reported knowing of a teacher who had forced a student to remove their clothing or knowing of a teacher who exposed him/herself to a student. Two respondents reported they knew of a teacher who touched a student's private area. Nineteen participants out of the 40 who reporting knowing of a teacher impregnating a student, stated that the teacher was reported and only 8 out of the 31 of respondents who knew of a teacher having a love affair with a student stated that the accused teacher was reported.

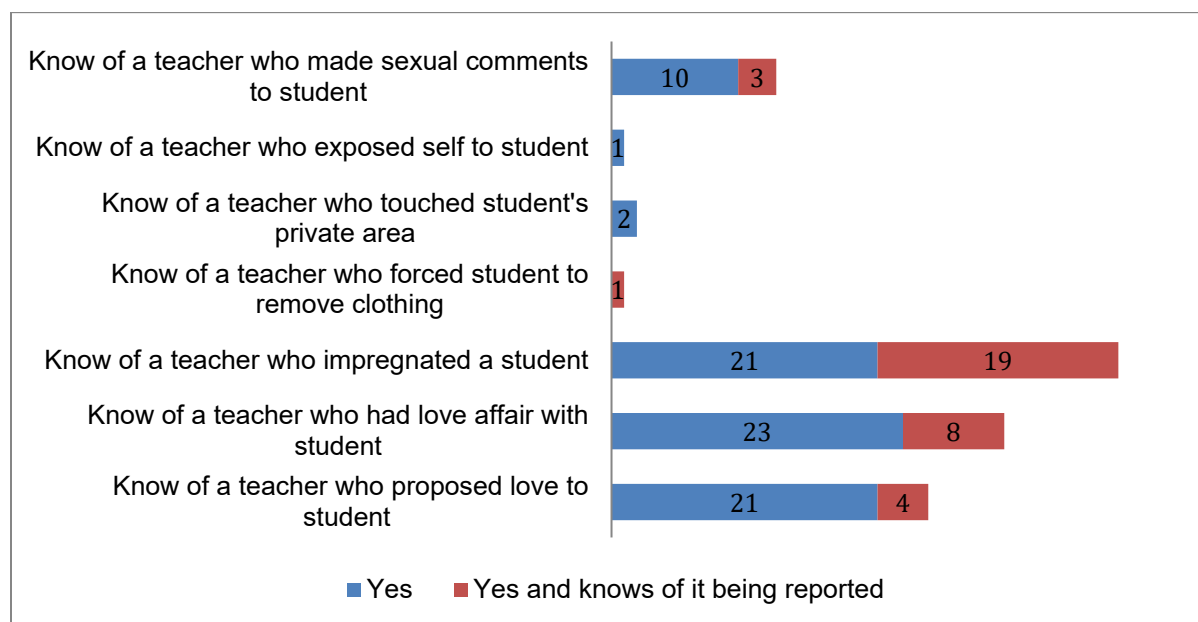


Figure 1. Number of respondents aware of sexual GBV in the school environment.

Teachers' low reporting of sexual GBV occurring in their school is not surprising for two reasons: (1) sexual acts are more likely to take place in private and remain unseen, and (2) the nature of these violations is taboo and are surrounded by a cloud of silence. It is unclear whether teachers did not report what they knew or if they truly were unaware of the prevalence of the violence. Specific sex acts are very unlikely to be discussed, even in a consensual exchange, so it is possible that many teachers remain unaware of sexual relationships and/or violence. Although there is always the possibility that there is a lower rate of sexual violence at these teachers' schools, there is nothing to suggest this is the case. Love affairs and pregnancy have visible components, as mentioned above, and are therefore more likely to be known by teachers.



The correlation between policies and social campaigns focusing on preventing early pregnancy in Burkina Faso, and the higher percentage of respondents reporting a teacher for impregnating a student, may be indicative of a positive effect of programming around early pregnancy in schools. Studies (Devers et al., 2012; Forsyth-Queen et al., 2015) found sexual comments from teachers to be commonplace in schools, thus I consider the 13% of teachers who reported knowing of a teacher making a sexual comment to a student quite a low percentage. Previous studies found higher rates of sexual violence. However, those studies specifically explored prevalence rates and surveyed various groups including students.

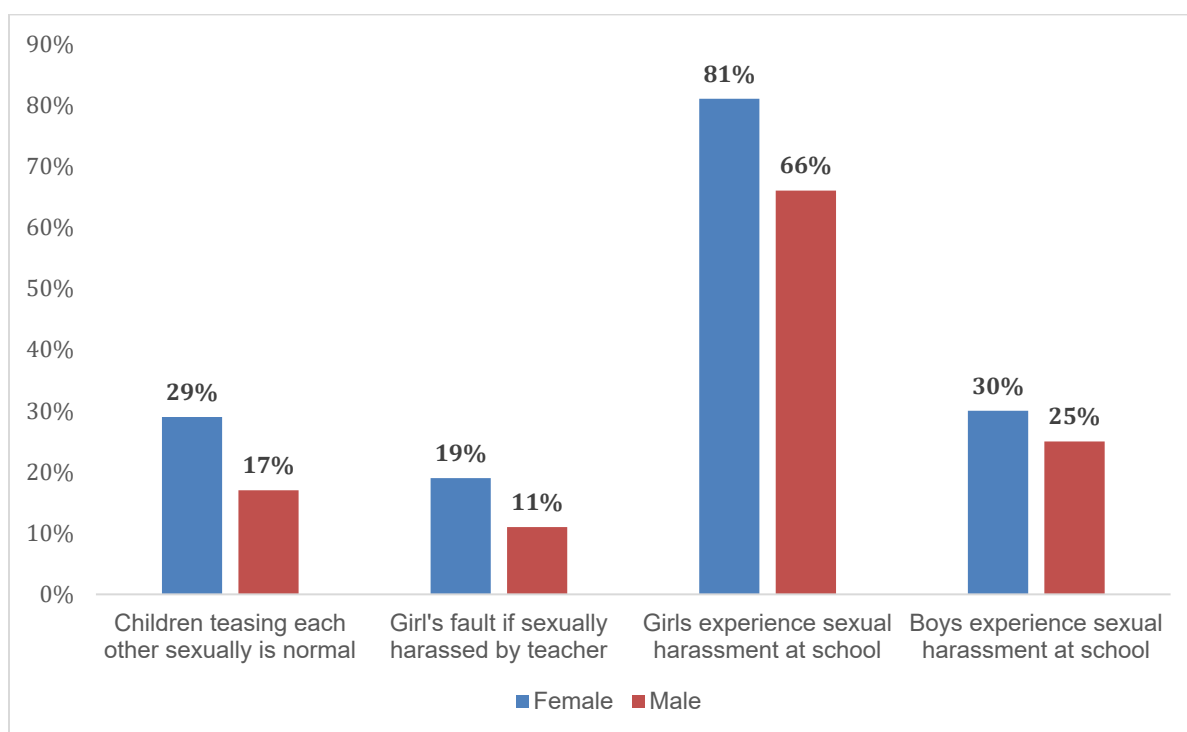


Figure 2. Perceptions of norms around sexual GBV in schools: Percentage of “yes” responses.

### Perception of Sexual GBV

Teachers’ perceptions of sexual GBV were captured and quantified using descriptive statistics obtained from questions that sought their opinions about issues around the violence. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with statements that measured their views of who was at fault when sexual violence occurred and how perpetrators should be treated. While the majority of teacher respondents reported that sexual GBV is problematic and concerning, the findings, based on teachers’ responses to survey questions, demonstrated the complexity of how teachers’ think of sexual violence and if and when an accused teacher should be held accountable for engaging in sexual relationships with students (see Figures 2 and 3). Figure 2 demonstrates further insight into how some teachers think about sexual harassment, including to whom it happens (girls rather than boys) and who is at fault (girl victims). A significantly lower percentage acknowledged that boys can be victims. A higher percentage of women teachers blamed schoolgirls for being victims of sexual GBV, with 19% of female teachers and 11% of male teachers reporting that girls are at fault if they are victims of sexual harassment (see Figure 2). It is encouraging that the majority of both male and female teachers agreed that girls experience sexual harassment at school, which means

training and programs can focus on debunking myths that boys are not victims and victims themselves are not responsible for preventing such violence.

Figure 3 examines male and female teachers' responses to three survey questions, that measured their opinions about how teachers should be held accountable for sex/love relationships with students. With little enforcement of Burkina Faso's laws around sex with minors at the official levels, it is of interest to understand how teachers think other teachers who have sex with students (whether labelled violence or not) should be punished. This data gives insight into the social acceptance of sexual relationships as well as the potential willingness of teachers to report other teachers.

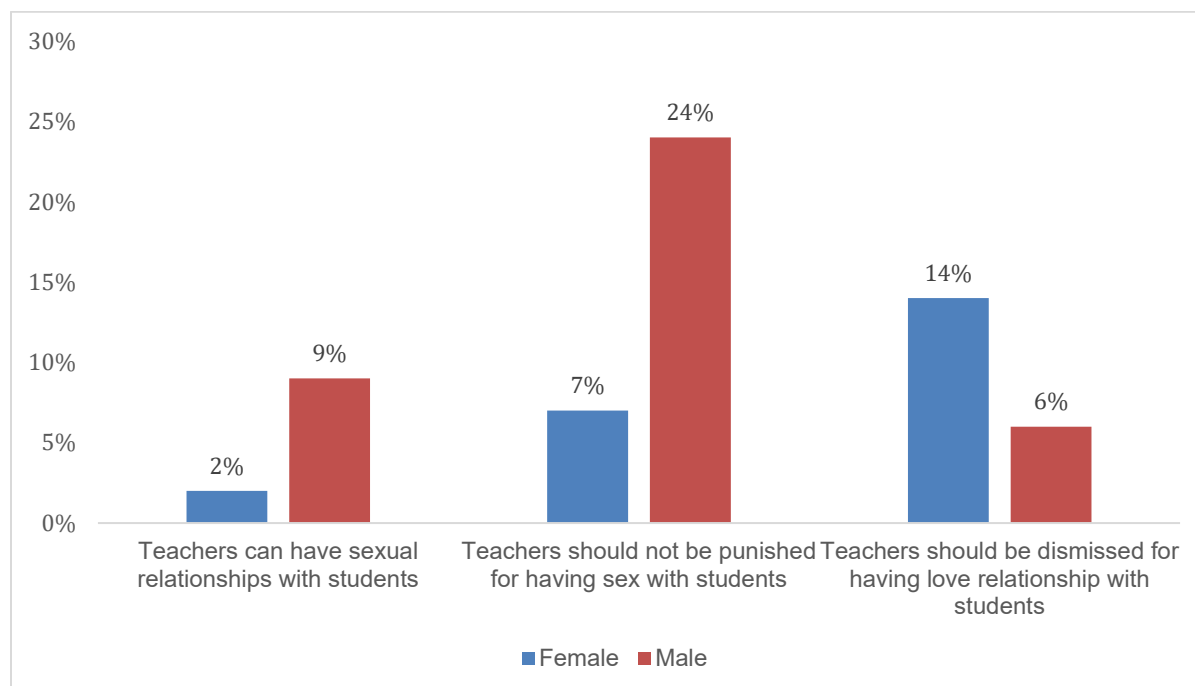


Figure 3. Perceptions of teacher accountability: Percentage of “yes” responses.

Based on survey responses, more women participants agree with statements that offending teachers should be held accountable for having sex and/or a love relationship with a student (see Figure 3). Almost all of the participants (89%) believe that teachers should not have sexual relationships with students and only 24% of men and only 7% of women believe that those teachers should not be punished for having sex with a student. Yet, only 14% of female and 6% of male respondents believe that a teacher should be dismissed from his or her job for having a love relationship with a student.

Further the survey found that 47% of respondents reported that teachers sometimes or always advise other teachers not to sleep with students, but only 34% of respondents say that teachers sometimes or always report teachers that do have sexual relations with students. Thus, it remains unclear what teachers would consider an appropriate disciplinary action against teachers who have sex with students and how teachers understand sexual relationships, particularly between teachers and students. It appears that there may be some relationships that are acceptable. These results also bring into question how respondents think of love relationships versus sexual violence between teachers and students. However, as demonstrated by the figures, there are some teachers who have perceptions that interfere

with combatting sexual GBV in schools. These findings can help guide future research and training programs.

### Teachers' Roles in Combating Sexual SRGBV

Although it has been reported that teachers are unaware of how to officially report GBV occurring in the school environment, which is a significant finding in and of itself, 89% of respondents believe that teachers can help change the current culture that allows the occurrence of GBV (see Figure 4).

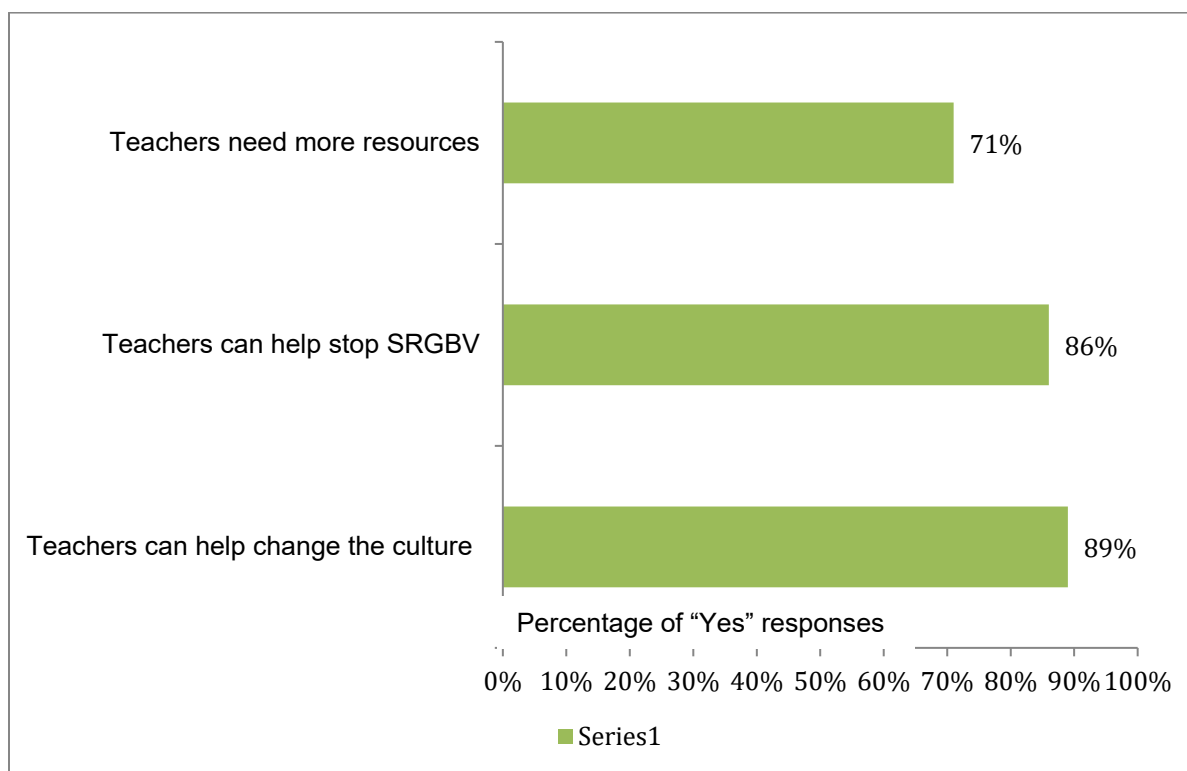


Figure 4. Perceptions of teachers' abilities to combat SRGBV.

Further, 86% of respondents think teachers can help stop GBV (see Figure 4). Nevertheless, 71% of teacher respondents requested more resources to address GBV in schools. These findings are encouraging in that there was evidence that teachers believe they can contribute to safe schools *if* they are given resources and support.

Despite these findings, which demonstrate that the majority of teachers think teachers can stop the violence, the teachers acknowledged significant obstacles to reporting GBV. Only 18% of respondents believe they would have job protection and even fewer at 13% reported that they are safe from harm if they were to report GBV in schools (see Figure 5). These results, discussed in the next section, help further our understanding of teachers' decisions to any passive refusal, such as the denial of knowledge of GBV and therefore the inability to report any violence or explicit resistance, such as blatant refusal to report, in addressing sexual GBV and/or reporting the perpetrators. It is clear from this survey that teachers do not believe they are protected in order to report sexual GBV.

### Reasons for Not Reporting

To further understand teachers' reasons for not addressing sexual GBV in schools despite documentation of prevalence, respondents listed reasons they believed teachers did not report sexual GBV and made suggestions for types of support that would help teachers combat the violence (see Tables 1 and 2). Aligned with other survey responses seen in Figure 5, 75% of teachers reported that teachers do not report SRGBV out of fear of harmful retaliation. A significant number of teachers, 47% in this study, believe that teacher solidarity keeps teachers from reporting on their colleagues who engage in sexual GBV. Government officials and employees at nongovernment organizations (NGOs) reported to me that teachers are expected to protect their colleagues. Aligned with this solidarity, 34% of respondents expressed that teachers want to protect their colleagues. In the National Counsel for the Prevention of Violence in School (*Conseil National Pour La Prevention de la Violence a l'Ecole*, CNPVE) annual report for 2013–2014, when a male teacher was accused of raping a student with which he said he had a consensual relationship, teachers protested to protect him from receiving punishment, demonstrating the strength of unity among teachers. It is not clear how entrenched female teachers are in this solidarity or if it is constructed more from a masculine identity.

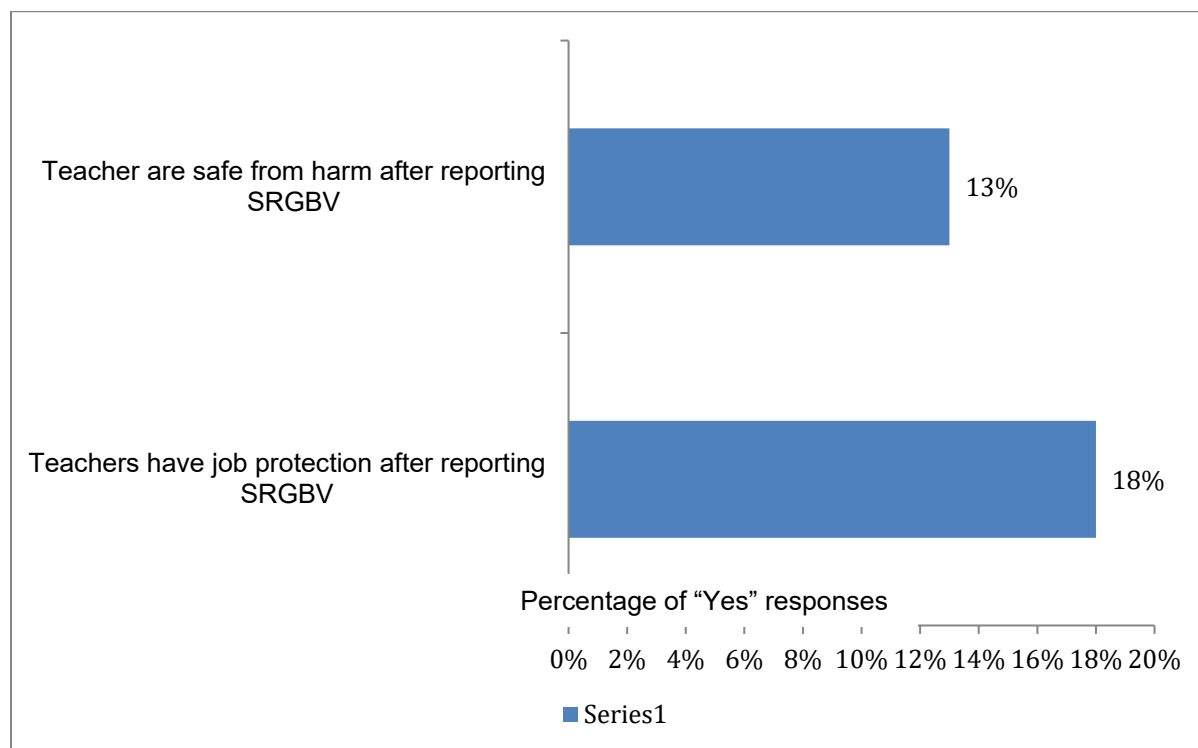


Figure 5. Perception of consequences for reporting GBV in schools.

Despite the reported obstacles, respondents offered several recommendations to support teachers in reporting sexual GBV and protecting students (see Table 2). Seventy-five percent of respondents believe that training on SRGBV and the official reporting protocol would be helpful to teachers in order to do more to respond against the violence. Additionally, 22% of teachers surveyed suggested better systems of reporting and 19% called for stricter sanctions against perpetrators. Surprisingly, only 20% asked for more protection for those who report perpetrators, although the majority of respondents believed that teachers who report sexual GBV in schools are not protected from negative consequences.

The disparity between asking for more protection for those who report perpetrators and perceiving harmful consequences from reporting might be due to norms of silence on sensitive issues. This also could indicate that while teachers say they can be change agents, in fact they prefer other actors with more positional authority to act against the violence, given that the majority of teachers requested an action from the Ministry of Education (MENA), in the form of trainings. Teachers perceive that with more awareness, achieved through trainings, the offending teachers will stop such actions. This would alleviate any responsibly by standing teachers to intervene. Thus, I assert that while teachers are aware and concerned that they are not protected if they report sexual GBV, they do not recommend protection to allow them to report more because they prefer to address the violence using other passive strategies, such as trainings that are more aligned with social norms.

*Table 1*

Respondents' Explanations for Lack of Reporting\*

Reasons respondents list for lack of reporting SRGBV	Percentage
Fear of problems for reporting another teacher	65%
Reporting SRGBV goes against teacher solidarity	47%
They want to protect their colleagues	34%
They do not know how to report	14%
Reporting will not result in sanctions	12%
It is none of their business	9%
Do not know	5%
Other	5%

\*Total percentage exceeds more than 100% because respondents could list more than one answer.

### Gender Differences in Reporting

Using an independent sample t-test, this study found no significant statistical difference at a .05 level between male and female teachers' responses (see Appendix 1) in the following scales: Knowledge of the occurrence of sexual SRGBV (7 items), Knowledge of the occurrence of physical and verbal SRGBV (5 items), Awareness of SRGBV reported (7 items), Teacher acceptance of corporal punishment (7 items), and Ability to report SRGBV (4 items). There was a significant statistical difference at a 0.1 level on teachers' acceptance of corporal punishment, with male teachers, reported at a slightly higher acceptance of the practice but none for reporting sexual SRGBV. See Appendix 2 for a description of the scale items.

There was no significant difference between the East and North regions in the same scales (see Appendix 1).

### Correlation between Knowledge of and Reporting SRGBV

A Pearson correlation of .302 with a significant level of .001 (see Appendix 3) shows there is a positive relationship between teachers' knowledge of sexual SRGBV and reporting of the violence. There is also a correlation of .303 at a .001 significant level of the acceptance of corporal punishment as a form of physical SRGBV and the awareness of reporting SRGBV. This correlation found no relationships with the other two scales: Knowledge of the occurrence of physical and verbal SRGBV, and Ability to report SRGBV.

The Pearson correlation that was used for the analysis supports the assertion that teachers are more likely to report sexual SRGBV if they know of its occurrence, which appears obvious, for one must know of something to do anything about it. In this context, it is most likely that if a teacher is willing to admit to having knowledge of SRGBV, it is due to their willingness to address it, otherwise, in Burkina Faso, it would be common to deny knowledge of the violence. Research in Burkina Faso (Diawara et al., 2013) suggests the school community, including teachers, turns a blind eye to sexual SRGBV. Teachers may prefer not to confirm incidences of sexual violence in order to avoid being in the situation of feeling obligated to report it, which they report as placing themselves at risk. A qualitative research study approach would allow for a more in-depth look at the nuances around teachers' understanding and acknowledgement of GBV in schools.

*Table 2*

Respondents' Recommendations\*

Respondents' recommendations for supporting teachers in stopping SRGBV	Percentage
Raise teachers' awareness through trainings	76%
Create better systems of reporting	22%
Educate students on how to protect themselves	21%
Protect those who report SRGBV	20%
Implement stricter sanctions against perpetrators	19%
Support teachers by improving teaching conditions	16%
Make sure teachers know how to report a violation	12%
Engage the community and parents	7%
Address gender inequality in schools	5%
Do not know	4%

\*Total percentage exceeds more than 100% because respondents could list more than one answer.

Interestingly, the data suggests that teachers are more motivated to report sexual GBV in schools than physical and verbal GBV. While no conclusion can be made based on this survey data alone, it is possible that due to the severity of sexual incidents, teachers will be willing to report it. This is an interesting finding since there is more stigma surrounding reporting sexual GBV as oppose to report physical violence, such as corporal punishment. This stigma is evident from the teachers' protests protecting teachers accused of this form of GBV and the historical lack of enforcement of laws around the violence.

### Summary of Findings

This study finds that teachers report not having knowledge of sexual GBV in schools and even lower number of teachers said that they report the violence to school administration, social services, or law enforcement. Encouragingly, most teachers surveyed did not condone sexual relations between teachers and students. There remains the question of whether respondents believe that love affairs are of a different nature than sexual relationships that involve coercion between teachers and students, and if they do, how are they able to distinguish between them. This is due to the contradictory data of respondents' beliefs of how

teachers should, and do, report love affairs and sexual relationships as well as how, if at all, perpetrators should be punished. While there is no significant difference between how men and women teacher respondents reported sexual GBV, this study finds that women teachers are more likely to hold attitudes that may perpetuate some gender inequalities. Women respondents are more likely than men to blame girls for experiencing sexual assault, and more women teachers supported gender norms within physical labor. This finding is one that would benefit from further exploration. It is difficult to draw conclusions from the limited survey data, but the finding is an important one that can contribute to the ongoing conversation around how women support girls or contribute to the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and GBV itself.

Overall, teachers perceived that they can be change agents but report that they are unable to report sexual GBV largely because it is unsafe to do so and because of the pressures of teacher solidarity. Most respondents recommended that teachers receive more training to combat SRGBV, whereas only a quarter asked for more protection to report the violence. This is yet another contradiction. There are no strong significant factors that explain teacher respondents' reporting behaviors. I discuss potential implications of these findings in the following section.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate several significant points. First, this study finds evidence, as does previous research (Devers et al., 2012; Leach et al., 2014), that there is an underreporting of sexual GBV in schools at a global scale but documented in the region as well. Teachers who have experienced or witnessed forms of sexual GBV in schools do not always report the violation. Other national and regional surveys demonstrate a higher prevalence of all forms of violence (Devers et al., 2012; MESS, 2012). However, in this modest sample of only two provinces in the country, there was a higher reporting of sexual GBV than found in the two most recent CNVPE annual reports. This highlights the virtual absence of effective reporting mechanisms for this type of violence. If the government of Burkina Faso hopes to track such violence with enough accuracy to assess a significant drop in prevalence, then data collection and monitoring systems, along with clear procedures of enforcement of laws need to be put into place within schools.

However, it will be very difficult to get accurate data, even with an official reporting system, if teachers are not able or willing to report known incidences of sexual GBV in schools. Most survey respondents believe that teachers can change the culture of sexual GBV and protect students. This finding is encouraging, albeit curious, since the respondents also did not demonstrate initiative to gain more protection and support to actively combat the violence. This further underscores the importance of the role of the MENA and the national unions in working with teachers to empower them to act as change agents. Perhaps starting with following the recommendation made by 76% of teacher respondents who ask for awareness training for teachers, the MENA can start to work more directly with teachers, including principals. This will require working closely with school principals and teachers, as they are the most likely to learn about occurrence of sexual GBV. This study finds that principals do not have any more knowledge on how to deal with SRGBV than the classroom teachers.

This study also adds to the understanding of teachers' multifarious attitudes of sexual and love relationships between teachers and students. A high majority of teachers do think there is a problem with teachers having sex with students and that teachers should be held accountable for such actions, yet they balk at job dismissal over a love relationship. This

indicates that respondents may differentiate between sex and love relationships and highlights the complex nature of intimate sexual relationships. Additional qualitative research to explore these nuances in Burkina Faso can help develop further understanding of how school communities regard differences, if at all, in sexual relationships to strengthen policies and training programs.

The hierarchy and reproduction of the gender norms in Burkina Faso contribute to the cycle of SRGBV. Evidence of teachers' abilities or willingness to acknowledge and problematize the practiced forms of dominant masculinity and passive femininity, the roots of this violence, is absent from the survey findings. In fact, rather than women respondents speaking against norms that produce gender inequality, while there is no statistically significant difference between men and women respondents, the survey findings demonstrate women teachers as perpetuating gender myths, at times more so than men. This survey found that a higher percentage of women teachers were quicker to blame girls than the male respondents, when sexually violated, of inappropriate behavior. The limitations of this sample do not explore possible informal protections offered by women teachers such as Porter's (2015) study, nor do they capture vulnerabilities experienced by many women teachers as Stromquist et al. (2013) study highlights. Nevertheless, these findings are interesting and demonstrate a need to avoid assumptions that women teachers are natural combatants against SRGBV. Additionally, I recommend policy makers be mindful in developing definitions in future policies that challenge misconceptions. This would demonstrate a serious commitment on part of the government to readdress established gender roles based on ingrained stereotypes of masculine and feminine power dynamics.

Another issue that became evident from this study is the strength of teacher solidarity in dissuading teachers from reporting sexual GBV in schools when the perpetrator is a fellow teacher. According to this study, teachers report this solidarity blocks teachers from being advocates against SRGBV. For teachers to truly be change agents, they need support. To work with teachers as a group, I recommend further exploration of this potential phenomenon for the government to more fully understand necessary ways to address working with the union to successfully enforce laws protecting against GBV. MENA can work more closely with the union to develop clear reporting mechanisms and sanctions, and to develop a partnership when prosecuting individual teachers for acts of violence. The unions can assist in creating a protective environment for teachers to act as change agents when combatting and reporting incidences of sexual GBV in schools.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates a need to support teachers in reporting sexual GBV in schools. Teachers report personal and professional risks due to reporting the violence, as well as the lack of knowledge about appropriate procedures for reporting GBV, but they believe that teachers can be change agents in combatting GBV. This article contributes to the existing studies on sexual GBV by giving a voice to teachers' knowledge and perceptions of the violence. The government of Burkina Faso has an opportunity to pass drafted policies that promote exactly what this study suggests in order to make progress in ending GBV: (1) provide comprehensive mechanisms to implement and enforce policies in schools, and (2) provide clear mechanisms for protecting teachers who are reporting the violence. MENA should coordinate efforts with the NGO community to provide training to teachers with objectives that empower teachers to be change agents as opposed to tools in combating GBV in schools. It will take time and multi-faceted approaches, including addressing unequal



power dynamics, to end all forms of violence, but the government of Burkina Faso has a chance to make a major step in the right direction.

### Limitations

I acknowledge the limitations of this small, opportunistic sample size. A small sample size limits the ability to generalize claims. This sample is not representative of all teachers. Previous national studies had more rigorous study designs including a significantly larger sample size, sampled throughout the country and incorporated individual interviews, focus groups, and administrated surveys. Additionally, the previous studies attempted to capture prevalence rates and included women, students, and other school actors in the studies. This study focuses only on teachers, relying on a self-administrated survey in two regions to provide a glimpse of teachers' understanding and attitudes around responding to sexual GBV in schools. The teacher sample, pulling from a successful and invested group of teachers, lends to this study's research questions by allowing for discussion of the behaviors of motivated teachers surrounding GBV in schools. Thus, it is advantageous to use them for this study, as they are a premier group of educators that is most likely to act as change agents in fighting against GBV.

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