



**“ We never report when boys touch our private parts at school because we shall be punished by our teacher, and I am very scared of telling my parent.”**

**Ujamaa-Africa: Addressing Violence against Girls through a school based intervention in informal settlements in Nairobi.**



Globally, one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2013). In Kenya, women and girls also experience high rates of physical, sexual and psychological violence. Between 2015 – 18, Ujamaa Africa implemented a project to train girls on self-defence and boys on addressing male attitudes and behaviours towards girls in classes 6-8 in informal settlements in Nairobi. This forms part of a multi-pronged intervention to reduce incidences of sexual assault among teenage, school going girls.

The impact of this intervention is being evaluated through a randomised control trial conducted by Stanford University, USA and the Kenyan-based African Institute of Health and Development (AIHD). Baseline findings from this study reveal that approximately 11% of girls reported being raped, with the majority of these cases being perpetrated by a boyfriend. This intervention brief outlines the scale of the problem, the intervention to address violence against girls and implications for Kenyan based government policy makers, civil society and donors.

### Background

Ujamaa Africa (Ujamaa) is an international non governmental organization (NGO) working in Kenya and Malawi since 2007 and 2014 respectively, whose mission is to prevent violence against women and children. It is an implementing partner for the US based No means No Impower Curriculum.

Between 2011-2013 Ujamaa and Stanford University collaborated to evaluate Ujamaa's girls' empowerment and boy's transformation intervention. In 2015 Ujamaa and Stanford University received a grant from the UK Aid funded *What Works* programme to conduct a randomised control trial of their girls and boys interventions.

### The Issue

Violence against women and girls is a global health issue resulting in devastating and lifelong negative effects on the growth, development and health of survivors (Sinclair et. al 2013). It is particularly prevalent among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa following high levels of exposure to specific risk factors (USAID, 2003). Alarming, about 40% of sexually active girls in secondary schools in Kenya, reported their first sexual encounter as either through the use of force or being coerced into having sex (AMREF, 1994). In the Kenya Domestic Household Survey (KDHS) 2014, 38% of women aged 15-49 are reported to have experienced physical violence, and 14% reported having experienced sexual violence.

According to one other study, the primary perpetrators of sexual violence among school girls are boyfriends followed by relatives, neighbours, stranger/gang and teacher or pastor (Sinclair et. al 2013). This leaves many adolescent girls at risk of being assaulted, yet most interventions are geared towards providing services for victims and much less on intervening to prevent rape from occurring.

However growing evidence indicates that violence against women and girls is indeed preventable and should be prioritised.

### The Intervention

Ujamaa implements the *What Works* funded intervention in the five major informal urban settlements of Nairobi County.



Urban Settlement in Nairobi

Its intervention uses a two pronged approach, working through experienced local instructors who train pupils in primary and secondary schools through 6 weekly sessions. The first prong is the **Girls' Empowerment and Self Defense (GESD)** program, which includes 12 hours of interactive empowerment instruction for girls and young women. All female participants gain a minimum of 6 hours of hands on practice mastering key skills over the course of the six-week program in



schools.

**Ujamaa instructors demonstrating how to use physical skills to get away from a sexual assault situation.**

The second prong of the intervention explores an important yet widely neglected entry point into the problem of violence against women and girls: **male attitudes and behaviors towards girls and women.** Consequently, through a 12 hour training programme, it supports boys to reflect on gender stereotypes, enabling them to build their confidence and skills particularly around

respecting women and girls. They also learn how to intervene if they see a girl being assaulted.

### Research Methodology

In 2016, Stanford University, USA together with Kenyan based research partner the African Institute for Health and Development (AIHD) began a randomised control trial of Ujamaa's intervention. This was a mixed methods study that employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

- ✓ The study was implemented in 110 government and private schools in 5 informal urban settlement areas of Nairobi.
- ✓ Surveys were completed by boys and girls in class 6.
- ✓ Schools were randomized to intervention or active-control on the basis of several characteristics.
- ✓ There were three time points i.e. baseline (2016), midline (2017) and endline (2018).
- ✓ Quantitative data was collected in the form of surveys, records of enrolment and attendance list for every training session.
- ✓ Qualitative data was collected from a cohort of 11 boys and 20 girls through interviews and focus group discussions with participants.

### Expected Intervention outcomes

- Reduction in annual incidence of sexual assault.
- Additional Outcomes for girls: improved generalized self efficacy, higher self esteem, more gender equitable attitudes and beliefs, improved mental health and lower depression.
- Additional Outcomes for boys: Reduced physical violence and corporal punishment, intervening to prevent gender based violence, self-efficacy, self esteem.
- For both girls and boys: Improved school attendance and standardized test scores.

## Findings

### Key Findings from the Baseline survey indicate:

1. **High prevalence of sexual assault among girls aged between 12-13 years.**
2. **Low disclosure rates of sexual assault among girls.**
3. **High perpetration of sexual assault rates by boyfriends**

Of the 4,131 girls surveyed in 110 schools in Class 6, about one in five girls (21%) reported having a boyfriend at some point in the prior year. **Out of every 100 girls, about 11 reported experiencing at least one rape in the prior 12 months (i.e. annual incidence rate of 11%).** Many other studies have reported life-time prevalence; in contrast the 11% in this study reports the percentage of girls raped in just the immediately preceding 12 months. Furthermore the 11% reported here is rape specifically; many other studies report on “sexual assault” which is a broader term that includes many different events, such as unwelcome touching of a sexual nature. The girls in this study are young (most are between 11 to 13 years old) so the rate of rape means these girls are at very high risk. Examples of high-risk situations, as described by the girls, included:

“Girls face rape when sent to the shops at night and some as they come from school.”

“Girls are lied to; they are bought foodstuff and are taken to places where they sleep with these men”.

Despite reports of concern about rape by strangers, **the majority of the rapes were reported to be perpetrated by a boyfriend or partner. There were some girls who reported being raped more than 30 times in the prior 12 months. Girls report that disclosing sexual assault often leads to victim blaming or punishments.**

While it is true that some locations experience higher rates of assaults, **every school had a girl who reported at least one experience of sexual violence.** One interesting observation: **schools that have a gender imbalance in the upper classes, so where there are more boys in these classes as compared to girls, experience higher rates of violence:** Findings from the endline study which will be available in 2019 will shed further light on the reasons for this.

## Conclusion

- This study reveals that sexual assault is a widespread problem among upper primary school going children within informal urban settlement areas of Nairobi.
- With the majority of perpetrators being boyfriends and male partners; there is need for researchers, practitioners and policy decision makers to jointly voice and advocate for preventive approaches to empower girls and the community at large to prevent sexual assault before it occurs.
- This is especially important because the extensive damage caused by sexual assault to the girls may have health and social implications later in the lifecycle, that could have been prevented early on.
- The schools setting forms a good entry point for implementation of preventive strategies at an early stage.

## Implications

Unless action is urgently taken to prevent sexual assault among girls, schools in informal urban settlements run a risk of experiencing high levels of dropouts resulting from teen pregnancy and other related complications as a truncated consequence of rape. Kenya as a country also faces the challenge of bringing up a generation of unhealthy and psychologically damaged girls affecting its overall prospects of growth and development in future.

- There is need for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) to establish measures of both preventing and responding to cases of sexual assault of school going girls.
- Such measures could include proven effective prevention and response

measures, such as on-site school counsellors in public schools. Community based and Non-governmental Organizations should be encouraged to create and evaluate innovative, sustainable and scalable preventive interventions in fighting violence against girls.

- Community based and Non-governmental Organizations can partner with relevant ministries to scale up effective interventions in upper primary and secondary schools in Kenya.

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