Violence against learners on the rise – survey

By Jackson Kitara

Despite the banning of corporal punishment in schools, violence against young people in secondary schools and technical, vocational education training (TVET) institutions is on the rise, a new survey has revealed.

The just-released *National Violence Against Children* baseline survey report of June 2025 conducted by the education ministry under Uganda Secondary Education and Expansion Project (USEEP) indicated that whereas boys experienced physical violence most, for girls it was sexual violence.

GENDER ASPECTS

"From a gender perspective, the boys in the secondary schools and TVET institutions experienced more of the physical violence, while the girls in both institutions were more affected by sexual violence," the report stated.

The survey was funded by World Bank with support from Luigi Giussani Foundation and Science Teaching and Innovation Africa, a private organisation. Under the survey, a total of 162 institutions were sampled. The secondary school students interviewed were 3,553 -- 1,777 male and 1,776 female.



Sarah Kalembe, head of USEEP at the education ministry

The TVET students interviewed were 499; 227 male (45%) and 272 (55%) female. The survey findings were released on Friday at Bomah Hotel in Palabek Ogili sub-county, Lamwo district. In attendance were education officers of Lamwo, Pader, Gulu city and Nwoya districts and headteachers of selected secondary schools.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

According to the survey, out of the 3,553 female students sampled, 43% (1,034) said they had experienced sexual violence, followed by economic violence at (31%) 750.

The others were emotional / psychological violence at 29% 716 and physical violence at 28% (709).

"The boys were more likely to suffer from physical violence, mentioned by 1,487 (61%), followed by economic violence; 759 (31%), emotional/ psychological violence; 486 (20%) and child labour; 422 (17%). Sexual violence was lowest for the boys reported by 155 (96%) of the student respondents," the report stated.

TVET

For the TVET students (n=499), the girls were more affected by peer-to-peer violence; 162 (44%) and sexual violence 155 (42%) compared to emotional 139 (38%) and economic violence 80 (22%). Physical violence was found to be lower for the girls; 71 (19%).

The emotional and economic forms of violence for the girls in TVET was largely caused by fellow learners that exhibited economic competitiveness that influenced their unaffordable life style and involvement in intimate relationships that are in most cases not safe and sustainable. In comparison, the secondary school female students had almost an equal share of sexual violence reported by (43%) of the secondary school students, and 42% of the TVET students.

For the boys in a TVET institution, they were most affected by physical violence reported by 177 (48%), followed by economic violence 98 (27%), peer-to-peer violence 92 (25%) and emotional violence 70 (19%). In comparison however, the boys in secondary schools were more likely to experience physical violence compared to those in TVET Institutions. The latter is deemed more mature and resilience to physical and economic hardships compared to the boys in secondary schools

STAKEHOLDERS SPEAK

Sarah Kalembe, the head of USEEP at the ministry of education, called for an end to bullying in schools.

"Schools need to strengthen the school-based violence prevention framework by enforcing reporting, tracking, referral and response guidelines in all secondary and TVET institutions," she said.

Kalembe said schools, especially those that can afford closed circuit television cameras, should strengthen their surveillance by installing them in classrooms, dormitories and common violence prone zones within schools.

She said curbing violence both at schools and in the community required socio-ecological model which aims to address the complex factors that contribute to violence in schools.

Barnabas Langoya, the Lamwo district education officer, said violence against children is still high in schools, despite the banning of corporal punishment.

He noted that many learners are being defiled and beaten at schools, adding that most of the incidents are not reported.

Langoya added that some of the violence is perpetrated by parents, who deny their children education and send them to work in quarries, markets and farms.

Margaret Alanyo, the Pader district education officer, said teachers have taken up both the academic and social life of nurturing learners due to the absence of parents.

She said parents no longer care about their children as many send them to school without scholastic materials and other basic needs.

"Some of these students go for night discos and start relationships with older men and women to get basics," Alanyo said.

Philip Oryema, Nwoya district education officer, attributed some of the violence to broken homes and domestic violence. Tom Richard Odyeny, the headteacher Paloga Seed secondary SchooL, said most parents have abandoned their role of raising children.