



Effects Of Sexual Gender-Based Violence On Girl's Education. A Case Study of 10 Public Primary Schools in Malawi.

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Abstract

Introduction: The study investigated the effects of sexual gender-based violence on girls' education in ten public primary schools of Malawi within Blantyre Urban.

Methodology: A cross-sectional field survey with a purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to collect qualitative data from 300 participants through semi-structured interviews. Ethical issues were considered, and the researcher got approval from Blantyre Council, Queens Elizabeth. Consent forms were administered before data collection. Data from learners below 18 years old were collected after getting formal written consent from their parents and school authorities.

Data analysis: Thematic data analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The data was grouped according to themes. This was done in an Excel Qualitative Data Matrix which included the respondents' direct responses, which were then mapped into response summaries and subsequent interpretations. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and percentages/frequencies calculations and presented as tables and graphs.

Study findings and discussions of the results: The study findings indicated that many girls in public primary schools are survivors of SGBV because of poverty, poor social gender norms, community ignorance, and negative attitudes towards girl's education. Equally, the results of the study indicated that male teachers, male students, intimate partners, and strangers are the main perpetrators of SGBV against girls. Furthermore, results revealed that SGBV influences many girls in primary school to drop out of school, be forced into marriage, get unwanted pregnancies, and have poor performance

in class. In addition, the study findings indicated that capacity building, the inclusion of gender topics in primary school syllabus, and sensitization meetings against all forms of GBV are the best primary preventive strategies against SGBV that affect girls' education in public primary schools.

Keywords: Effects of sexual Gender Based Violence, Girl's education, Malawi Public Primary School.

I. INTRODUCTION

Malawi is one of the countries where gender-based violence against women and girls is very high. Many adolescent girls in both primary and secondary schools are continually experiencing SGBV because of gender stereotypes and gender identity emanating from poor social norms and harmful cultural practices. Despite the country's several programs and initiatives to reduce and eliminate sexual abuse against girls, cases continue numbering and affecting more innocent girls in primary and secondary schools. Many studies, including a survey conducted by Badri, Mohaidat & Mourad (2014), exposed that tackling SGBV towards girls' education in primary schools is not an uneasy road because many societies are dumbfounded and engulfed with confusing statements about what constitutes SGBV against girls in public primary schools. Because of that, the concept of SGBV against girls in schools is considered too abstract and complex (Samati, 2021; Badri, 2014; Bisika, Ntata & Konyani, 2009).

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many studies conducted in public primary schools in Malawi revealed that girls face different forms of gender-based violence. A survey conducted by Samati (2021) showed that 70% of girls in



primary school experience SGBV perpetrated by their fellow male students, teachers, vendors, and opinion leaders in the community. The survey conducted in Malawi by the UNICEF (2014& 2020) found that two in five girls experience sexual violence before attaining legal age. Many empirical studies conducted in Malawi, including study by Bisika, Ntata, and Konyani (2009), revealed that girls in primary school experience multiple forms of SGBV because of poor social norms and harmful cultural beliefs and practices. Almost all the empirical studies of gender and human rights conducted in Malawi established that many girls in primary and secondary schools face different forms of GBV, especially sexual abuse. However, few researches have been conducted in Blantyre Urban public primary schools to discover the major effects of SGBV on girls' education. Therefore, the study in this paper considers these arguments and investigates the effects of SGBV on girls' education in ten public primary schools in Blantyre Urban.

1.2. Significance of the study

The study results will help the government and other developmental partners to develop unsurpassed strategies and programs to help end SGBV against girl children in public primary schools. In the same vein, the findings will compel the government to develop and enforce laws and policies that will help to deal with major effects of SGBV that affect girls' education in public primary schools.

1.3. Objective of the study

The overall objective of the study was to investigate the effects of SGBV on girls' education in public primary schools.

1.3.1. Specific objectives

The primary specific objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the effects of SGBV on girl's education
2. To determine perpetrators of SGBV on girl's education
3. To investigate the major causes of SGBV on girl's education
4. To recommend preventive strategies against SGBV that affect girls' education.

1.4. Research questions of the study

The following main questions were used during the administration and collection of data:

1. What are the effects of SGBV on girls' education?

2. Who are the perpetrators of SGBV in girls' education?
3. What are the major causes of SGBV that affect girls' education?
4. Are there any strategies and programs that can be used to address the effects of SGBV on girls' education?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Global overview of sexual gender-based violence against girls

Many girls worldwide are vulnerable to all forms of GBV, especially sexual abuse. Several girls in primary schools who face different forms of abuse develop mental health problems and physical problems that, more often than not, affect their academic performance. 1 out of 2 children aged 2 to 17 years' experiencesexual violence every year perpetrated by men and women, the majority being men and boys. Many reports revealed that 120 million girls worldwide are estimated to be victims of SGBV before reaching 20 years old. According to the report, the prevalence of violence against children tends to be higher among children from low-income households who, most of the time, fail to have basic needs for their lives; and even fail to afford the required legal fees whenever they are sexually or physically abused (Meghanathan& Hatcher, 2021; UNICEF, 2014& 2020; WHO Report, 2020).

2.2. Sexual gender-based violence against girls in Malawi

Statistics presented in Malawi indicated that 1 in 5 girls experiences SGBV before 18 years, representing a 74.4% prevalence rate. Out of these statistics, 1 in 3 girls are the survivors of forced or coerced sex. And over one-half of adolescent girls aged 13 to 14 years old in Malawi experience all forms of violence in their lifetime (NSO, 2015-2016; Bisika, Ntata & Konyani 2009). Studies conducted in Malawi by (the NSO, 2015-2016; UNICEF et al, 2015) discovered that 45% of girls in Malawi aged 15-19 experienced physical violence or SGBV. The same studies revealed that globally, Malawi has the highest rate of child marriage, with 50% of girls married at 18 years and 12% married at 15 years.

2.2. Sexual abuse and girls' education in Malawi

SGBV against girls in primary schools is a global problem, and Malawi is no exception. Many girls in Malawi drop out of school because of forced and early marriage. This increases illiteracy levels and dependency syndrome among girls and young



women, eventually leading most of them to be victims of different types of violence. Furthermore, gender disparities, annoying jokes by male students, and unequal distribution of tasks between male and female students affect the classroom attendance rate of many girls in primary schools. In Malawi, many girls in public primary schools fail to continue pursuing education because of a lack of good education facilities such as toilets, girl's hostels, and changing rooms for girls when they are in menstruation period (World Bank Group Gender Assessment in Malawi Report, 2022; Samati, 2021; Bisika, Ntata& Konyani, 2009).

2.3. Effects of SGBV against girls in public primary schools

Many girls who experience sexual abuse drop out of school, have developmental disorders, and perform very poorly in class. Furthermore, many girls who are survivors of SGBV get unwanted pregnant, forced marriage, and develop underlying health problems like fistula, and some serious injuries (Samati, 2021; WHO, 2020; NSO, 2015-2016; Bisika, Ntata&Konyani, 2009).

2.4. Perpetrators of SGBV on girl's education

Globally, 1 in 3 girls ranging from 15 to 19 are survivors of all forms of GBV, especially sexual abuse perpetrated by intimate partners and husbands (UNICEF, 2014). The study conducted in Chikwawa District by Samanti (2021) revealed that 12% of girls in public primary schools are forced to have sex with experienced men and boys. According to the studies conducted by Bisika& Konyani (2014), adolescent girls in primary schools experience sexual abuse as they go and coming from school perpetrated by male teachers, vendors, fellow students, and strangers.

2.5. The major causes of SGBV on girl's education

Several girls in public primary schools are forced or excluded from some essential activities and subjects they don't like because of gender disparities. Also, many girls in public primary schools, especially in rural areas, are forced to do chores at school and teachers' houses while boys are learning. In the same vein, sexual favors and lack of mentor-ship make many girls in public primary schools survivors of all forms of GBV, especially sexual abuse. In addition, some studies revealed that the design of girls' school uniforms contributes to increasing sexual abuse against girls in primary schools. Lastly, many girls attending public primary schools are becoming victims of sexual violence due

to unequal distribution of resources, dependency syndrome, poor social norms in society, poverty, and long school holidays due to COVID-19 (Samati et al., 2021).

2.6. Recommended strategies to address SGBV in girl's education

Enhancing programs that focus on poverty reduction, strengthening relationships, promotion of mental health services, perpetrator identification and referrals, building economic and social assets for girls, increasing programs that enhance men's and boy's engagement to promote healthier gender norms, and working with the community to create a safer environment for girls, increase sensitization meetings targeting male teachers, vendors, male students and service providers are the best strategies to prevent SGBV that affect girls education (Samati, 2021; Bisika, Ntata& Konyani, 2009).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The researcher used an explanatory research design where a qualitative research method was used during data collection, and the researcher conducted interviews and focus group discussion meetings with key study respondents.

3.2. Target Population

The target populations in this study were teachers, school management committees, PTA members, learners in standards 7 and 8, parents and guardians, chiefs, police working in a victim support unit, child protection officers, health workers working at One Stop Centre and Youth Friendly Services, non-governmental organizations that are working directly with learners in primary schools.

3.3. Sample size

The researcher collected data from 300 participants, and 30 questionnaires were administered to every category using a sampling size developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

3.4. Sampling techniques

The researcher used purposive non-probability sampling techniques because this helped the researcher to find those individuals, groups, or documents that best represented the issue studied. Equally, this sampling technique helped the researcher to capture necessary and specific information for the study.



3.5. Data Collection Instrument

The researcher collected data using a questionnaire comprising closed-ended and open-ended questions. Furthermore, the researcher used a voice recorder to capture responses during focus group discussions with the respondents.

3.6. Data collection procedure

A cross-sectional field survey with a purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to collect qualitative data through personal observations, focus groups, and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The researcher self-administered questionnaires to all key respondents of the study.

3.7. Data analysis

Thematic data analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The data was grouped according to themes. This was done in an Excel Qualitative Data Matrix, which included the respondents' direct responses, which were then mapped into response summaries and subsequent interpretations. The results were analysed using descriptive statistics, calculation of percentages/frequencies, and presented in tables and graphs.

3.8. Study area

The researcher conducted the study in ten public primary schools of Malawi within Blantyre Urban: Mbayani, St James, Kanjedza, Limbe, Kapeni, Namwalimwe, Nyambadwe, Manja, Namiwawa and St Pius Primary School.

3.9. Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues were considered, and the researcher got approval from Blantyre Council, Queens Elizabeth, after assessing the study proposal. Consent forms were administered before data

collection. Data from learners below 18 years old were collected after getting formal written consent from their parents and school authorities.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic information of the respondents of the study

The data analysis in Table 4.1 below indicated that the majority of the respondents were the holders of Malawi School Certificates of Education. The same table shows that many of the study's respondents were males. In terms of marital status, the table indicated that the majority of the participants of the study were married. Furthermore, the data analysis in the table shows that many of the study's respondents had information about SGBV. The correlation of age bracket and SGBV knowledge indicated that many respondents of the study holding PSLCE Level do not have more knowledge and information concerning SGBV than respondents with high qualifications. This means people with less educational background are more likely to be perpetrators or survivors of SGBV due to a lack of information concerning different forms of GBV. The results are similar to the findings of the studies conducted by (UNICEF et al., 2020; NSO 2015-2016; Bisika, Ntata & Konyani, 2009) which indicated that women and young girls with low academic qualifications are more likely to experience different forms of GBV, especially SGBV than those with high academic qualifications. According to the findings of the study, there is a need to enhance programs that promote girl's education. This program will help many young women and girls to acquire important information concerning gender, and human rights.

Table 4.1: Demographic information of the respondents of the study

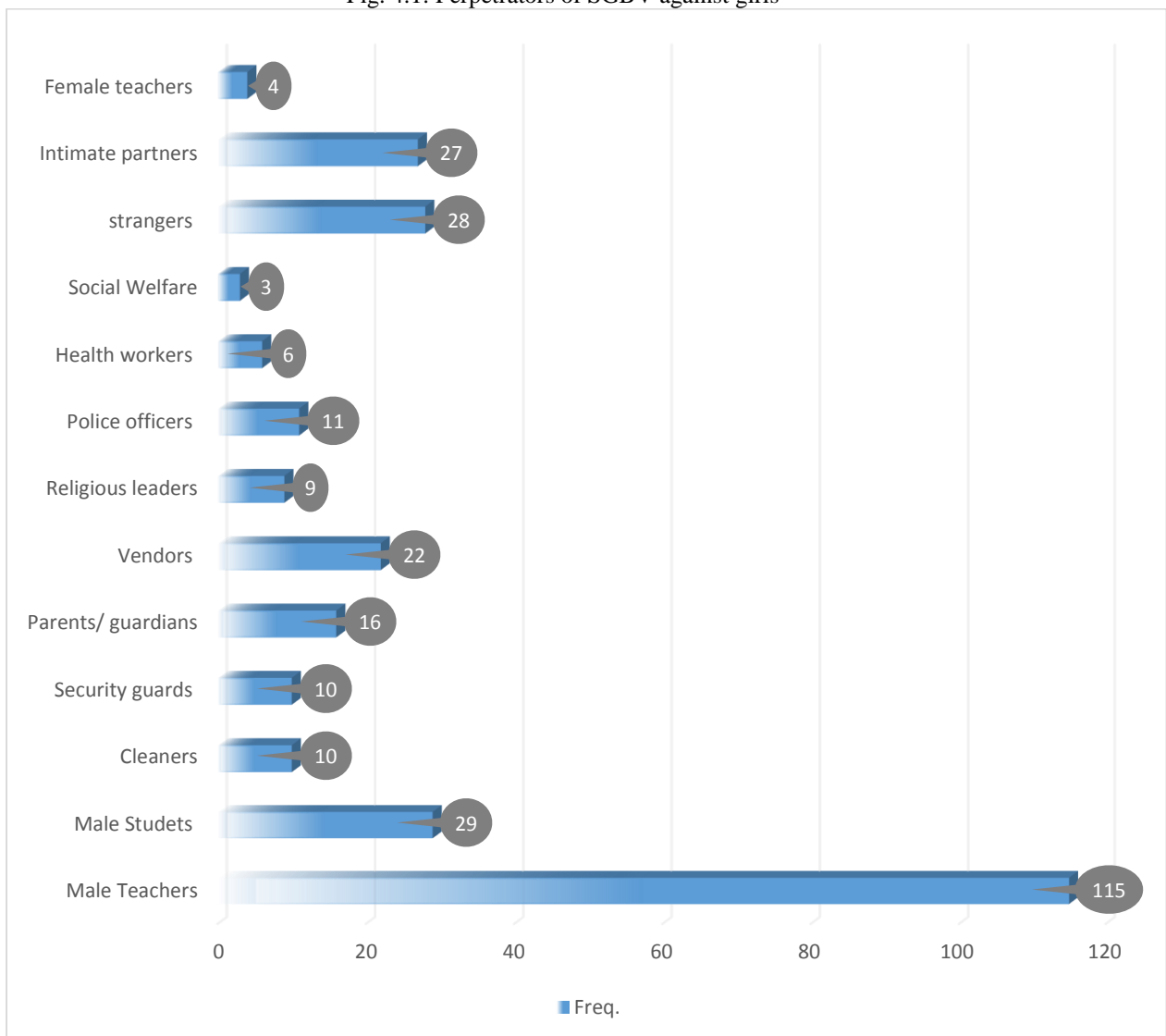
Education level	Age bracket		Gender		Marital Status				Knowledge about GBV	
			M	F	married	Single	divorced	widow	No	Yes
PSLCE	10-19	24	6	18	5	19	0	0	22	2
JCE	20-29	49	13	36	11	35	3	0	31	18
MSCE	30-39	127	89	38	95	20	9	3	7	120
Diploma	40-49	52	43	9	46	3	2	1	0	52
Degree	50-59	38	35	3	29	5	4	0	0	38
Masters and above	60-above	10	9	1	4	2	1	3	0	10
Total		300	195	105	190	84	19	7	60	240



4.2 Perpetrators of SGBV against girls in public primary schools

The data analysis in Fig. 4.1 below indicated that 40% (n=115) male teachers, 10% (n=29) Male students, 10% (n=28) strangers, 9% (n=27) intimate partners, 8% (n=22) vendors, 6% (n=16) parents/ guardians, and 4% (n=11) police officers are perpetrators of SGBV against girls in public primary schools. However, the study indicated that male teachers and male strangers are the most common perpetrators of SGBV against girls. According to the findings, many girls in public primary schools experience SGBV perpetrated by male teachers who are principled to protect and prevent girls from experiencing all forms of violence. Based on the results of the study, programs that enhance girl's protection against abuse should be conducted by targeting teachers and members of the general public including guardians and parents. The results of the study validate the findings of the study conducted by Samati (2021); NSO (2015-2016); Bisika, Ntata and Konyani, (2009) which indicated that teachers, strangers, and guardians are the perpetrators of SGBV against women and girls.

Fig. 4.1: Perpetrators of SGBV against girls



4.3 Effects of Gender-based violence against Girl's Education in public primary schools

The main specific objective of the study was to investigate the effects of SGBV on girls'

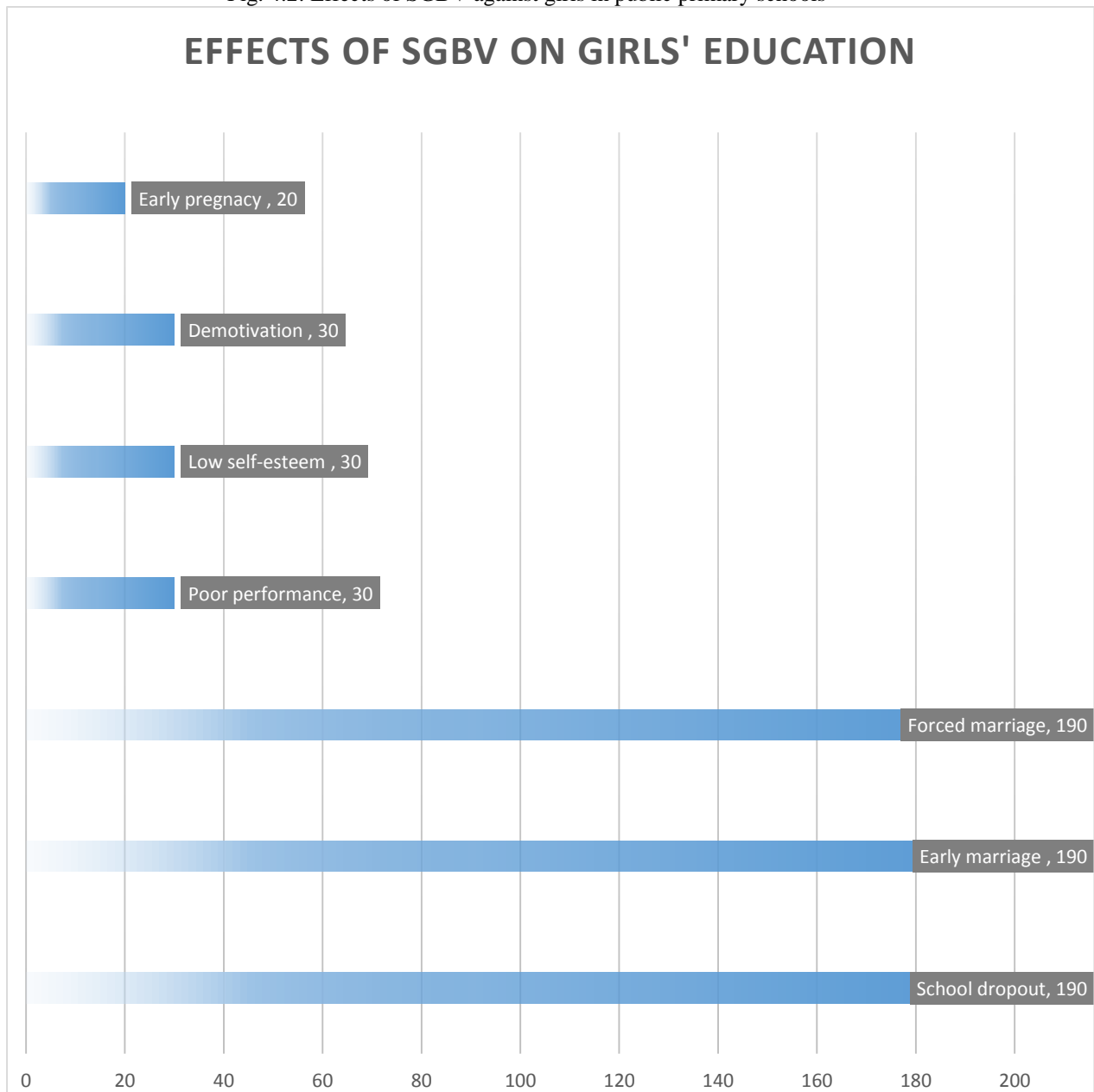
education in public primary schools. The study findings indicated that 28% (n=190) of girls drop out school because of sexual abuse, 28% (n=190) of girls forced marriage, 28% (n=190) girls are



survivors of early marriage, 5% (n=30) of girls performed poor in class, 4% (n=30) of girls develop low self-esteem, 4% (n=30) of girls are demotivated, 3% (n=20) of girls are survivors of early pregnancy due to SGBV mainly perpetrated by men and boys, especially male teachers. The

findings of the study validate study findings conducted in Malawi and other countries like studies by Samati (2021); UNICEF(2020& 2014);Bisika, Ntata& Konyani(2009) which indicated that SGBV forces girls to drop school, get married, and get pregnant at an early stage.

Fig. 4.2: Effects of SGBV against girls in public primary schools



4.4. Contributing factors of SGBV that affect girl's education in public primary schools

The table 4.2. below indicated that many girls in public primary school experience SGBV

because of 50% poverty, 25% poor social gender norms, community's ignorance, and negative attitudes towards girl child education, 9% parent's illiteracy, 8% harmful cultural beliefs and practices,



and 8% peer pressure and male's aggressive behaviour. However, the study found that poverty, and poor social gender norms, ignorance and negative attitudes towards girl child education are the main contributing factors influencing SGBV against girls in public primary schools. Based on the results, there is a need to enhance programs that focuses on girl child education and protection

against all forms of GBV, especially SGBV. The study findings validate studies conducted by (the World Bank, 2022; Samati, 2021; Haffejjee, 2015; NSO, 2015-2016; UNICEF, 2013; Bisika& Konyani et al., 2009) which revealed that many girls in Malawi drop out of school because of harmful cultural practices, and poor social norms, community altitudes, and forced marriage.

Table 4.2: Factors influencing SGBV against girls in Public Primary School

Factors influencing SGBV against girls in public primary schools	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	120	50%
Poor social gender norms, community's ignorance and negative attitudes towards girl's education	60	25%
Parent's illiteracy	20	9%
Harmful cultural beliefs and practices	20	8%
Peer pressure and male's aggressive behavior	20	8%

Source: Fieldwork (Maida, 2023)

4.5. Recommended strategies that can help to prevent SGBV against girls in public primary school

According to the data analysis on the Table 4.3 below, the respondents of the study indicated SGBV against girls in public primary schools can be prevented through the following primary preventive strategies: 30% (n=90) increase capacity building on all forms of GBV against girls targeting male teachers and community members, 30% (n=90)

including topics of gender, human rights in primary school education syllabus, 10% (n=30) promote gender equality, and enforce all gender laws, 10% (n=30) write gender and human rights information in all classrooms and outside classrooms, 10% (n=30) capacity building of parents and guardians on child protection and girl child education, and 10% (n=30) establish gender and human rights committees in all primary schools.

Table 4.3: Strategies against SGBV that affect girl's education

Strategies against SGBV	Freq.	Percentage
Increasing capacity building against SGBV	90	30%
Inclusion of gender and human rights topics in primary school syllabus	90	30%
Promote gender equality, and enforcing gender laws	30	10%
Put gender information in all classrooms	30	10%
Capacity building of parents and guardians on child protection	30	10%
Establish gender and human rights committees in all primary schools	30	10%

Source: Fieldwork (Maida, 2023).

V. DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The study discovered that many girls in public primary schools are survivors of SGBV mainly perpetrated by male teachers, male students, male intimate partners, and strangers. Furthermore, the study indicated that SGBV affects girls' education in different ways such as school dropouts, poor performance in class, underlying health problems, unwanted pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, and physical injuries. Furthermore, the results of the

study indicated that poverty, poor social norms, and negative attitudes towards girl child education are some of the major contributing factors influencing girls in public primary schools to be survivors of SGBV. The findings of the study indicated that capacity building on gender and human rights targeting male teachers, male students, and members of the general public, the inclusion of gender and human rights topics in primary school syllabus, and sensitization meetings are the important strategies that can help to prevent girls in public primary



schools from experiencing SGBV. The results are similar to findings of studies conducted across the world, like studies by (Samati, 2021; UNICEF, 2020& 2014; WHO, 2020&2009; Fanunmoju& Rassol, 2018; NSO 2015-2016; Mwasya, 2015; Bisika, Ntata and Konyani, 2009) which indicated that many girls, especially girls in primary and secondary schools are survivors of different forms of GBV perpetrated by teachers, vendors, parents and strangers.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that the Government of Malawi, through the Ministry of Education, should:

- Develop a clear Education Gender Policy to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence affecting girls' primary school education.
- Develop a policy that will give opportunities for free and quality services for survivors of gender-based violence.
- Work hand in hand with School Management Committees and Parents Teacher's Associations to establish separate committees that will help monitor and spearhead all gender and human rights activities in primary schools.
- Incorporate topics of human rights and gender in primary school syllabus to increase learners' understanding of gender and human rights issues.
- Increase gender and human rights capacity-building programs targeting both male and female learners and teachers in primary schools.
- Increase capacity-building programs targeting male studies as agents for change.

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