

Gender-based Violence in Primary Schools in the Harare and Marondera Districts of Zimbabwe

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KEYWORDS Gender. Violence. Psychological Abuse. Physical Abuse. Sexual Abuse. Child Labour. Culture of Silence. Primary Schooling

ABSTRACT Gender-based violence is violence directed against any person on the basis of gender, including acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or threats of such acts. Although any person is a risk, women and girls are the primary victims of gender-based violence. Informed by womanist theory, this paper reports on a qualitative study of gender-based violence in Zimbabwean primary schools. Participants were twenty girls who had been victims of gender-based violence enrolled in primary schools in the Harare and Marondera districts of Zimbabwe selected by purposeful sampling and a chain referral. Data was gathered by semi-structured interviews and visual tools. Findings provide a comprehensive picture of gender-based violence in primary schools. This is manifested in acts of physical violence, particularly the unsanctioned use of corporal punishment, psychological violence and sexual abuse. School grounds harbour unsafe and poorly supervised areas where violence may occur and reporting routes for incident are ineffective. Perpetrators include teaching and non-teaching staff and peers. An insidious form of gender-based violence is embedded in child labour practices in the school and the community. Gender-based violence damages girls' health, social and psychological development and impedes learning. Further, gender-based violence is perpetuated by a culture of silence informally maintained by victims, teachers, peers and parent and by the school's weak compliance with protective policies.