

“Every Child Should Be Welcome”

School Violence and Bullying Involving
Young People With Disabilities



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Recommended citation:

McCloskey, M. & Meyers, S. (2020). “Every Child Should Be Welcome”: School Violence and Bullying Involving Young People with Disabilities. Final draft of the background paper submitted to UNESCO in November 2020.

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Cover photography by: wavebreakmedia



Acknowledgements

The study was commissioned by the Section of Health and Education, Division of Education for Peace, Inclusion and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It was overseen by the Team on Safe and Healthy Learning Environments who included Christophe Cornu, Parviz Abduvahobov, Yong Feng Liu, and Sylvain Seguy and is used with permission by UNESCO.

The co-authors of the report are Megan McCloskey and Stephen Meyers. Research was conducted by the co-authors with the assistance of student fellows in the Disability Inclusive Development Initiative at the University of Washington, Seattle, United States, including: Bhuri (Tim) Tiasevanakul, Katherine Chamblin, Maya Forte, Maha Khan, and Sarah Spikes.

Support for the study was also provided by focus group facilitators Sabeeha Majid (University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights, South Africa), Sahid Hadi (Islamic University of Indonesia Center for Human Rights Studies, Indonesia), Katherine Chamblin and Sarah Spikes (University of Washington, U.S.), Seth Kaeb and Blake Widmer (Deaf Can!, Jamaica), Shixin Huang (University of Washington, China), and Simon Brown and programme staff with Sightsavers Inclusion Works (Bangladesh and Nigeria).

We are grateful for the following experts and specialists who provided invaluable resources and input over the course of the study through virtual consultations:

Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General on Disability and Accessibility

Ikponwosa Ero, United Nations Independent Expert on Albinism

Luisa Sotomayor, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children

Francisco Quesney, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children

Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, Global Disability Advisor, World Bank Group

Sergio Meresman, Inter-American Institute on Disability Inclusive Development (Uruguay)

Sian Tesni, Senior Advisor for Education, Christian Blind Mission (CBM)

Jackline Olanya Amaguru, Safeguarding Manager, Global Security and Safeguarding Unit, CBM

Julia McGeown, Global Inclusive Education Specialist, Humanity & Inclusion

Mpho Tjope, Founder, #ICanBe (South Africa)/Albinism Advocacy for Access

Mussa Chiwaula, Director General, Southern African Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD)

George Kayange, Director of Programmes, SAFOD

Liesbeth Roolvink, Global Technical Lead, Education Systems, Sightsavers

Purna Kumar Shrestha, Education Lead, VSO International

Lael Mohib, Enabled Children (Afghanistan)

Pashtana Durrani, Learn Afghanistan/Malala Fund Champion

Mohammed Ali Loutfy, Executive Officer, Disabled Peoples International

Mildred Omino, 2020 Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity/Women & Realities of Disability Society (Kenya)

Priscila Rodriguez, Associate Director, Disability Rights International

Risikat Toyin Muhammed, Women Disability Self Reliance Foundation (Nigeria)

Diana Carolina Moreno, Director of Incidents (Directoria de Incidencia), Profamilia (Colombia)

Monica Cortes, Executive Director, Asdown Colombia

Edith Betty Roncancio Morales, Director, Liga Colombiana de Autismo (LICA)

Jean Elphick, Independent consultant (formerly with Afrika Tikkun)

David Rodrigues University of Lisbon, National Counselor of Special Education, President of the Pro Inclusion Association (Portugal)

Stacey Blackman, University of West Indies – Cave Hill Campus (Barbados)

Anjali Forber-Pratt, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University

Therese Tchombe, Professor Emeritus & Honorary Dean, UNESCO Chair for Special Educational Needs, University of Buea (Cameroon)

Innocentia Mgijima, University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights, Disability Unit

Rami Benbenishty, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Ron Avi Astor, University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA)

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Executive Summary

An estimated 15 percent of the world's population, or one billion people, are living with a disability (World Bank, 2011). While there is no reliable global data on the number of children living with disabilities, prevalence estimates suggest it is well over 150 million, or 1 out of every 20 persons under the age of 18 (WHO, 2011; UN DESA, 2019). Children and young people with disabilities tend to be among the most marginalized people in the world (UNESCO, 2020) and are nearly four times more likely to experience violence at some point in their lives than their peers (Jones, et al., 2012; Hughes, et al., 2012). The reasons for this heightened risk are complex and include social stigma and discrimination, negative traditional beliefs and ignorance about disability within communities, lack of social support for caregivers, including parents, and increased vulnerability caused by the need for increased care, among other factors (Jones, et al., 2012). In schools and other learning settings, social stigma and negative attitudes toward learners with disabilities can make children and young people with disabilities more vulnerable to violence, interfering with their ability to exercise their right to an education and promoting absenteeism and dropouts, with lifelong social, economic, and health consequences.

In order to inform the development of policies and programmes to prevent school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities and improve their access to safe, welcoming and nurturing learning environments, UNESCO commissioned the present literature review. The purpose of this review is to describe the state of research regarding school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities, assess how factors like gender, age, and learning setting intersect with disability to increase risks of victimization, and review what is known about the effectiveness of interventions to prevent school violence and bullying involving learners with disabilities.

"It was probably in my secondary school. There was a boy who said all the terrible things to me. There was one sentence that I remembered very well: "You are already like this. Why don't you kill yourself?" You can't imagine a boy would say something like this! I can never forget it."

(Zhijing, China, 22 years old,
female, visual disability)

Globally, almost one in three students has been bullied at school and more than one in three has been involved in a physical fight with another student (UNESCO, 2019). Rates of school violence and bullying victimization are estimated to be substantially higher for children and young people with disabilities and other students who are perceived to be different in some way (Ibid.). An unsafe learning environment reduces the quality of education a child receives, can promote absenteeism or encourage dropouts, and may lead to lifelong mental health challenges and increased vulnerability to violence.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right of every person with a disability to the full enjoyment of all human rights (Art. 7), including the right to an inclusive education (Art. 24), and the right to live a life free from violence (Art. 16). The Convention on the Rights of the Child does the same, mandating States Parties ensure each child has whatever protection and care is necessary to protect her/his well-being (Arts. 2, 19, 23, and 28). For an education system to be inclusive, it must welcome and support all students and provide them with the opportunity to learn and grow whatever their abilities or requirements (UNCRPD, Art. 24 and General Comment No. 4, 2016).

This report is based on a rapid review of the literature on school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities. It adopts an intersectional lens and analyses the ways in which socio-demographic and environmental factors such as gender, age, family disadvantage, disability type, and learning setting intersect and affect vulnerability to violence. Recognizing that students with disabilities, like other students, may experience school violence and bullying in multiple and complex ways, including as victims, and perpetrators of or witnesses to school violence and bullying, or some combination of all three, the review included literature that examined bullying involvement of learners with disabilities broadly.

In addition to the literature review, the findings are informed by consultations with stakeholders including students and former students with disabilities (over the age of 18), representatives of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and experts on disability inclusion, inclusive education and child protection within the United Nations and in non-governmental organizations around the world.

The consultations included focus groups with young people with disabilities who were students themselves or recent graduates and shared their experiences of bullying as victims and witnesses and provided input into the recommendations at the conclusion of this report. The consultations followed an ethical protocol adapted from Ethical and Safety Guidelines for Research on Gender-Based Violence published by Partners for Prevention.¹

Box 1:

Understanding Disability

The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognizes that “disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNGA, 2006). The CRPD further recognizes that persons with disabilities are not a uniform group but rather “include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Ibid).

¹The Partners for Prevention protocol may be found here:

http://www.partners4prevention.org/sites/default/files/ethical_and_safety_guidelines_for_research_with_men_final.pdf.

Key findings

Prevalence of school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities

Prevalence overall

Findings of the prevalence of school violence and bullying experienced by children and young people with disabilities vary substantially depending on research designs. Students with disabilities are diverse and findings regarding prevalence show differences that depend in part on how disability is defined for purposes of the respective study and which students with disabilities are included. However, in each study reviewed for this report the **students with disabilities included in the study were as or more likely than their non-disabled peers to be victims of school violence and bullying**, and in some cases significantly so. **This was true for every level of schooling**, from pre-primary to primary, secondary and higher education. For example:

- Pre-primary aged children (three to six years old) with special educational needs in one study in Finland were more than twice as likely to be victims of bullying and four times as likely to be both bullies and victims as their non-disabled peers (Repo & Sajaniemi, 2014; see also Son, et al., 2014, finding in a study in the United States involving more than 1,000 pre-school aged children with disabilities that between one-quarter and one-third of the participants had experienced some form of peer victimization at school and many had experienced multiple types of peer abuse).
- Primary school children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in South Korea were more than four times as likely to be victims of bullying as their peers without disabilities

(Hwang et al., 2018), and in Uganda, girls and boys with disabilities in primary school were two to four times as likely to experience sexual violence at the hands of male peers as non-disabled students (Devries, et al., 2014).

- In a national sample of bullying among primary and secondary school students in the United States, 25%² of primary students with disabilities had experienced bullying, compared to just 15% of their nondisabled peers, while at the secondary level 34% of students with disabilities were victimized by bullying compared with just 28% of their peers (Blake et al., 2012). In rural schools, the ratios were significantly higher with fifth grade boys and girls with disabilities between two and nearly four times more likely to be victims of bullying than their peers without disabilities (Farmer et al., 2012).
- Similarly, in a large-scale study involving more than 55,000 primary and secondary students across 11 countries in Europe, students with disabilities reported higher rates of peer victimization in every country; in some cases the rates of victimization were almost twice as high (Sentenac, et al., 2012).
- More than two-thirds of secondary students with intellectual disabilities in Taiwan had experienced peer victimization within the previous semester, compared with estimates of just 25% to 50% among non-disabled students (Chiu, et al., 2017).
- In higher education, national studies of dating violence among university students in the United States have found that young women with disabilities are twice as likely as other

² Throughout this report percentages are expressed as round numbers for ease of reference, with the exception of where differences are small and rounding would distort the data as reported.

female university students to be sexually assaulted or experience intimate partner violence (Cantor, et al., 2020; Scherer, et al., 2016). University students in South Africa, China, Indonesia and the United States consulted for this study reported multiple instances of bullying on their respective campuses, from peers and faculty questioning their ability to keep up to refusals to permit or approve necessary accommodations and exclusion from social activities.

Perpetrators and perpetrator-victims

Students with disabilities are involved in school violence and bullying not only as victims but also as perpetrators, perpetrator-victims, and bystanders. While estimates of the prevalence of bullying perpetration among students with disabilities vary depending on the source of information (self-reports or parent reports), school settings, and research designs, data suggests that **students with disabilities are over-represented among perpetrator-victims and are no more likely to be aggressors** than their non-disabled peers in the absence of peer victimization. Students with disabilities are also more likely to report that **avoidance responses such as walking away and support-seeking behavior, including telling an adult, were ineffective** at reducing violence or bullying.

- In a systematic review of literature assessing prevalence rates of bullying perpetration and victimization among school-aged youth with intellectual disabilities, Maiano, et al. (2016) found a mean prevalence rate of bullying perpetration by students with disabilities of 15% but a combined perpetration-victimization rate of more than 25%.
- Farmer et al. (2012) found that American fifth grade boys with disabilities were three times and fifth grade girls with disabilities nearly five times more likely to be perpetrators and victims of bullying than boys and girls without

disabilities but were no more likely to be a bully absent previous victimization.

- In a study of responses to bullying involving more than three thousand students between grades 5 and 12 in the U.S., all of whom had self-reported bullying victimization, students in special education were more likely than students in general education to report having responded by hitting their aggressor, among other possible responses (Hartley, 2017). The students in special education were also more likely to report that after trying avoidance responses, such as walking away, support-seeking behaviors, including telling an adult, and aggressive responses to bullying, such as hitting back, “things got worse” afterward (Ibid.).

Bystanders

Very few studies focus on students with disabilities as bystanders or witnesses to bullying but what data there is suggests that **learners with disabilities may be overrepresented among witnesses to bullying as assistants, defenders, and bystanders**, and that **witnessing bullying is highly stressful** for students with disabilities and is **correlated with an increased risk of victimization**.

- A study assessing risk factors associated with bullying behavior in a sample of more than 10,000 students in primary and secondary school in the U.S. found that having a disability was associated with increased risk of bullying victimization overall, but also assisting behaviors (predominantly among primary students) and defending behaviors (predominantly among secondary students) (Malecki, et al., 2020).
- A small-scale, qualitative study on the impact of transition from a segregated school to a mainstream setting on 11 to 14 year-olds with speech, language and communication needs in the U.K. found that students rated “seeing bullying” as their most significant fear by far, much more so than homework, and

that students were uncertain how to respond (Perfitt, 2013).

- Kowalski, et al. (2016) found that among college students with disabilities, being a witness to cyberbullying increased the likelihood of bullying victimization.

Types of violence

While the studies reviewed differed with respect to how they defined and measured categories of school violence and bullying and included few comparative analyses, results reported across separate studies suggest that **students with disabilities are affected by all types of school violence and bullying**, including physical violence, corporal punishment, psychological violence, including verbal and emotional abuse and social exclusion, sexual violence, and cyberbullying. **For all types of violence**, data also suggests students with disabilities are **as or more likely to victimized** than their non-disabled peers. In other words, there is no type of school violence and bullying to which learners with disabilities are less vulnerable than their non-disabled peers.

- A systematic review of literature on bullying victimization of young people between the ages of 5 and 22 with intellectual disabilities found they experienced all forms of bullying examined, with mean prevalence rates of physical (33%), verbal (50%), relational (37%), and cyber (38%) victimization, and higher rates of victimization overall than those commonly found among typically developing young people (Maiano et al., 2016, p. 191).³ Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis of bullying involvement of children and adolescents with and without chronic illness and/or physical or sensory disability concluded that children and adolescents

with chronic illness and/or disability were more likely than their non-disabled peers to be bullied at all, and more likely to be victims of each category of school violence and bullying measured (physical, relational, verbal, and cyber bullying and illness-specific or appearance-related teasing) than their non-disabled peers (Pinquart, 2017; see also Devries, et al., 2018). Children and adolescents whose conditions were visible were the most likely to be bullied (Pinquart, 2017).

Sexual violence/Intimate partner violence

While girls and young women with disabilities are most at risk of sexual violence and dating violence in general and in school settings, **both girls and boys with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled, same-sex peers to be affected by sexual violence**, including sexual harassment, in school settings at the hands of fellow students.

- In a cross-sectional study with a sample of nearly four thousand children between the ages of 11 and 14 in Ugandan primary schools, nearly all (95%) students reported some experiences of violence but girls with disabilities were more likely to report having experienced any violence than their non-disabled female peers and were more than twice as likely to experience sexual violence at the hands of male students (Devries, et al., 2014). Boys with disabilities reported similar levels of most forms of violence as their non-disabled male peers but much higher levels of sexual violence from male students, although the overall prevalence of reported sexual violence among boys was low (Devries, et al., 2014).
- Mitra, Mouradian, & McKenna (2012) found in a study of dating violence among U.S. high school students with and without disabilities

³ Maiano, et al. noted that prevalence rates reported by individual studies differed according to specific study characteristics, particularly the information source(s) (youth self-reports or parental reports), types of measures used, assessment context and school setting, time frame, and bullying frequency criteria used (p. 191).

that boys with disabilities reported dating violence at higher rates (9.1%) than both girls and boys without disabilities (8.8% and 4.5% respectively), although at much lower rates than girls with disabilities (26%).

- In a study involving 17,364 Chilean students between grades five and eight, male students reported higher rates of sexual harassment than female students overall, with school-related experience of disability discrimination as one of the strongest predictors of peer sexual harassment, suggesting that students already marginalized on the basis of disability were more likely to be targets of sexual harassment (Lopez, et al., 2020).
- Among students in higher education, young women with disabilities are much more likely to experience sexual violence than their non-disabled peers (Cantor, et al., 2020; Scherer, et al., 2016).

Teacher violence

Students with disabilities are at disproportionate risk of teacher violence, including corporal punishment, physical restraint, involuntary confinement, emotional violence and neglect. Where learners with disabilities are exposed to teacher violence, it may be with parents' support.

- In the United States, students with disabilities only represent 12% of the student population, but account for 75% of the students that are physically restrained and 58% of those subjected to seclusion or involuntary confinement (Suarez, 2017).
- In a study involving primary school students in Uganda, school staff were more likely to be emotionally abusive and neglectful of both boys and girls with disabilities, and more likely to be physically violent toward girls with disabilities, relative to non-disabled boys and girls (Devries, et al., 2014).
- Schools in the U.S. with higher percentages

of students receiving special education were nearly twice as likely to use corporal punishment than other schools, even when they reported the same number of problem behaviors and disciplinary actions (Han, 2011).

- Stakeholders and researchers have found that parents and teachers may resist policy changes to prevent corporal punishment of learners with disabilities in schools in part because physical punishment is perceived as a permissible mechanism of control and exercise of teacher authority (Njelesani, 2019; UNICEF, 2017).

Cyberbullying

While there are few studies of the involvement of young people with disabilities in cyberbullying, those few suggest that cyberbullying involving learners with disabilities follows patterns similar to other forms of bullying, namely that students with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled peers to experience cyberbullying at all ages, and girls with disabilities may be most vulnerable.

- In three studies comparing the involvement of adolescents with learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and their peers without disabilities in cyberbullying, researchers found that the students with disabilities were more likely to be victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of cyberbullying their peers without disabilities (see, e.g., Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Heiman, et al., 2015; Kowalski & Fedina, 2011).⁴ This was true even though students both with and without disabilities reported spending similar amounts of time on the internet and had similar levels of expertise using social media and other online tools (Heiman, et al., 2015; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015).

⁴ It should be noted that the findings are limited to adolescents with learning disabilities and ADHD. More research is necessary to determine the extent to which it is possible to generalize the findings across learners with other forms of disability.

- In a study involving 205 college students in the U.S., not only were students with disabilities much more likely than their peers to report online victimization but the more outwardly noticeable a student's disability was, and whether the student was known to be receiving accommodations at school, the more likely the student was to become a victim of cyberbullying (Kowalski, et al., 2016).⁵
 - In a study involving 507 Israeli adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 years old, half of whom had been diagnosed with a learning disability (LD) and half of whom were considered "typically achieving", Heiman and Olenik-Shemesh found that nearly two-thirds of all girls were victims of bullying online (compared with half of all boys). The girls with LDs who attended special education classes were the most likely to be victimized online, more than both girls and boys with LDs in general education classes and girls and boys who were typically achieving (p. 150). Girls with LDs in special education classes were also the most likely to report perpetrating bullying online and being both perpetrators and victims (Ibid.).
- students with emotional disturbances, intellectual and developmental disabilities, communication difficulties, and multiple disabilities most likely to experience higher rates of victimization.
- In a national assessment of the prevalence of bullying victimization among students with disabilities in the U.S. which measured rates at elementary (grades one to five), middle (grades six to eight) and secondary school levels and compared students with different disability types, researchers found that students with emotional disturbances were bullied at a significantly higher rate than the overall victimization rate for students with disabilities at all levels of schooling and at secondary level they were the only group with a higher rate of victimization (39%) than the overall rate for students with disabilities (27%) (Blake, et al., 2012; see also Swearer, et al., 2012 reporting similar findings for children with behavioural disabilities and other health impairments). They also found that the risk of repeated victimization varied by disability type, with students with autism in elementary and middle school at greatest risk, while at the secondary level students with orthopedic impairments were most at risk, relative to other students with disabilities (Ibid., p. 216-217).

Factors affecting risk of victimization

While comparative research is limited, data suggests that disability identity or disability type, gender, age, poverty, a prior history of victimization, and learning settings are all factors that can increase the risk of school violence and bullying for learners with disabilities.

Disability type

There are few studies which compare rates of bullying victimization among students with different disability types but those which do suggest a range of bullying experiences with

- Bear et al. (2015) compared bullying victimization across 10 categories of disability and students with no reported disabilities in 74 elementary schools (K-5) in the U.S. and found that students with disabilities overall were more likely than non-disabled students to experience bullying but that prevalence rates varied significantly by disability type. Students with emotional disturbances were the most likely to be bullied, with nearly three in four reporting verbal abuse and more than one in four physical abuse at least once or twice in the previous month (p. 108). Students

⁵ They were also twice as likely as their peers to have experienced traditional forms of bullying outside the digital environment.

with mild intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, blind or visual impairment, and other health impairment also reported higher rates of victimization than both non-disabled children and children with other forms of disability (p. 108; see also, Devries, et al., 2018, finding that students with self-care and communication difficulties were most at risk of school violence compared with students with sensory or mobility difficulties).

- In studies that focus specifically on students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, researchers have found such students experience bullying victimization at high rates overall. For example, in a study among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Taiwan more than two out of three had experienced at least one form of victimization and nearly half had experienced two (Chiu, et al., 2017; see also Blake, et al., 2016, finding in a comparative study that learners with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) were the most at risk of bullying victimization compared with all other students with disabilities, followed by students with emotional disturbances). In a systematic review and meta-analysis of studies of prevalence of bullying among youth with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) researchers found a mean prevalence rate of bullying victimization among students with ASD of 44% (Maiano, et al., 2016). Similarly, in a study involving children with autism spectrum disorder and mild intellectual disability in Turkey, both groups were more likely to report victimization than typically developing students (Eroglu & Kilic, 2020). Students with multiple diagnoses, such as a learning disability and autism spectrum disorder, are at greater risk than students with only one diagnosis (Brunstein, et al., 2016).

Prior history of violence

Adverse childhood experiences can have profound effects on a child's health and can increase the

risk of future victimization for all children but especially those with disabilities, who are a higher risk of compound victimization (Son, Parish & Peterson, 2012). A prior history of victimization is one of the most significant predictors of future bullying victimization for learners with disabilities at all levels of schooling.

- In a longitudinal study involving 4,155 students between 6 and 13 years old in special education in the U.S., Blake et al. (2016) found that once a student with a disability had been bullied, his/her risk of being bullied increased five-fold over time (p.204). They further found that a previous experience of victimization was the most significant predictor of bullying victimization even when controlling for age, household income, primary disability, and social competence (Ibid.)
- Son, et al. (2020) similarly found that childhood experiences of violence were strongly correlated with experiences of intimate partner violence among college students with disabilities, with prior peer victimization and community violence correlated with the highest risk.

Learning settings

As with research regarding the prevalence of school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities, the data on the way in which school settings may increase or reduce the risk of school violence or bullying is difficult to analyse in part because of the variation among school settings around the world and limited descriptions within individual studies. However, the studies reviewed suggest that **students with disabilities are at risk of school violence and bullying in all learning settings**, including mainstream and special schools, although prevalence rates in particular settings vary significantly between studies and by disability type. Data obtained by human rights investigators, however, suggests that **children and young people with disabilities in institutional and residential (boarding school) settings are most at risk of violence.**

- A meta-analysis of research comparing bullying involvement of children and adolescents with and without chronic illness and/or disability found no difference in peer victimization rates among students with chronic illness and/or disability in special schools and regular schools, suggesting that learners with disabilities were equally vulnerable to bullying victimization in both settings (Pinquart, 2017). Blake, et al. (2016) similarly found that inclusion in general education settings had no bearing on the risk of being bullied for learners with disabilities. However, other researchers have found differences in rates of victimization that vary with school setting and with disability type (see, e.g., Zablotsky, et al. (2013) and Rose et al. (2015) finding higher rates of victimization among students with autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities in mainstream settings; Rowley, et al. (2012) finding that students with less severe social impairments were at higher risk of bullying in mainstream settings).
- In a study involving more than 120,000 students in 8th, 9th and 11th grades in the U.S., Eisenberg, et al. (2016) found that girls with disabilities in settings with a large proportion of peers with disabilities were more likely to experience emotional distress and self-harming behaviors than those in mixed peer or mainstream settings, absent bullying victimization, suggesting being in mainstream settings in general is emotionally advantageous overall (p. 16). However, in the face of bullying victimization, having a greater number of similarly vulnerable peers in any setting made the impact of victimization less emotionally distressing for girls with disabilities (Ibid., p. 16-17).
- Although research is very limited, investigations of residential care homes and institutions have found that violence against children and young people with disabilities is endemic and severe in many (see, e.g.,

UNICEF, 2013). Even in well-run facilities, stakeholders report the treatment of children and young people with disabilities with respect to lack of privacy and nurture is far different from what would be tolerated absent disability.

Prevention of school violence and bullying

There is very little peer-reviewed research into the effectiveness of interventions to prevent school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities but stakeholders consistently pointed to the need to **promote an inclusive school culture and involving students, parents, teachers and school staff, community members, and other stakeholders in a whole education effort** to eliminate social stigma and violence against children and young people with disabilities.

School climate

A number of studies have shown an association between school victimization of students generally and school and classroom climate (see, e.g., Lopez, et al., 2020; Moore, et al., 2020). While few of these have focused on **learners with disabilities, data suggests that learners with disabilities are less vulnerable to bullying in schools where teachers actively promote positive peer interactions and promptly intervene to stop bullying.**

- In one of the few assessments of an intervention targeting school violence and bullying against students with disabilities, researchers evaluated the Good School Toolkit developed by the Ugandan NGO Raising Voices (Devries, et al., 2018). The Good School Toolkit is designed to promote changes to operational cultures within schools and involve students, teachers and school staff in activities related to promoting mutual respect, engaging students in decision-making processes, using non-violent discipline, and promoting responsive school governance, among other things. A randomized control trial demonstrated that the Toolkit was accessible to students with disabilities and that it was

effective in reducing levels of staff and peer violence (Ibid., p. 307)

- In a qualitative study involving 161 college students in the U.S., more than two-thirds of whom reported having experienced some form of peer victimization during primary and secondary school, participants identified strict school rules and a school culture that did not promote peer victimization as important protective factors (McNicholas, et al., 2017; see also Weiner, et al., 2013). This study and others also suggest that peer acceptance, friendships, and “cohesive” classroom environments characterized by “caring staff attitudes” are protective against school violence and bullying for learners with disabilities (Ibid.; see also, e.g., McLaughlin, et al., 2010).

Inclusive curricula and teacher training

Adopting **curricula that are inclusive of persons with disabilities** of all types, **recruiting and promoting teachers and school staff with disabilities**, and incorporating **transformative teaching materials** that challenge social norms and promote social emotional learning can be effective tools to reduce violence (WHO, 2014; UNESCO and UN Women, 2016; Espelage, et al., 2015).

Inclusive mechanisms to promote monitoring and accountability

Children and young people with disabilities face significant barriers to reporting violence and receiving protection from it. Creating age, gender, and disability sensitive mechanisms that allow learners with disabilities to report negative experiences at school and training teachers, school staff and social service providers about the rights and needs of students with disabilities can reduce stigma and prevent bullying.

- Researchers have found that children and young people with disabilities are less likely than their non-disabled peers to disclose experiences of violence and are less likely to recognize abusive behaviour as violence

(Hershkowitz, et al., 2007; Anderson & Pezzarossi, 2012). Barriers to reporting are environmental (inaccessible infrastructure and transportation), social (a lack of training among school staff and challenges with communication), and institutional (discriminatory policies) (Plan International, 2016). Child protection providers also report a lack of confidence in working with children with disabilities (Stalker, et al., 2010; Taylor, et al., 2014). Adopting accessible feedback mechanisms that are confidential and age-appropriate, such as comment boxes, can make it more likely that students with disabilities will disclose school violence and bullying when it occurs.

- Removing barriers to full participation in school settings and promoting equal opportunities for students with disabilities can promote peer interactions and social inclusion and reduce vulnerability to bullying (Blackman, et al., 2017; see also Danes-Staples, et al., 2013 regarding the role of extracurricular activities in reducing school violence against students with disabilities). Providing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in student committees, especially those relating to school culture and prevention of bullying, can also provide meaningful opportunities for students to share their experiences of violence.

Gaps in research

While much can be learned from existing research on school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities, the vast majority of the peer-reviewed studies identified during the literature review draw on data from a limited number of high-income countries in the Global North. Given that the overwhelming majority of persons with disabilities are believed to be living in low and middle-income countries (WHO, 2011), this means that the experiences of the majority of school-aged children and young people with disabilities are not being captured in the research.

Understanding the magnitude of school violence and bullying and related risk factors for all students with disabilities, including those in low and middle income countries, is essential to fully realizing the right to inclusive education and ensuring no student is left behind.

These findings are discussed in more detail below.

Introduction

This desk review summarizes available evidence on school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities in early childhood settings, primary, secondary and higher education and other learning settings. It draws primarily from the scholarly literature into school violence and bullying as well as input from stakeholders, including young people with disabilities.

Data on school violence and bullying indicates that as many as one in three students is bullied by their peers at school in any given month (UNESCO, 2019). However, the data collected in the course of this review indicate that on average children and young people with disabilities experience school violence and bullying at two to four times higher rates than their peers at every age and across every learning environment.

In 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a comprehensive analysis of the quantitative data collected from two large-scale international surveys covering 144 countries as well as a range of additional global and regional surveys which collectively showed prevalence of school violence

and bullying and changes over time. That analysis, *Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying*, showed promising downward trends in the prevalence of school violence and bullying overall in nearly half of the countries surveyed, but worrisome persistence of school violence and bullying in most (UNESCO, 2019).

The analysis also revealed that children who are perceived to be “different” in any way are more likely to be bullied, with physical appearance being the most common reason for being bullied (UNESCO, 2019). This includes students who are gender nonconforming, students who are overweight, and students of different races. The analysis also noted the likelihood that disability placed children and young people at greater risk of school violence and bullying. While the evidence globally remains limited, a growing body of literature analyses the prevalence of school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities and the factors that can increase—or reduce—risk. This report reviews the available evidence and identifies gaps where additional research is needed.

Children and young people with disabilities have the same right to education shared by all other children and young people, as well as the right to live their lives free from violence and exploitation (UNCRC Arts. 24, 16; CRC Arts. 23 and 28). Yet school violence and bullying can impede their access to education, limit their participation in school, encourage absenteeism and dropouts, cause long-term negative effects on their health and wellbeing, and raise barriers to their inclusion in society as a whole. For children and young people with disabilities, bullying can be particularly harmful as it “constitutes a ‘barrier to being’ that affects sense of self and well-being” and can play an important role in creating and reinforcing disablement (Chatzitheochari, Parsons & Platt, 2016).

Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all.

4.1 [E]nsure that **all** girls and boys complete free, **equitable** and **quality** primary and secondary education...

4.2 [E]nsure that **all** girls and boys have access to **quality** early childhood development, care and primary education...

4.5 [E]liminate gender disparities in education and ensure **equal** access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including **persons with disabilities**, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide **safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all**.

While there has been some limited research into the prevalence of school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities, as well as risk and protective factors, significant gaps in knowledge exist regarding the extent of school violence and bullying and the effectiveness of mechanisms to prevent and respond to it, especially in countries outside the Global North. Research adopting an intersectional lens is particularly necessary to identify the mechanisms necessary to ensure students with disabilities who are from already marginalized groups or who are made vulnerable because of their sexual orientation, HIV status, indigeneity or other social category have the same opportunity to learn in safe and inclusive environments.

Disability and intersectional analysis

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives.”

(Lorde, 1984)

Persons with disabilities, like all people, are diverse and their experiences in schools, communities and families are mediated by gender, race, age, class, ethnicity, and disability, along with a host of other social and demographic factors. Intersectionality as an analytical tool and method takes differences into account and explores how differently situated individuals encounter and experience inequality and discrimination (Imkaan, 2019). It calls attention to the ways in which inequality experienced by persons with disabilities is “inextricably linked” with other factors like race and gender that may lead to unique and compounding forms of discrimination that may require new and targeted strategies to prevent (CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 28, 2010; Imkaan, 2019).

This report reviews available evidence to assess what is currently known about the association of school violence and bullying and disability, identifies gaps in the evidence that can direct further research, and provides an overview of the vulnerability of children and young people with disabilities to school violence and bullying with the intent of informing future policy and programme development.

Methodology

A rapid literature review was conducted from August to September 2020. The main research questions guiding this review were:

1. What is the relationship between violence and bullying and children and young people with disabilities in schools or other learning settings?

2. How do profile characteristics of children and young people with disabilities, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability identity, or impairment, affect the scope, magnitude and forms of violence to which children and young people with disabilities may be subjected or which they may witness or perpetrate?
3. What contextual or other factors such as learning settings make school violence and/or bullying of children and young people with disabilities more or less likely or increase/decrease the vulnerability of children and young people with disabilities to violence?
4. What are the institutional (both governmental and non-governmental) responses to school violence and/or bullying of children and young people with disabilities, and how effective are they?

The review was limited to research published after the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force, from 2010 to the present. It adopted a Best Evidence Synthesis approach (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) which allows researchers to consider whatever evidence is available and take account of study design and quality in the critical appraisal and synthesis steps. The goal is to avoid producing a review that merely points to the absence of evidence. Rather, a best evidence synthesis approach is inclusive of a range of evidence so as to fill in the “evidence jigsaw” with as many pieces as possible (Ibid.). For purposes of the present literature review, studies were reviewed using appraisal prompts detailed in the Methodology Annex (including assessment of the transparency of research design and methods) to evaluate rigour, credibility, dependability, transferability and relevance. While the methodological rigour of

each study was a criterium for inclusion, in keeping with the Best Evidence Synthesis approach the review applied a low threshold to maximise the inclusion and contribution of a wide variety of evidence applicable to this topic. Where available and relevant, existing systematic reviews and meta-analyses were prioritized for inclusion. A detailed search protocol, inclusion and exclusion criteria, databases searched, and key words used are included in the Methodology Annex attached.

The search identified 1,650 articles of which 322 were screened for further review. Additional articles were identified through review of references in selected articles.⁶ The majority of studies reviewed analysed data gathered in the U.S., with a much smaller proportion considering data from the Global South.

Of the more than 300 articles closely reviewed for this study, nearly half (48%) used data drawn from North America. An additional 25% of the data came from countries in Western Europe. The remaining articles were from Asia & the Pacific (11%), Africa (7%), Central and South America (3%), and the Middle East (2%). Within each region, certain countries were overrepresented in the research collected. For example, the United Kingdom and Australia represented nearly half of the articles from Western Europe and Asia and the Pacific respectively. In Africa, data used in 10 of the 22 articles was drawn from South Africa, and an additional four were from Uganda.

Not only were studies limited to just a few geographic areas and countries within them, it is also unbalanced with regard to the country income levels represented. Eighty-six percent of the articles were focused on high-income countries in comparison to just 2% of the articles focused on low-income countries. Lower-middle income and upper-middle income countries represent just

⁶ *It should be noted that the findings in this report are almost entirely dependent on research that pre-dates the pandemic. It is thus essential that they be supplemented as new information becomes available on the impact of the pandemic on the exposure to violence and bullying of children and young people with disabilities.*

4% and 8% of the remaining research. Because school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities is a global phenomenon, the global inequality in research suggests a critical need for additional research from countries located in the Global South and countries at low, lower-middle, and upper-middle income levels.

Box 4:

KEY CONCEPTS:

School violence includes: Physical violence includ[ing] physical attacks, physical fights, corporal punishment and physical bullying; psychological violence includ[ing] verbal abuse, emotional abuse, social exclusion and psychological bullying; and sexual violence includ[ing] completed and attempted non-consensual sex acts, unwanted touching, sexual harassment and sexual bullying (UNESCO, 2019).

Bullying means intentional and aggressive behavior occurring repeatedly against a victim where there is a real or perceived power imbalance, and where the victim feels vulnerable and powerless to defend himself or herself. The unwanted behavior is hurtful: it can be physical, including hitting, kicking and the destruction of property; verbal, such as teasing, insults and threats; or relational, through the spreading of rumours and exclusion from a group (UNSG, 2018).

Cyberbullying includes the posting or sending of electronic messages, including pictures or videos, aimed at harassing, threatening or targeting another person. A whole range of social platforms, including chat rooms, blogs and instant messaging are used in cyberbullying (UNSG, 2018).

In addition to the literature review, researchers conducted consultations with stakeholders and key informants. These included interviews with more than 30 disability rights advocates and experts in the field of inclusive education and prevention of violence against children and young adults, most of whom have global experience and expertise but are located in Latin America (Uruguay, Colombia and Chile), Europe (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), Africa (South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda), and Asia (Afghanistan). A complete list of those interviewed and their affiliations is included in the Methodology Annex attached.

As part of the consultation process, researchers coordinated focus group discussions with young people with disabilities in South Africa, China, Jamaica, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Indonesia, and the United States, with the assistance of local researchers and NGO staff. More than 70 young people with disabilities participated in the focus groups and provided input into the recommendations incorporated into this report. The descriptions focus group participants shared of their own experiences as students with disabilities as well as their input into the overall findings and conclusions are used to support and add context to the literature review and fill in gaps where research is limited or lacking. Details regarding the procedure followed for the focus group discussions, including the ethical protocol applied, are included in the Methodology Annex.

Frame of Analysis

School violence and bullying involving persons with disabilities may take diverse forms dependent on context, demographic and socio-economic characteristics of participants, and a host of other complex and interconnected factors which may interact with one another to produce (or reduce) vulnerability to violence or bullying. The review took a multi-level approach that considered

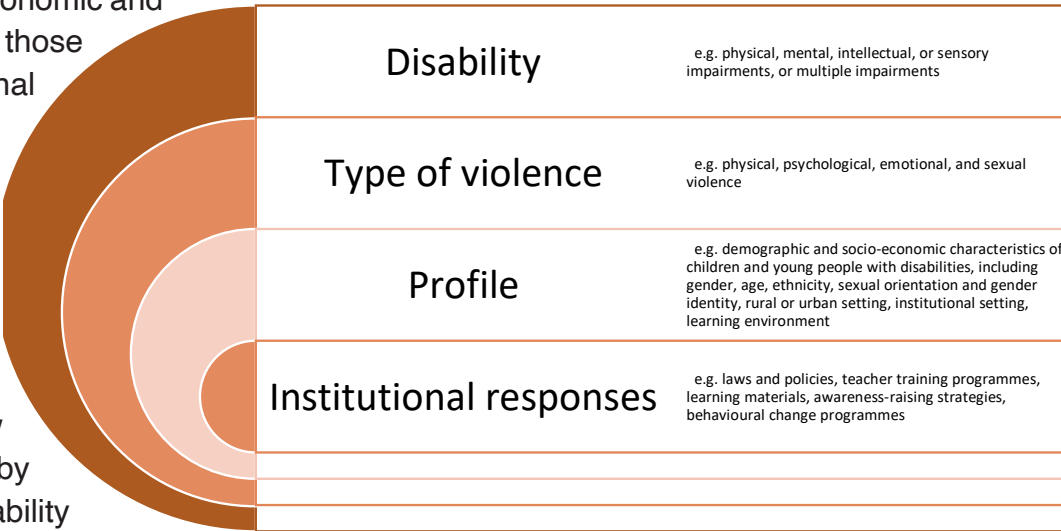
resources through four nested layers: disability, type of violence, socio-economic and demographic profile of those involved, and institutional responses (see figure 1 right).

Drawing comparisons across studies presented challenges due to a variety of factors including how disability was defined by the authors, which disability types were included in analyses, how bullying was defined, which particular behaviours were included to classify students as victims or perpetrators, the level of frequency that was used to classify behaviour as bullying or episodic, and the sources from which data was secured, particularly whether studies relied on reports of bullying by children and young people with disabilities, by their parents or family members, or by school staff.

Many studies also failed to disaggregate data on the basis of disability type or on other socio-demographic categories that could have affected outcomes, such as gender and gender identity, race and ethnicity, rural or urban setting, or other demographic or socio-economic characteristics that may impact vulnerability to violence. As a result, one of the most significant findings of the review was that while there is some scholarly attention being paid to school violence and bullying involving children, adolescents and young adults with disabilities there is a clear need for research that adopts an intersectional lens and takes context into account.

Like all students, children and young persons with disabilities may be involved in school violence and bullying in a number of ways. They may be victims or survivors or violence, bystanders or witnesses to violence, or perpetrators of school

Figure 1



violence and bullying, or some combination of these. The analysis thus includes studies which assess school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities as victims, perpetrators, and bully-victims, or both perpetrators and victims.

Critical Appraisal and Synthesis of the Evidence

Although data on children and young people with disabilities is generally lacking, a systematic review of research into the relationship between disability and violence of all types showed that children with disabilities were three to four times more likely to be victims of violence than their non-disabled peers (Jones, et al., 2012). Similarly, in qualitative research with young people with disabilities in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia researchers found that all of the respondents had been affected by violence, including for some repeated episodes of physical, sexual and emotional violence, often at the hands of other children in school or in their neighborhoods (African Child Policy Forum, 2010; see also Plan International, 2016).

Data on the causes of violence against children and young people with disabilities is limited but researchers, non-governmental organizations,

and child protection advocates have attributed it to factors including:

- Social stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities at any age;
- Cultural beliefs about disability that see it as a curse or evidence of past bad behavior of children or family members;
- Lack of support for children with disabilities and their families;
- Increased dependency on others for care;
- Over-extended and untrained care providers, including parents, personal care assistants, and teachers; and
- Isolation of children with disabilities from the community and lack of accountability.

(See, e.g., Jones, et al., 2012; Hughes, et al., 2012; Plan International, 2016; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015; UNICEF, 2013; Ammerman and Baladerian, 1993).

Research among students with disabilities who have experienced peer violence shows high rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (see, e.g., Mitra, Mouradian & McKenna, 2012; Hidalgo-Rasmussen, et al., 2015; Holt, et al., 2013), as well as much higher risk of future victimization (Son, et al., 2020; Blake, et al., 2016;). These studies suggest that students with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities, are more likely to experience significant negative health outcomes from bullying victimization by other students than their peers without disabilities (Mitra, Mouradian & McKenna, 2012; Hidalgo-Rasmussen, et al., 2015). It is thus essential to understand the mechanisms through which children with disabilities are made vulnerable to violence in all its forms and what actions can be taken to eliminate it.

Box 5:

“If you can’t keep up with the work you shouldn’t be here”⁷

Young people with disabilities in S. Africa, China, Jamaica, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Indonesia, and the United States asked about school violence and bullying reported common experiences:

- School violence and bullying happens at all levels of school, from kindergarten to university, and in all learning settings, including special schools and mainstream schools.
- Many students with disabilities experience bullying not just by their peers without disabilities but by teachers and school staff. Many teachers are not patient with slow performers, pick on them, and tell them they cannot succeed. Other students learn from the adults and mimic them.
- Violence and bullying by peers and teachers make it more difficult to learn, limit interest in participating in school and extra-curricular activities and encourage dropouts.
- Girls with disabilities are the most disadvantaged, the most likely to be bullied, and the least likely to feel able to speak up or be heard.
- Bullying victims are afraid to speak up because they fear the violence will get worse, no one will listen to them, and perpetrators will not be held accountable.

Prevalence and extent of school violence and bullying

Globally, children, adolescents, and youth with disabilities are far less likely than their non-disabled peers to attend and complete school at every level. They face many barriers not shared by others children and young people including accessibility of school facilities, including WASH facilities, inaccessibility of instructional materials, lack of teacher training and support for diverse learning needs, and stigma and discrimination from peers, teachers and school staff and administrators,

⁷ Female focus group participant in the U.S., 23 years old, describing the attitude of peers and faculty to students with disabilities.

community members, and even parents who do not believe their children are capable of learning.

School violence and bullying and the actual and perceived vulnerability of children and young people with disabilities present an additional barrier to school attendance. The risk of violence and bullying can lead many learners with disabilities to skip school or drop out altogether and prevents families from sending their children to schools. (Plan International, 2016; Focus groups: Bangladesh and Nigeria; stakeholder interviews)

Children and young people with disabilities experience school violence and bullying in complex ways that are mediated by disability, gender, age, and poverty, among other factors. Previous exposure to violence in the home and at school can also be a significant, if not the most important, risk factor for later experiences of—and engagement in—school violence and bullying (see, e.g., Blake, et al., 2016).

The following sections assess the available evidence on school violence and bullying and disability and review what is known about the prevalence of school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities as victims, perpetrators, and perpetrator-victims. Studies of bullying involvement of students with disabilities present a number of methodological issues, including (1) unrepresentative and small convenience samples, (2) no universal definition of bullying or disability, (3) no comparison groups, (4) limited disaggregation by sex and disability type, and (5) differences in information sources (see, e.g., Maiano, et al., 2016, reviewing research on prevalence and correlates of bullying perpetration and victimization). The studies included below while not lending themselves to cross-national analysis were selected on the basis of the size of their participant samples ($n > 1,000$) and transparency and rigour of methods. Where available and relevant, the analysis includes data drawn from existing systematic reviews and meta-

analyses.

“Bullying at school is worse than community violence because it breaks another part of you, it gets at your abilities, it is some form of a barrier to a full life, which affects your future earnings, independence, how you see the world, as all these mostly depends on getting formal education. Therefore bullying at school is one of the cruelest form of violence as it denies you belonging and learning”

(Mpheo Tjobe, Albinism Advocacy for Access)

Victims of school violence and bullying

Available research consistently shows that students with disabilities are among the most vulnerable to school violence and bullying, from pre-primary through higher education, whether enrolled in a special school or included in the general education system, and whether in the Global North or the Global South. The exact proportion of children with disabilities who experience violence and the severity and frequency of that violence, however, is difficult to ascertain or compare across studies in large part because of differences in data collection methods. It is also likely that the level of school violence and bullying being captured in data collection surveys understates its prevalence substantially because of student reluctance to report bullying and failure to recognize bullying as violence or abuse.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, large-scale quantitative studies of the involvement of children and young persons with disabilities in school violence and bullying consistently show that children and young people with disabilities are far more likely to be victimized than their peers without disabilities. In a national sample of bullying among primary and secondary school students in the United States, students with disabilities were found to be one to one and a half times more likely to be victims of bullying than their peers without disabilities (Blake et al., 2012). At the primary school level, 25% of students with disabilities had experienced bullying, compared to just 15% of their nondisabled peers, and at the secondary level,

the ratio was 34% of students with disabilities to just 28% of their peers (Blake et al., 2012).⁸ A systematic review of research on the prevalence of bullying across students with chronic illness⁹ or disability in Germany found remarkably similar results with 35% of students with chronic illness or disabilities experiencing bullying compared to just 26% without chronic physical illness or disability (Pinquart, 2017). Furthermore, the overrepresentation of students with chronic physical illness and disabilities in bullying rates was relatively consistent across school type, reporting method (student self-reports or parent or teacher reports), age, or gender (Ibid.).

A large-scale quantitative study of bullying victimization among students 13-15 years old in Sweden identified disability as the most significant risk factor for bullying victimization. Students with disabilities were more than twice as likely to experience bullying with 25% reporting having been bullied, compared to 13% of their peers without disabilities (Annerback, et al., 2014). Children with disabilities being at double or triple the risk of bullying is not an uncommon finding. Farmer et al. (2012) found that fifth grade boys with disabilities were two and a half times and girls with disabilities were nearly four times more likely to be victims of bullying than their peers in a study of bullying in rural America. A comparative study of peer victimization of children and young people in 11 Western countries found that in all country contexts, students with disabilities or

chronic illness were disproportionately affected by peer victimization with a low of 1.3 times greater victimization than students without disability or chronic illness in Germany to 2.1 times in Poland (Sentenac et al., 2012) (see figure 2 below).

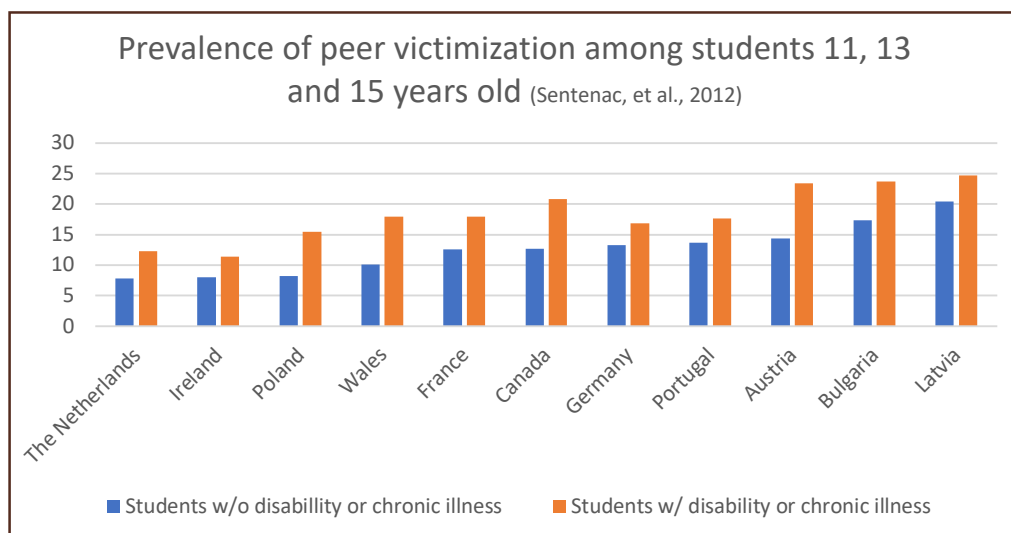


Figure 2

The overrepresentation of students with disabilities as victims is consistent across quantitative research of 1,000 or more participants in other country contexts, including contexts outside of North America and Western Europe. Primary school children (aged 7-12 years) with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in South Korea, for example, were more than four times (20% to 5%) as likely to be victims of bullying than their peers without disabilities (Hwang et al., 2018) and girls with disabilities in Uganda reported higher rates of all forms of violence at the hands of school staff than girls without disabilities, and were more than twice as likely to experience sexual violence (8% to 4%) at the hands of male peers than girls without disabilities (Devries et al., 2014).

Large scale studies from the Global South remain rare, though what evidence exists similarly shows

⁸ Throughout this report, percentages are rounded for ease of review. Actual data are likely to vary.

⁹ Researchers defined chronic illness to include “a condition that is associated with functional impairment and lasts for a considerable period, has a sequela that persists for a substantial period, persists for more than 3 months in a year, and/or necessitates a period of continuous hospitalization for at least one month”. (Pinquart, 2017, p. 247) By comparison, in Sentenac, et al., researchers relied on self-reports of chronic illness as a “long term illness, disability or medical condition that has been diagnosed by a doctor” (p. 462).

higher rates of violence for young people with disabilities. In 2010, the African Child Policy Forum published one of the first analyses of violence against children with disabilities in the sub-continent. Among nearly one thousand participants from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia researchers found that all of the respondents had been affected by violence, including for some repeated episodes of physical, sexual and emotional violence, most often at the hands of other children in school or in their neighborhoods. A 2016 study by Plan International involving nearly four thousand students in Uganda found that students with disabilities reported substantially higher rates of violence than their peers without disabilities across all forms of violence and from the hands of both teachers and their peers.

Smaller scale quantitative studies from around the world produced similar results. A survey of 706 secondary school students with intellectual disabilities in Taiwan found that 69% had experienced social, verbal, financial, or sexual victimization within the last semester, which was far higher than estimates of 25-50% for Taiwanese students without intellectual disabilities (Chiu et al., 2017, p. 50). Likewise, a survey of 178 5th and 6th grade students with special educational needs in Greece found high rates of bullying victimization (30%) (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2015). While quantitative studies of prevalence are important, smaller scale mixed method and qualitative studies are equally insightful in understanding the daily experiences of school violence and bullying encountered by children and young people with disabilities. Smaller scales studies also help explain the mechanisms behind the high prevalence rates. A qualitative study of just ten young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the US, for example, not only revealed that almost all had experienced either face-to-face or cyberbullying, but that their willingness to accept “friendship at any cost” explained why they were motivated to

accept this bullying from peers as an alternative to extreme loneliness and social isolation (McHugh & Howard, 2017).

Similarly, a study of 24 adolescents with physical disabilities or chronic illness transitioning from primary school to middle school in Australia recorded that a full one third of the children reported not having a single friend in school. The researchers also found that the bullying and teasing was often directed at the child’s physical difference, such as a peer making fun of their hand or legs, which had a profound impact on their sense of self (McMaugh, 2011). These dynamics show that while school violence and bullying may be captured in large scale studies, the social isolation experienced by children and young people with disabilities is an equally important issue that may not be captured in school violence and bullying surveys.

Perpetrators

While the evidence suggests that children and young people with disabilities are overrepresented as victims of school violence and bullying, the extent to which they are involved in bullying as perpetrators is less clear. In a study analysing both bullying victimization and perpetration involving students with disabilities, Rose, Monda-Amaya, and Espelage (2011) found that students with disabilities were not only more likely to be victims of bullying, but also more likely to be perpetrators. A systematic review of literature assessing prevalence rates of bullying perpetration and victimization among school-aged youth with intellectual disabilities similarly found that students with disabilities were perpetrators of school violence and bullying but were far more likely to both perpetrators and victims (Maiano, et al., 2016). The review found a mean prevalence rate of bullying perpetration by students with disabilities of 15% but a combined perpetration-victimization rate of more than 25% (Ibid).

Rose, et al. (2011) argue that “bullying perpetration

by students with disabilities is often a learned behavior, possibly a reaction to prolonged victimization or an overall lack of social skills" (p. 125), and thus a retaliatory or protective strategy. In a subsequent analysis, Rose and colleagues theorized the role students with disabilities play in bullying by warning that "Bullying involvement is not a static process that is defined by a linear relationship between a "pure" bully and "pure" victim and is more likely defined by the fluidity of roles. If fluidity of roles does exist, it is conceivable that a relationship exists between victimization and perpetration, especially for students with disabilities..." and pointed to a study where "victimization predicted both bully perpetration and fighting, representing bully-victims and reactive-victims" (Rose et al., 2016a, p. 314).

This theory is supported by research into responses to peer victimization by students with disabilities. In a study involving more than three thousand students between grades 5 and 12 in the U.S., all of whom had self-reported bullying victimization, students in special education were more likely than students in general education to report having responded to bullying by hitting their aggressor, among other possible responses (Hartley, 2017). The students in special education were also more likely to report that after trying avoidance responses, such as walking away, support-seeking behaviors, including telling an adult, and aggressive responses to bullying, such as hitting back, "things got worse" afterward (Ibid.).

Perpetrator-Victims

Using Rose et al.'s analysis and the typology of victim, perpetrator, and perpetrator-victim, additional researchers have found that when victimization is taken into account, children and young people with disabilities are no more likely to be aggressors than children without disabilities, but are overrepresented among perpetrator-victims, which is explained by their higher levels of victimization (Beckman, et al., 2016; Eisenberg, et al., 2015). Farmer et al., (2012), for example, found

that American fifth grade boys with disabilities were three times and girls with disabilities nearly five times more likely to be perpetrator-victims than boys and girls without disabilities, but were no more likely to be perpetrators absent previous victimization (p. 30).

Bystanders

Very few studies focus on students with disabilities as bystanders or witnesses to bullying but what data there is suggests that learners with disabilities may be overrepresented among witnesses to bullying as assistants, defenders, and bystanders, and that witnessing bullying is highly stressful for students with disabilities and may lead to an increased risk of victimization.

In a rare study that focused on students with disabilities as bystanders and involving a sample of more than 10,000 students in primary and secondary school in the U.S., students with disabilities were found to play a variety of bystanding roles. Malecki et al. (2020) found that despite elevated rates of victimization, students with disabilities were no more likely to engage in bullying behavior as aggressors, but were more likely to engage in active bystander roles. Students with disabilities were overrepresented both as "assisters" in bullying behavior, meaning that they laughed or joined in bullying initiated by a peer, and as "defenders," which meant they sought to protect someone they observed being bullied by telling the bully to stop or seeking help.

A small-scale, qualitative study of students with speech, language, and communication disabilities transitioning from primary to middle school in the United Kingdom found that among children with disabilities "seeing bullying" was identified by study participants as one of their top three most stressful scenarios. It received twice as many identifications as homework, independent work, and other common stressful scenarios for children of the same age without disabilities. Of potential stressors described, "seeing bullying"

received twice as many ratings as homework. The reason given by the students was that they did not know how to respond to bullying, and effectively address it (Perfitt, 2013). This heightened level of concern with bullying is indicative of the way that the perceived potential of bullying can be a barrier to education in the same way as the actual occurrence of bullying.

There is also research suggesting that being a witness to bullying may increase the risk of future victimization for learners with disabilities. In a study of cyberbullying in the U.S., Kowalski, et al. (2016) found that among college students with disabilities, being a witness to cyberbullying increased the likelihood of bullying victimization. There is a noticeable gap in research regarding the role students with disabilities play as bystanders to school violence and bullying, and the impact it can have on their satisfaction with school, an important area that young persons with disabilities themselves identify as key to their inclusion.

Limitations in the data

While the prevalence rates discussed above are indeed serious and show a consistent pattern of overrepresentation of children and young people with disabilities in school violence and bullying, there continues to be a need for more prevalence data, particularly data that allows for national and cross-national comparisons and that includes young people with disabilities in the Global South. In research on bullying of students with disabilities, for example, victimization rates can vary from 0 to 100% depending on the research methods used (Rose et al., 2011). One of the challenges is methodological: researchers do not consistently use the same definitions of disability or measurements for victimization (Bear et al, 2015; Chen & Schwartz, 2012). This is particularly challenging across countries that may use different legal definitions of disability or have different cultural understandings or resources for identifying children with disabilities, especially those with invisible disabilities, such as a learning

disability.

Another challenge is the extent to which students with disabilities do not recognize the experiences they have as amounting to “violence” or “bullying” (see, e.g., Anderson & Pezzarossi, 2012). Chen & Schwartz (2012), for example, compared reporting rates of bullying victimization of students with ASD and their parents. They found that just 64% of students self-reported bullying compared to 72% of parents (p. 204), which may be because the children did not recognize certain social interactions as bullying, whereas their parents did. Similarly, self-report surveys may not be accessible to younger children or students with intellectual disabilities, thus resulting in underreporting.

An additional challenge is the frequency and cut-off criteria used by researchers. Some studies ask whether a student has “ever” experienced bullying versus “two or three times a month,” which can lead to profound differences in findings. Similarly, some studies ask about bullying experiences over the past year, whereas others may ask over the last semester or even the last several weeks. These too lead to profound differences in prevalence. While this latter concern is not unique to studies involving students with disabilities it nevertheless creates challenges for comparisons between studies, demonstrating a need for better, disability inclusive survey instruments that will collect more comparable data.

“I had a male classmate who was both deaf and had intellectual impairment... The teacher would speak openly in front of the whole class, “Oh, that guy is an idiot. He is like a pig! He doesn’t study well. He should just quit and go outside to work. But which boss would hire someone like him? He is totally useless!” All students in my class believed in the teacher and would bully the male student altogether... I wasn’t nice to him either at the time.”

(Ling Ling, China, 27 years old, female, Deaf)

Teacher violence

In a systematic review on the global prevalence of corporal punishment in schools, the practice was found to be widespread, including in countries where it has been legally banned (Heekes et al., 2020). While just two of the fifty-three papers reviewed by the study explicitly included data on disability, both suggested that students with intellectual and learning disabilities were associated with higher uses of corporal punishment. Similarly, in an analysis of schools in the United States, schools with a large proportion of students receiving special education were found to be nearly twice as likely to use corporal punishment than schools with fewer students with disabilities, even when they reported the same number of problem behaviors and disciplinary actions (Han, 2011).

In addition to traditional forms of corporal punishment, such as slapping, paddling, and so forth, there are other forms of corporal punishment that disproportionately affect students with disabilities that may not be captured in data, such as the misuse of restraint and seclusion. While restraint and seclusion may be necessary in cases where a child's behavior poses imminent harm to self or others, in many contexts it is used as punishment (Suarez, 2017). In the United States, students with disabilities only represent 12% of the student population, but account for 75% of the students that are physically restrained and 58% of those subjected to seclusion or involuntary confinement (Ibid.). Students with emotional and intellectual disabilities are most at risk of physical restraint and being confined in school. In practice, this form of violence may include a student with an intellectual disability being tied to a chair by teachers to prevent them from wandering around a school or a child with a psychosocial disability being confined in a storage closet or even duffel bag as the result of a tantrum (Ibid., p. 881-883).

While teachers may be important and influential instigators of school violence and bullying in some cases, they are also likely to be key partners in efforts to prevent school violence and bullying. Students with disabilities have reported that when teachers hold bullies accountable and discipline abusive students, they can keep violence from recurring (Njelesani, 2019). There is also evidence that when teachers and school staff create a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment for all learners, violence and bullying are less likely (Focus groups: China, Indonesia; stakeholder interviews).

Schools can also be important spaces in which violence in families and communities is identified and addressed. Surveys of students conducted during the pandemic indicate that for many schools are safer than their homes and they are at greater risk by being kept at home (Interview: Purna Shrestha, VSO International).

Where violence by teachers and school staff is occurring, it may be with parents' support. In one study on responses to violence against children with disabilities in Niger, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Togo, parents and teachers expressed concerns that laws and policies designed to prevent corporal punishment and give more agency to children could permit children to be unruly and undermine the parent/child and teacher/child power dynamic (Njelesani, 2019; see also UNICEF, 2017). A key informant who leads an international NGO that promotes inclusive education in 16 countries similarly explained that parents often resist changes in school policy that ban corporal punishment. He reported that sometimes parents go to teachers and ask "Why haven't you beaten my son? Why haven't you beaten my daughter? He is not doing his homework. She is not listening to me."

Individual factors affecting vulnerability to school violence and bullying

Children and young people with disabilities, like children everywhere, are not a homogenous group and their experience of school violence and bullying can be complicated by multiple factors including past experiences of violence or bullying, disability identity, sexual orientation and gender, age, and socio-economic status, among other things.

Factors affecting vulnerability to violence are also likely to differ depending on the broader social and geographic context in which students live and attend school. Parental levels of education, parental disability, exposure to family violence, prevalence of patriarchal gender attitudes, and poverty and food insecurity are all associated with peer violence (see, e.g., Son, et al., 2020; Corboz, et al., 2018; Kavanaugh, 2018)

Disability is also understood differently around the world and defined in different ways in national laws and policies promoting access to education such that in some contexts young people may be classified as having special needs entitling them to support while in others they may never be identified as disabled and receive no educational support. What factors matter most is likely to differ depending on context.

Much of the literature on risk and protective factors relating to bullying involvement of children with disabilities focused on isolating one or two factors, such as gender or disability type alone, or gender and disability type or disability type and school setting together. Few studies tested multiple factors, such as gender, disability type, age, and school setting, or disaggregated data in much detail, leaving open the possibility of confounding factors that were not identified. Data analysing particular intersections such as gender orientation and disability and indigeneity and disability is almost completely lacking.

The sections below review the findings in research relating to risk factors for school violence and bullying, paying particular attention to intersecting identities. While all of the studies included were transparent with regard to their research design and sufficiently rigorous for inclusion, sample sizes are varied across studies lending different degrees of weight to their conclusions. Where studies involved fewer than 1,000 participants, the sample size is described in the analysis.

Box 6:

Violation of the right to inclusive education and school violence

In 2009, Rubén, a ten-year-old student with Down syndrome, began his fourth year in a mainstream public school in Spain. He had previously had support from a special education assistant and maintained good relations with his classmates and teachers. His fourth-year teacher, however, allegedly threatened him with physical harm, told his parents he was “unsocial and dangerous”, and argued he should be removed and sent to a special school. A second teacher slapped him. In his fifth year, Rubén’s teacher refused to work with his special education assistant and continued to press for him to be transferred. School authorities did not investigate Rubén’s parents’ complaints but instead sent him to a special education center over his parents’ objections.

In its first decision on the right to inclusive education under the CRPD (Art.24), the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ruled that Spain had violated Rubén’s right to inclusive education. Spain failed to assess Rubén’s specific requirements and did not take reasonable steps that could have allowed him to remain in a mainstream school, including by ensuring his claims of abuse were adequately and promptly investigated.

In addition to ensuring Rubén is admitted to an inclusive program, given compensation, his abuse allegations are investigated, and the violation of his rights are publicly acknowledged, the Committee called on Spain to take measures to prevent similar future violations, especially by putting an end any educational segregation of students with disabilities in special or mainstream schools.

Disability/impairment

Much of the large-scale data collected on students with disabilities' involvement in school violence and bullying categorizes all students with disabilities together, without disaggregating students with disabilities by disability or diagnosis. This is in part due to the difficulties of performing adequately powered statistical comparisons when there are relatively few cases within a data set. The majority of small-scale studies focus on just one or two disability groups. While these smaller studies are important for understanding the specific dynamics of school violence and bullying that affect a particular group, they do not lend themselves to comparative research across disabilities.

There are few studies which compare rates of bullying victimization among students with different disability types but those which do suggest a range of bullying experiences with students with emotional disturbances, intellectual and developmental disabilities, communication difficulties, and multiple disabilities most likely to experience higher rates of victimization.

In a national assessment of the prevalence of bullying victimization among students with disabilities in the U.S. which measured rates at elementary (grades one to five), middle (grades six to eight) and secondary school levels and compared students with different disability types, researchers found that students with emotional disturbances were bullied at a significantly higher rate than the overall victimization rate for students with disabilities at all levels of schooling and at secondary level they were the only group with a higher rate of victimization (39%) than the overall rate for students with disabilities (27%) (Blake, et al., 2012; see also Swearer, et al., 2012 reporting similar findings for children with behavioural disabilities and other health impairments). They also found that the risk of repeated victimization varied by disability type, with students with autism in elementary and middle school at greatest risk, while at the secondary level students with

orthopedic impairments were most at risk, relative to other students with disabilities (Ibid., p. 216-217).

Bear et al. (2015) compared bullying victimization across 10 categories of disability and students with no reported disabilities in 74 elementary schools (K-5) in the U.S. and found that students with disabilities overall were more likely than non-disabled students to experience bullying but that prevalence rates varied significantly by disability type. Students with emotional disturbances were the most likely to be bullied, with nearly three in four reporting verbal abuse and more than one in four physical abuse at least once or twice in the previous month (p. 108). Students with mild intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, blind or visual impairment, and other health impairment also reported higher rates of victimization than both non-disabled children and children with other forms of disability (p. 108; see also, Devries, et al., 2018, finding that students with self-care and communication difficulties were most at risk of school violence compared with students with sensory or mobility difficulties).

Symes and Humphrey (2010) conducted a study that compared the social rejection and acceptance of students with ASD, dyslexia, and without disabilities. They found that while students with ASD experienced higher levels of social rejection and bullying than their peers in comparison to students without disabilities, students with dyslexia did not. This demonstrates that within the schools included in the study, students with dyslexia were more successfully included than their peers with ASD. Such a finding is consistent with research suggesting students who exhibit behavior problems and social skills deficits that shape their interactions with others in their peer group are among those most likely to experience bullying (Ibid., p. 100).

While comparative reports are important for identifying students with disabilities at increased

risk, they rarely provide the detail necessary for understanding the specific dynamics of the way school violence and bullying interact with students with intellectual disabilities versus a visual or hearing impairment, and so forth. Therefore, it is important for continued research, including qualitative research, on the complex way that school violence and bullying specifically affect children and young people with specific types of disabilities.

Communication Disabilities

A major cross-cutting theme in heightened prevalence of bullying is communication impairment, or disabilities that affect the ability of a child or young person to effectively communicate. A national study on children with communication impairments and their life activities in the United States found that among the 7 to 9 year old children surveyed, 20% of those with a communication impairment experienced bullying, whereas only 14% of their peers without a communication impairment experienced bullying (McCormack et al., 2011, p. 1337). Similarly, in Uganda, Devries, et al. (2018) found that students with communication challenges were among those most at risk of violence at the hands of school staff, more so than students with sight, hearing, mobility or memory functional difficulties.

The same children in McCormack et al.'s (2011) study also reported less ease in making friends, and thus greater levels of social isolation among their peers. Friendship groups are an important protective factor from bullying. Difficulties in communicating can present a major barrier for children forming personal relationships with others, which can increase their risk of bullying and decrease resiliency when it occurs (MacArthur, 2013).

Intellectual Disability

In studies that focus specifically on students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, researchers have found such students experience

bullying victimization at high rates overall. For example, in a study among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Taiwan more than two out of three had experienced at least one form of victimization and nearly half had experienced two (Chiu, et al., 2017; see also Blake, et al., 2016, finding in a comparative study that learners with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) were the most at risk of bullying victimization compared with all other students with disabilities, followed by students with emotional disturbances). In a systematic review and meta-analysis of studies of prevalence of bullying among youth with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) researchers found a mean prevalence rate of bullying victimization among students with ASD of 44% (Maiano, et al., 2016). Similarly, in a study involving children with autism spectrum disorder and mild intellectual disability in Turkey, both groups were more likely to report victimization than typically developing students (Eroglu & Kilic, 2020). Students with multiple diagnoses, such as a learning disability and autism spectrum disorder, are at greater risk than students with only one diagnosis (Brunstein, et al., 2016).

Despite what appear to be significant prevalence rates involving bullying of learners with intellectual disabilities, it is probable that they are underestimating actual experiences of bullying. Students with intellectual disabilities have proven to be one of the most difficult populations on which to attain an accurate prevalence rate. Self-report questionnaires are often not validated for children and young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, which could result in gross underreporting (Fisher & Morin, 2016). Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities may also have difficulty recognizing bullying, including cyberbullying, when it happens, particularly because of a willingness to accept "friendship at any cost" in environments where they experience extreme social isolation (McHugh & Howard, 2017).

Psychosocial and emotional and behavioral disabilities

Children and young people with disabilities with a variety of learning and mental disabilities, which are sometimes referred to as psychosocial or emotional and behavioral disabilities, have received a great deal of recent attention in the school violence and bullying literature. This includes research on children with ASD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and additional disabilities that can affect an individual's communicative abilities and social skills. Data has consistently shown that students with emotional and/or behavioural disabilities are most vulnerable to school violence and bullying (see, e.g., Blaket, et al., 2012). However, a significant amount of research has also been devoted to understanding if students with learning and mental disabilities are more likely to be perpetrators. This latter literature has largely found that students with disabilities, such as ASD and ADHD, are no more likely to be perpetrators, but may be more likely to be both perpetrators and victims (Rose et al., 2011). Higher levels of victimization are especially notable for students with multiple diagnoses; students with both a learning disability and ADHD were at greater risk of bullying victimization than students with only one of the two disabilities (Brunstein et al., 2016).

Social competence, or the ability to regulate one's emotions, has been found to influence risk of bully victimization for children and adolescents in general and may be a meaningful predictor for explaining the increased vulnerability of youth with disabilities for victimization. Considerable research has confirmed that externalizing and internalizing symptoms serve as both causes and consequences of victimization and that the display of prosocial skills can reduce bullying risk (C. R. Cook et al., 2010; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Hoglund, 2007).

Box 7:

Students living with albinism

Albinism is a rare genetic condition in which a person produces little or no melanin, resulting in little or no pigmentation in the skin, hair and eyes (UN, 2019). Persons with albinism often experience vision impairment and are frequent targets of discrimination and stigmatization because of the way they look. Children living with albinism often face violence and rejection at school and from their communities, and struggle to secure accommodations that will allow them to actively participate in school (UN, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019; stakeholder interview: Mpho Tjope). According to one person interviewed, bullying at school is particularly harmful because "it breaks another part of you, it gets at your abilities, what you can and cannot do...it tells you you do not belong, you cannot learn [and] you cannot run away from it" (stakeholder interview).

For many, the walk to and from school can be the most challenging—and dangerous—part of their day because of fear of attacks, which include being spat on, told they are cursed, and physically attacked (Ibid.). Fear of violence and the experience of bullying causes many students with albinism to drop out of school altogether. In Burkina Faso, for example, 1 out of 3 girls with albinism do not finish primary school and in Burundi, an estimated 56 per-cent of girls and boys with albinism drop out (UN, 2019). #ICanBe is a campaign led by persons with albinism which connects students and professionals with albinism to challenge stigma and introduce students to persons like them-selves who completed school and have gone to have families, hold jobs and be treated as valued members of the community. The campaign's creator describes it as "the most important work I have ever done."

Sensory disability

Students with visual and hearing impairments face higher levels of victimization than students without such impairments, although the differences may be small and may depend on the degree of vision

or hearing loss (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011; Bauman & Pero, 2011). For example, in a study that compared blind, low-vision, and students without visual impairments in Germany, researchers found that students with low vision reported higher levels of peer-victimization than both sighted and blind students (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011). In contrast, a relatively small-scale study comparing Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students in Germany, Deaf students reported higher levels of victimization than hearing students, but hard of hearing students did not report higher levels of bullying (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011). Overall, the differences between all three groups were relatively small. Other studies have found higher rates of victimization, with one concluding Deaf and hard of hearing children may experience abuse at rates four times higher than children without hearing impairments, yet have far less ability to report abuse or access justice due to communication barriers with teachers, school counselors, social workers, and others that can report child abuse and assist Deaf and hard of hearing children (Lomos & Johnson, 2012).

Segregated school environments can lead to higher risks of bullying, but in nuanced ways that are context dependent. In a study of a Blind school that included both day and boarding students, Gur & Albayrak (2017) found that while 75% of students with visual impairments overall had been exposed to violence over the past year, boarding students were at greater risk than day students (p. 2271). In a Deaf school in Jamaica, hard-of-hearing students who transferred into the school after primary school and had not learned Jamaican Sign Language (JSL) were more likely to be socially isolated and much more likely to be targeted by bullies (Focus group: Jamaica).

For some students, being in a school with students with similar disabilities can be liberating. Heagele et al. (2017) found that students who had transferred into residential Blind schools from inclusive residential schools or public or community schools reported that that had gone

from “being the only blind guy, to being one of the crowd” (p. 135). Being able to participate in physical education, which reportedly separated the “bullies and the bullied” across an axis based on the “able” and “less able” in integrated schools, was a key factor.

Mobility and motor disability

While physical appearance was reported as the most frequent reason for bullying in UNESCO’s Behind the Numbers (2018, p. 28), there is a dearth of research specifically on the involvement of students with mobility or physical disabilities in school violence and bullying. In a rare exception, Campbell et al. (2012) compared fifth-grade students with developmental coordination disorder (DCD), a chronic disability that affects children’s ability to perform everyday motor-based activities, with students without disabilities, students with DCD reported much more frequent verbal and relational victimization than their peers and, in turn, higher levels of depression. In addition to bullying, adolescent girls with physical disabilities may be twice as likely to experience sexual violence (Aliksson-Schmidt et al., 2010). Much of the exclusion and heightened risks faced by adolescents with physical disabilities may be due to increasing emphasis on normative, and gendered, body types. The focus on physical differences in adolescence, however, can be addressed in the classroom through the introduction of a greater diversity of norms through literature and other means to create a more inclusive learning environment (Hazlett et al., 2011).

Multiple disabilities

Klomek et al. (2016) found that students with both learning disabilities & ADHD in Israel were far more likely to be frequent victims of bullying (23%) than students with just one of those disabilities, who reported frequent victimization just 14% of the time. Eisenberg et al. (2015) similarly found that students in the US who reported having both mental health or emotional problem combined with a physical disability experienced the highest rates

of victimization (34%) in comparison to students with just one disability type or no disability.

Children with multiple disabilities are also among the most involved in bullying. A comparative study looking at bullying victimization and perpetration across gender, sexual orientation, weight, and disability status found that over a third (34%) of female youths with both an emotional-behavioral disability and a physical disability were involved in bullying as perpetrator-victims while youth with no disability were half as likely to be involved as perpetrator-victims (17%) (Eisenberg et al., 2016, pp. 1786-1787). The same study also found that female youth with both forms of disability were the most likely to be victims-only across all groups, including gay/lesbian boys and girls and obese boys and girls (p. 1787).

Gender

I think on the issue of school violence, the difference between male and female is like this...males usually would directly mock you, tease you. But for female perpetrators, they may ridicule you and give sarcastic comments on you. For boys, if you are weak, they may also beat you directly, collectively or individually. If females are perpetrators, they usually use some indirect ways, especially giving some sarcastic comments without using the name, like commenting on some characteristics of your body. But you know that's you they are talking about".

(Zhiqing, China, person with visual disability)

Gender mediates the experience of marginalization for boys and girls with disabilities in multiple complex ways. Girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence, especially sexual violence, at all stages of their lives, and are more vulnerable to repeat episodes of sexual violence (Hughes, et al, 2012; Jones, et al., 2012; Hui, et al., 2018; Runhare and Vandeyar, 2011; Trani, et al., 2011). Girls and young women with disabilities are also more likely than boys to internalise what they perceive as society's rejection (UNFPA, 2018). They are more likely than their male peers to think

of themselves as disabled and hold a negative self-image, making them more vulnerable to harmful social interactions with peers and others (Id.; see also Turner, et al, 2011, showing a correlation between internalizing emotional problems and heightened risks of sexual victimization).

Data on school violence and bullying among all students indicate that both girls and boys are equally likely to experience school violence and bullying, especially between the ages of 11 and 15 (UNESCO, 2019). However, the forms of violence vary, with boys more likely to experience physical violence and girls slightly more likely to experience psychological violence (UNESCO, 2019).

Similar patterns have been observed among children and young people with disabilities. Both boys and girls with disabilities are more likely than their peers to experience some form of school violence and bullying but the prevalence and forms violence and bullying take tend to differ. Girls with disabilities tend to report higher rates of relational or emotional victimization while boys with disabilities are more likely to experience physical violence (See, e.g., Andreou, et al., 2015; Plan International, 2016; Kavanaugh, 2018; Hui, et al., 2018; African Child Policy Forum, 2010). However, the magnitude of the differences tends to vary by the method of assessment used and the form of victimization measured (Blake, Kim, McCormick, & Hayes, 2011). For example, Blake et al. (2016) did not identify gender differences in victimization rates but also did not focus on the kinds of bullying, such as social victimization and exclusion, others have found are more commonly experienced by girls.

Girls and young women with disabilities are also more likely to have experienced sexual violence, although boys and young men with disabilities report higher levels of sexual violence than their non-disabled male peers (Plan International, 2016; Devries, et al., 2014; Mitra, Mouradian, & McKenna, 2012; Alriksson-Schmidt, Armour &

Thibadeau, 2010; African Child Policy Forum, 2010). In Uganda, while boys and girls with disabilities experienced similar levels of physical violence, girls with disabilities were far more likely to experience sexual violence than other girls and than boys with disabilities (Devries, et al., 2014). Similarly, among U.S. high school students, girls with disabilities were more likely than their peers to have been physically forced to have sex (Alriksson-Schmidt, Armour & Thibadeau, 2010) and were more likely to have experienced dating violence (26% of girls with disabilities compared with 8.8% of girls without) (Mitra, Mouradian & McKenna, 2012).

However, research also points to high and potentially higher rates of sexual victimization and harassment involving boys with disabilities. In Mitra, et al.'s study of dating violence among U.S. high school students with and without disabilities, boys with disabilities reported dating violence at higher rates (9.1%) than both girls and boys without disabilities (8.8% and 4.5% respectively), although at much lower rates than girls with disabilities (26%). This suggests that having a disability may create greater vulnerability to sexual violence than being male or female (see also Hui, et al., 2018, concluding that disability plays a greater role than gender in mediating certain social interactions). In a study of sexual harassment among Chilean students between grades five and eight (median age=12.45), the authors found that boys reported more sexual victimization than girls overall and that disability was one of the strongest predictors of vulnerability to victimization (Lopez, et al., 2020).

Further research into the vulnerability of boys and young men with disabilities to sexual violence and sexual harassment is needed to ensure that programs targeting the prevention of gender-based violence are inclusive of boys and young men not only as potential perpetrators but also as possible victims.

Some studies not specific to students with disabilities have shown that girls overall have more negative attitudes toward bullying and tend to adopt the role of defenders or choose not to become involved (Cowie, 2000; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Espelage, Mebane, & Swearer, 2004; Espelage & Holt, 2007; Carrera-Fernandez, et al., 2013). This may be a product of attitudes toward and adoption of gender norms. In a study among Spanish adolescents between 12 and 18 years of age, researchers found that boys who held "hostile" sexist attitudes (seeing women as a subordinate group and male social control over them as legitimate) and negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians also had the most positive attitudes toward bullying (Carrera-Fernandez, et al., 2013; see also Corboz, et al., (2018), finding that "large proportions of children who perpetrated violence (66%) agreed that a husband had the right to punish his wife if she did something wrong, compared with 55% of victimized children and 35% of children who had not experienced any peer violence").

Qualitative interviews with students at two day-schools for learners with mild intellectual disabilities in South Africa similarly reveal gendered influences on the prevalence of sexual violence against female students, particularly at the hands of male students (Nyokangi and Phasha, 2016). Students identified factors contributing to the violence, including:

- Peer pressure – Male students felt pressured to have sex (because they did not want to be teased for being gay) and admitted to violently coercing female partners into sexual activities; and
- Concealment of reports by students of sexual violence – Female students reported that their complaints about sexual abuse were ignored by school authorities, which made future occurrences more likely and discouraged them from complaining.

What this suggests is that where girls with disabilities feel less able to speak up or that their complaints will not be respected, and boys with disabilities feel pressured to prove masculinity to resist homophobic bullying, violence can be the outcome.

Gendered attitudes or acceptance of gender norms may also affect whether a victim of sexual violence recognizes it as “abuse” and is thus able to register a complaint. In a study of Deaf female college students in the U.S., Anderson and Pezzarossi found that while most of the study’s 97 participants had experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner within the previous year, fewer than half labeled these experiences as “abuse”, even when it was severe (2012). This held true across forms of violence, including physical and psychological violence and sexual coercion. While more than half of the students reported having been coerced or physically forced into sex, fewer than 10% acknowledged it as “abuse”, making it highly unlikely that they would seek help or psychosocial support (Anderson & Pezzarossi, 2012).

Research has also shown a connection between a lack of actual sexual knowledge among young people with disabilities and their increased risk of victimization (Brown-Lavoie et al., 2014). Brown-Lavoie et al. explained that when decreased social interactions and increased social isolation among students with disabilities prevent these students from receiving sexual knowledge from peers, parents, and teachers, that can increase their vulnerability to victimization, a conclusion multiple other researchers have reached (see, e.g., UNFPA, 2018 for a compilation).

Sexual orientation and gender identity

Young people with disabilities who hold diverse gender identities are also likely to experience school violence and bullying differently, but there is a need for more research in partnership with

this group. Surveys of students who identify or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex suggest that they experience bullying and stigma at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity (IGLYO, 2018; see also Rivers & Cowie, 2006; Meyer, 2008). Research also suggests that “homophobic” bullying is more common among boys and young men and more likely to affect boys and young men transgressing traditional gender norms (Meyer, 2008).

However, while a very few studies identified in this review included some limited data on students with disabilities who hold diverse gender identities the data was insufficient to support any conclusive findings regarding the risk of school violence and bullying involving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) students with disabilities. Additional research is urgently needed to fill this gap and better understand the experiences of LGBTQ students with disabilities and their experience of school violence and bullying.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) among college students with disabilities

Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects both women and men, although not to the same extent (Son, et al., 2020). Studies among college students in the U.S., typically between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, have found that nearly one in every three college students has been a victim of IPV (see, e.g., Cho & Huang, 2017). Although some studies have pointed to a heightened risk of IPV involving college students with disabilities, there have been few studies focusing on this group. Among the exceptions is an analysis of data gathered from 20,000 college students between the ages of 18 and 25 as part of the American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment II (NCHA II) (Scherer, et al., 2016). Scherer et al. found that college students with disabilities were nearly twice as likely to experience IPV as their peers, with students with mental disabilities and

multiple disabilities at the greatest risk (2016).¹⁰

Box 8:

Sexual assault and disability on campus

In 2020, the Association of American Universities (AAU) conducted a survey to assess the prevalence of sexual assault and misconduct at colleges and universities in the US. The survey included 33 public and private schools of varying size across the country and had a total of 181,752 undergraduate and graduate student respondents, all of whom were 18 years old or older and more than two-thirds of whom were between the ages of 18 and 25. The AAU found an overall rate of nonconsensual sexual contact of 13% but much higher rates for students with disabilities – 33% for women with chronic mental health conditions (depression, PTSD, anxiety, etc), 32.7% for women with two or more disabilities, and 28% for women with ADHD – compared with just under 16% for women with no disability (Cantor, et al., 2020). Rates for those who identified as LGBTQ were also high (29% for those with two or more disabilities, 26% for those with chronic health conditions) but still lower than for women with disabilities.

Initiatives to track and respond to sexual assault on campus are not uniformly inclusive of young women with disabilities. While colleges are required to collect data on the prevalence of sexual misconduct and assault, develop specific policies to address sexual assault, and implement prevention programs and support services, campuses are currently not required to consider the needs of diverse groups of students such as students with disabilities. Materials and services relating to sexual assault on campus are not required to be accessible or comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (National Council on Disability, 2018).

Similarly, in a survey of more than three thousand students across six universities in the U.S. and Canada, Son et al. (2020) found that 70% of those with disabilities had experienced IPV, compared to 58% of their peers. This is consistent with research involving women with disabilities in various age groups, which has shown that women with disabilities are more likely to be abused for more extended periods of time, are at greater risk of abuse by multiple perpetrators, and are likely to confront abusive strategies specifically targeting their disability (see, e.g., Plummer & Findley, 2012). For example, in interviews for one study of IPV among young women with disabilities in their early 20s, the participants described disability-specific abuse such as the abuser calling them “crazy”, a “moron”, or “bipolar”, threatening to tell others they were “crazy”, or blaming them for their own victimization because of their disability status (Bonomi, et al., 2018). A heightened vulnerability to violence, especially sexual violence, extends to women with different forms of disability, with women with physical disability 1.5 times and women with severe disabilities as much as four times more likely to report having been forced to have sex (Stermac, et al., 2018). Son et al. hypothesized that “[F]or individuals with disabilities, the individual vulnerability, coupled with negative social attitudes towards them, including pervasive discrimination and stereotyping, may increase the risk of IPV victimization (Son, 2020, p. 2; citing Calderbank, 2000, and Curry, Hassounah-Phillips & Johnston-Silverberg, 2001).

What is concerning is that many in this group may resist reporting in part because of actual or perceived barriers to getting help. Son et al., found that most students with disabilities who reported

¹⁰ The majority of the students participating in the study were female, including both those who identified as having a disability and those who did not but a significant number of students with disabilities identified as “homosexual, bisexual or unsure”. Unfortunately, the data were not reported in a way to enable a comparison of the rates of victimization of the latter group of students with disabilities against those holding heteronormative identities or without disabilities.

¹¹ Seventy-seven percent of the students with disabilities were female, compared with 72 percent of those without disabilities.

experiencing IPV did not seek help and fewer than one in four sought out counseling services (see also Findley, et al., 2016). Partly this was due to a lack of support on campuses (actual or perceived) and inaccessibility of services for survivors (Findley, et al., 2016). The researchers did not assess the outcomes for students with disabilities who did seek help, a significant gap.

Age

Research suggests that globally persons with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence than their non-disabled peers at every age, from early childhood to adulthood, with the majority of research on school violence and bullying focusing on primary, middle, and secondary school students. Although data show that even very young children with disabilities are more likely than their peers to experience school violence and bullying (see, e.g., Son, et al., 2014, finding that between one quarter and one-third of preschool children with disabilities had experienced some form of peer victimization at school and many had experienced multiple types of peer abuse), most studies suggest school violence and bullying is particularly significant for children with disabilities during the transition from middle childhood into adolescence, roughly ages 13-15.

Researchers in the United States have found that bullying victimization for students with disabilities peaks during middle school and declines during high school for students with disabilities (Blake et al., 2016). This is true even when controlling for other demographic or social characteristics. Researchers have theorized that this is explained by important developmental transitions, particularly the transition from middle childhood into adolescence, when children begin to vie for elevated social status and attempt to win the attention and regard of romantic prospects (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009; Pellegrini &

Long, 2002).

However, the effect of age on vulnerability to school violence and bullying against children and young people with disabilities is likely to differ depending on the context. The African Child Policy Forum found young people with disabilities reported higher rates of overall violence between the ages of 14 and 17 in four of five countries studied. Conversely, stakeholders in Sierra Leone reported witnessing school violence and bullying of younger children with disabilities by older students who were ashamed of their poor performance at school and felt shown up by their juniors (Field notes: Humanity & Inclusion). Younger children in residential schools where they share living facilities with older students are also more likely to experience violence, including sexual violence than their peers in less restrictive school settings (Disability Rights International).

While there is little research on the prevalence of school violence and bullying among students in college and post-secondary education, the risk to such students is clear. A study cited by Stermac et al., (2018) found that “students with learning or psychiatric disabilities reported greater psychological, social, and health-related effects of negative campus experiences compared to other [nondisabled] students” (p. 322). These may be leading to high dropout rates among students with disabilities, who are less likely to graduate college than their peers without disabilities. In the United States, just 41% of students with disabilities who entered college graduated within four years compared to 52% of students without disabilities. The completion rates are even lower for students with specific disabilities, such as ASD, only 39% of whom complete college within four years (Bolourian et al., 2018, p. 6).

"There is no inclusivity and it is exhausting to continuously have to fight for it. People don't take people with disabilities seriously and the fight is exhausting."

(Focus group participant, South Africa, 22 years old, female, cerebral palsy and quadriplegia)

Focus groups of students with disabilities at a major university in South Africa and another in the United States discussed bullying and neglect by their peers and by university faculty and staff as major barriers to their equal participation in higher education and their feelings of inclusion on their campuses. Both groups reported hostility from university faculty and staff to requests for accommodation and a general lack of attention to inclusion within classrooms, university facilities, and social activities, especially sports. Students described their experiences in higher education as "more subtle" forms of bullying and abuse that included inaccessible university facilities and infrastructure, exclusion from social, cultural and sporting events, suspicion from peers that they were benefiting from some kind of special treatment during exams, as well as a lack of interest from fellow students and faculty members and a lack of representation in educational curricula, even in courses on law and rights. While these consultations are by no means representative, they do point to a need for future research, ideally in partnership with young persons with disabilities.

Prior history of violence and/or victimization

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have profound effects on a child's health and can increase the risk of future victimization (Hughes, et al., 2017; Christofferson 2020; Chan et al., 2018; Harkness & Lumley, 2008). Young people with disabilities are at a higher risk of all forms of childhood victimization, including physical, emotional, sexual and peer victimization compared with young people without disabilities, placing them at increased risk of compounded victimization (Son, Parish & Peterson, 2012;

Stalker & McArthur, 2012). In one survey of 101 college students with disabilities, nearly one in four reported having experienced some form of abuse within the previous year and nearly two of three had been physically or sexually abused before the age of 17 (Findley, Plummer & McMahon, 2016). Son et al. similarly showed a strong correlation between previous adverse childhood experiences and experiences of IPV as young adults among college students with disabilities (2020). The correlation was significant across all forms of ACEs measured as well, including childhood abuse and neglect, community violence, and peer victimization. Indeed, the college students with disabilities who experienced peer victimization and community violence were at the highest risk of IPV among study participants (Son, et al., 2020).

A study among students aged 6 to 13 years in the U.S. showed similar results, finding that having a prior history of victimization was the greatest predictor of bullying victimization risk across time (Blake, et al., 2016). Age, household income, primary disability and social competence were all also significant predictors of risk of victimization but previous experience of victimization was the most significant for all students with disabilities at all ages: "Once students with disabilities had been bullied, their risk of repeated victimization increased five-fold [over time]" (Blake, et al. 2016: 204).

Early experiences of violence may be direct, in the form of abuse by parents or caregivers, or indirect, such as witnessing intimate partner violence involving one or more parent (Chan, et al., 2016). In a study of nearly six thousand school-aged children in Hong Kong, Chan et al. found not only that children with disabilities were nearly twice as likely to experience physical abuse but that when other forms of violence were present in the family, the risk of maltreatment could increase by as much as six times (2016).

Despite the connection between early experiences

of violence and later victimization, there is very little research into the multiple forms of violence to which children with disabilities may be exposed, not only peer violence but also violence within the home and the community more broadly. Filling this gap could be an essential step to reducing school violence and bullying rates overall.

Poverty, food insecurity and parental disadvantage

Poverty and food insecurity can also contribute to vulnerability to school violence and bullying for children with disabilities (Elgar, Craig, Boyce, Morgan, & Vella-Zarb, 2009). Students in Afghanistan who were bullied were also those most likely to be experiencing food insecurity (Corboz, et al., 2018). In Sierra Leone and Nigeria, children's rights advocates also reported that hunger can lead both to victimization and bullying behavior as older students prey on younger ones for food or learning materials (Field notes: Humanity & Inclusion). Students in a school for the deaf reported bullying among students targeting those whose clothes are old or indicative of poverty (Focus group: Jamaica).

Poverty can also expose children with disabilities to different forms of violence relating to school or force them out of school altogether. Data suggests poverty creates significant disparities in school completion rates at all levels of schooling for all children, not only children with disabilities. In low-income countries, just 34 percent of children in the poorest households complete primary school, compared with 79% of their peers in the wealthiest households (UN Stats, 2020). Among children with disabilities, poverty is often a factor in limiting their ability to attend school at all and denying access to quality education (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Parents who are pressured to work to support their families are often forced to send a child with disabilities to a residential facility or institution because they can't be home to provide care (Ibid.). In other cases, they are expected to pay higher school fees for their children with disabilities, forcing many to pull their children out

of school or refuse to send them at all (Ibid.).

Low income in parents has also been correlated with higher behavior problems among children in school, lower language and social skills, and greater challenges relating to peers, all of which are associated with increased risk of victimization (Son et al., 2014). A longitudinal study among children in Australia found that adolescents with disabilities from families with low levels of parental education were 51% more likely to experience social bullying victimization than their peers (Kavanaugh, 2018).

Conversely, wealth can be a protective factor reducing the vulnerability of children and young people with disabilities to school violence and bullying. Blake et al. (2016) found that children and adolescents with disabilities from higher-income families had a lower risk of being bullied than children with disabilities from lower-income families (see also Emerson & Roulstone, 2014, reaching the same conclusion in a study of adults with disabilities). They hypothesized this may be because children from higher-income families can afford status symbols and the "materialistic armor" like expensive clothing or cell phones that protect them peer teasing and increase their popularity (Blake et al, 2016)

Environmental factors affecting vulnerability to school violence and bullying

As discussed in detail above, a significant amount of school violence and bullying research focuses on individual factors to explain the connection between school violence and bullying and disability. This includes disability-related aspects of students' behavior, such as ability to communicate or normative social skills, or social identities, like gender, age and a history of exposure to violence. Duncan (2013) argues such paradigms can be ableist by pathologizing students for their "individual deficits." As an alternative, Duncan suggests a social model approach that focuses on the need for societies to create school cultures and

education systems to create environments where violence and bullying is less likely to occur. This critique brings necessary attention to the critical role that school policies and teacher practices play in setting the conditions for all students to learn free from violence and bullying victimization. The following sections take up this critique by considering the role played by learning settings and school climate in exposing or protecting children and young people with disabilities to and from school violence and bullying.

Learning setting

A growing body of research suggests that vulnerability to school violence and bullying for students with disabilities can be dependent on the learning setting but results vary significantly across studies. Learning settings for students with disabilities are diverse and range from segregated settings where children and young people with disabilities have limited to no contact with the outside world or their peers without disabilities, such as residential schools or institutions, to inclusive schools where they fully and equally participate in all aspects of school life from learning in the same classrooms with their peers to joining extracurricular activities, such as sports. In between these two poles are nonresidential segregated day schools; mainstream schools where children with disabilities spend part or all of the day in a separate special education unit or classroom; schools where students with disabilities are placed in regular classrooms, but do not receive the accommodations necessary for equal participation; and a full range in between each.

Data on the number and percentage of students with disabilities in different learning settings is incomplete (UNESCO, 2020). While the percentage of students with disabilities attending mainstream schools (as opposed to segregated schools) has increased substantially as more countries have adopted policies promoting inclusive education, it is not clear to what extent

those schools maintain segregated classrooms on the same school grounds or limit the classes students with disabilities share with their non-disabled peers (UNESCO, 2020). Despite the CRPD's prohibition on the exclusion of children and young people with disabilities from general education systems (Art. 24(2)(a)), national laws and policies do not universally require the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Instead, one out of four countries legally permit education of children with disabilities in separate settings, with many of these (exceeding 40%) in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Just 17 percent mandate inclusion, while an additional 10% of countries require integration and the remainder opting for combinations of segregation and mainstreaming (UNESCO, 2020).

UNESCO and other UN agencies promote an inclusive approach to education rather than the development of separate policies for learners with disabilities. Inclusion and equity should be seen as overarching principles that should guide all educational policies, plans and practices (UNESCO, 2017).

As with research regarding the prevalence of school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities, the data on the way in which school settings may increase or reduce the risk of school violence or bullying is difficult to analyse in part because of the variation among school settings around the world and limited descriptions within individual studies. However, the studies reviewed suggest that students with disabilities are at risk of school violence and bullying in all learning settings, including mainstream and special schools, although prevalence rates in particular settings vary significantly between studies and by disability type.

Mainstream education settings

A meta-analysis of research comparing bullying involvement of children and adolescents with and without chronic illness and/or disability found

no difference in peer victimization rates among students with chronic illness and/or disability in special schools and regular schools, suggesting that learners with disabilities were equally vulnerable to bullying victimization in both settings (Pinquart, 2017). Blake, et al. (2016) similarly found that inclusion in general education settings had no bearing on the risk of being bullied for learners with disabilities. However, other researchers have found differences in rates of victimization that vary with school setting and with disability type (see, e.g., Zablotsky, et al. (2013) and Rose et al. (2015) finding higher rates of victimization among students with autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities in mainstream settings; Rowley, et al. (2012) finding that students with less severe social impairments were at higher risk of bullying in mainstream settings). The variation in findings may be the result of the ways in which both inclusion and disability are being defined or implemented across school systems and data collection tools.

Research does suggest that placement in a special education or inclusive classroom does not always have the same effect (Saia et al., 2009), and may affect different students with disabilities differently. Rowley et al. (2012) found that students with less severe ASD experienced higher levels of victimization than those with more severe ASD in mainstream schools, suggesting the possibility that stronger social skills can lead to more frequent social engagement with non-disabled peers which may provide more opportunities for negative interactions. Interviews conducted for this review suggested an alternative theory, with key informants noting that students with mild learning or other disabilities which go undiagnosed may be targeted as slow learners and bullied by peers and teachers alike for not being able to keep up. There is some evidence that attending inclusive schools can help reduce the risk of bullying by providing opportunities for peer group association. The best factor protecting against bullying is acknowledged to be social support, provided

through friendship or even acquaintance with peers. However, inclusive settings (and even schools with thoughtful anti-bullying policies) do not, in themselves, confer protection. Children with Special Education Needs (SEN) and/or disabilities may still have low social status, have few friends and be socially rejected within them (p. 50).

Eisenberg et al. (2016) found that students with disabilities' resilience to victimization may increase if they have peers with disabilities in the same school but that, absent bullying victimization, girls with disabilities were emotionally much better off in inclusive settings with mixed peer groups. In a study involving more than 120,000 students in 8th, 9th and 11th grades in the U.S., Eisenberg, et al. (2016) found that girls with disabilities in settings with a large proportion of peers with disabilities were more likely to experience emotional distress and self-harming behaviors than those in mixed peer or mainstream settings, absent bullying victimization, suggesting being in mainstream settings in general is emotionally advantageous overall (p. 16). However, in the face of bullying victimization, having a greater number of similarly vulnerable peers in any setting made the impact of victimization less emotionally distressing for girls with disabilities (Ibid., p. 16-17). This suggests that schools should develop strategies to support and improve the social interactions between children with disabilities and their peers without disabilities in order to facilitate meaningful and inclusive peer friendships that, in turn, reduce the likelihood of peer victimization (Rowley et al., 2012).

Cook, Ogden, and Winstone (2016) found that four out of six of students with ASD in mainstream schools in their study experienced bullying, whereas only one out of five students in a special school experienced bullying. They concluded, however, that the key difference was the lack of resources in the mainstream schools to support students with ASD, whereas the special school provided "small class sizes, specialist teaching staff, and trained [teaching assistants], facilitating

social interactions and addressing bullying appropriately” (p. 267). As a consequence, students with ASD in the mainstream schools reported fewer friends than those in special schools and lacked the peer support that helps prevent victimization.

Special schools

A lack of access to quality inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities, limited supports for families, and stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities and their families leads many families to send their children to schools serving only children with disabilities (Goldman, et al., 2020). In many cases, these schools include residential facilities in which students board. Residential school settings can vary substantially in terms of the quality and safety of the school environment.

Violence and bullying can be associated with special schools in several ways. There is data suggesting that learners with disabilities in special schools experience various forms of violence, including sexual violence, at the hands of peers, teachers and school staff (see, e.g., Phasha & Nyokangi, 2012; Arulogun, et al., 2012). In addition, during focus groups and interviews conducted for this review students with disabilities expressed complicated experiences with segregated schooling. While some students with disabilities have positive associations with segregated settings in which they do not feel “disabled”, several reported that they felt stigmatized when they were outside of their special schools and in the community because of negative assumptions that community members and students their age without disabilities made about the quality of the education they were receiving in the schools (Focus group: South Africa; stakeholder interviews). Community members and school staff alike were also dismissive of the capabilities of students attending special schools. Several spoke of the attitudes of teachers within the special schools who assumed students could not

learn and taught them accordingly at a much lower level than they were capable of, making it difficult for students to join a class at their grade level in a mainstream school. Others described feeling disconnected from their families and communities because the special schools they attended were far from their homes. In some cases, that led to permanent estrangement.

But Chan, et al. found that children with disabilities attending special schools in Hong Kong were less likely to experience school violence and bullying than their peers with disabilities in mainstream schools (2018). Indeed, the proportion of children reporting victimization in mainstream schools were two to three times higher than children in special schools, including boarding schools. However, the authors note that the higher rates of victimization in mainstream schools could be attributable to the educational culture of Hong Kong in which student achievement is based almost entirely on performance on examinations, which could lead to social exclusion of some learners with disabilities (Chan, et al., 2018).

What these findings suggest is that the experience of school violence and bullying victimization may be mediated by school climate, cultural norms and contexts as much as by the experience of segregation.

Residential facilities and institutions

Although the UNCRPD calls on States to recognize the right of children with disabilities to full inclusion in their communities (Art. 19), around the world millions of children with disabilities are separated from their families and placed in boarding schools, residential care homes, orphanages, and other facilities (Desmond, et al., 2020; Goldman, et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2013). Children with disabilities are up to 17 times more likely to live in institutions than their peers (UNICEF, 2013). Although data is limited and inconsistent, a recent analysis estimated that anywhere from 3 million to nearly 10 million children and young people are living in

institutional care around the world, with most of these likely in lower and middle income countries (Desmond, et al., 2020).

There is no universally accepted definition for the term “institution”. (Desmond, et al. 2020; Rosenthal, n.d.). United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children distinguish between “institutions” and “residential care” facilities generally on the basis of size and deem the latter to be more acceptable than the former (Desmond, et al., 2020). However, in practice what constitutes an institution is unclear (Desmond, et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2013; stakeholder interviews). In some countries, there is little distinguishing a residential “school” for children with disabilities and an institution. What may be common to both are closed doors and lack of accountability which makes them inherently dangerous for children (UNICEF, 2013).

Box 9:

“A child who is hidden has no rights”¹²

Over the past 20 years, Disability Rights International (DRI) has documented the conditions of children with disabilities in institutions around the world. Their findings tell a tragic story:

- Human rights monitoring and enforcement programmes to protect children and young people with disabilities against violence and exploitation are missing or ineffective.
- Most facilities lack trained staff to support children and protect them from abusive behavior, including self-abuse.
- Violence, including sexual violence, is endemic and girls and young women with disabilities are frequently sterilized to prevent pregnancies in the expected event they will be raped.
- Children are left to languish without stimulation and often acquire developmental disabilities and some suffer from irreversible psychological damage (UNICEF, 2013).

Even though some institutions refer to themselves as “schools”, DRI investigators have found little evidence that children with disabilities are being educated. In a recent interview, DRI’s Associate Director commented that “I cannot recall anyone in any institution we have visited acting as a teacher”.

Even in well-run schools, the treatment of children and young people with disabilities is far different from what would be tolerated absent disability. A male disability rights advocate in Latin America described a visit to a special school in Uruguay where the head mistress invited him into the girls’ bathroom while she was dressing an adolescent girl. While there was no malicious intent, the right to privacy and physical autonomy of the girl being dressed were simply disregarded in the

¹² Njelesani, J. (2019). “A child who is hidden has no rights”: Response to violence against children with disabilities. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 89: 58–69.

name of expediency. A 2016 report by Human Rights Watch documented abuses of children with and without disabilities living in well-resourced residential institutions, including the lack of individual attention and nurture, a lack of privacy and a lack of accessibility.

Acting on the CRPD's mandate to promote the full inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in the social life of their communities and respect their rights to live in a home with a family is essential to reducing their vulnerability to violence and bullying in all settings, including and especially in residential schools.

Digital environments and cyberbullying

The coronavirus pandemic has prompted school closures worldwide and forced millions of students to shift to online learning. This includes tens of millions of students with disabilities, who are likely to face unique barriers shifting to online learning, including an increased potential for cyberbullying. The digital environment can offer important benefits for learners with disabilities. It can be an easier space in which to develop friendships without the need for face-to-face interaction and can provide more opportunities to seek academic assistance, find information, or ask questions privately (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Lundy, et al., 2019). However, persons with disabilities are disproportionately disadvantaged when it comes to accessing and using digital technology (Lundy, et al., 2019). Devices, websites, and applications are not consistently accessible for all learners with all disability types; schools and families do not have the financial resources necessary to supply or purchase technologically advanced and accessible equipment for all learners; and parents, teachers and school staff do not consistently have the technological expertise and knowledge to support learners using digital equipment

(Ibid.). While many learners with certain types of disabilities are likely to access and use the internet at rates similar to their peers (see, e.g., Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015, referring to adolescents with learning disabilities), overall children with disabilities are more likely to face discontinuity and disruption in internet access (Lundy, Byrne, Templeton & Lansdown, 2019).

Prevalence rates of cyberbullying involving students generally are variable across studies but range from 10% to 40% among secondary school students and 10% to 28% among college-age students (Kowalski, et al., 2016). While there are few studies of the involvement of young people with disabilities in cyberbullying, those few suggest that cyberbullying involving learners with disabilities follows patterns similar to other forms of bullying. In three studies comparing the involvement of adolescents with learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and their peers without disabilities in cyberbullying, researchers found that the students with disabilities were more likely to be victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of cyberbullying their peers without disabilities (see, e.g., Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Heiman, et al., 2015; Kowalski & Fedina, 2011).¹³ This was true even though students both with and without disabilities reported spending similar amounts of time on the internet and similar levels of expertise using social media and other online tools (Heiman, et al., 2015; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015).

As with other forms of bullying, students with disabilities are likely to be more vulnerable than their peers to cyberbullying across multiple age groups. While the studies discussed in the previous paragraph were limited to adolescents under the age of 18, a study involving 205 college students in the U.S. whose average age was 20 years old, similarly found that students with

¹³ It should be noted that the findings are limited to adolescents with learning disabilities and ADHD. More research is necessary to determine the extent to which it is possible to generalize the findings across learners with other forms of disability.

disabilities were much more likely than their peers to report online victimization (Kowalski, et al., 2016).¹⁴ The students participating included diverse disability types, including those with physical disabilities, anxiety or learning disabilities, or other types of disabilities. Recognizability of an online users' disability status appears to have had an effect on victimization as the more outwardly noticeable a student's disability was, and whether the student was receiving accommodations at school, the more likely the student was to become a victim of cyberbullying (Ibid., p. 420). Witnessing cyberbullying also increased the risk of victimization for students with disabilities (Ibid.).

The experience of cyberbullying is also gendered, with girls with disabilities being more likely to experience online victimization than boys with disabilities (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015). In a study involving 507 Israeli adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 years old, half of whom had been diagnosed with a learning disability (LD) and half of whom were considered "typically achieving", Heiman and Olenik-Shemesh found that nearly two-thirds of all girls were victims of bullying online (compared with half of all boys). The girls with LDs who attended special education classes were the most likely to be victimized online, more than both girls and boys with LDs in general education classes and girls and boys who were typically achieving (p. 150). Girls with LDs in special education classes were also the most likely to report perpetrating bullying online and being both bullied and bullying (Ibid.).

School climate

A number of studies have shown an association between school victimization of students generally and school and class climate (Lopez, et al., 2020; Moore, Astor & Benbenishty, 2020). The most common aspects included in the concept of

school climate are respectful relations between students, teachers, and administrators; respect for diversity; clarity of school rules and their fair and consistent application; and so forth (Benbenishty & Astor, 2018, p. 184). McLaughlin et al. (2010), who refer to school climate as the "social fabric of the classroom," argue that "classrooms with 'cohesion', an emphasis on peer friendships and 'caring' staff" are less likely to have bullying behavior (p. 30). In a nationally representative study in Israel involving 16,604 middle and high school students from 526 schools, researchers found that differences in the rates at which students reported sexual harassment and victimization were explained by their perceptions of school climate (Attar-Schwartz, 2009). A study of 62,679 high school students in Virginia showed the same, with differences in reporting rates explained by student perceptions of their schools as having strong disciplinary structures and high support for students (Crowley, et al., 2019). Positive school climates have also been associated with clear, fair, and consistently enforced norms (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019; Rinehart & Espelage, 2016).

School climate matters for students with disabilities as well. While research consistently shows that students with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence and bullying, research also suggests that the extent of their vulnerability depends on the climate of their schools and classrooms. Teachers and school administrators can play an integral role in creating a positive school climate for students with disabilities by facilitating positive peer relationships. There is a growing body of research that shows that students with disabilities are less vulnerable to bullying in schools where teachers encourage students with and without disabilities to play and socialize together (McLaughlin et al., 2010, p. 30-31). When teachers facilitate positive interactions between students with and without disabilities, students with disabilities are more

¹⁴ They were also twice as likely as their peers to have experienced traditional forms of bullying outside the digital environment.

likely to develop friendships with their classmates who, in turn, can be an important protective factor from bullying. The way schools react to incidence of violence and bullying is also important. Young people with disabilities participating in a study regarding their experiences of peer victimization reported that they had much better experiences in schools that had a “very strict no tolerance policy” regarding bullying in their schools (McNicholas et al., 2020, p. 3698). The same group of young people in the study reported far greater experiences of victimization in schools where school staff ignored their needs, and often excluded them from school activities or failed to provide accommodations.

A study of Deaf schools found that 33% of Deaf and hard of hearing students reported bullying compared to just 14% of hearing students in mainstream schools. But they also found that in Deaf schools, students reported that teachers intervened in bullying just 25% of the time, whereas students in mainstream schools reported that their teachers intervened in 40% of cases (Weiner et al., 2013). The authors conclude that the higher levels of bullying in Deaf schools was not due to individual characteristics of Deaf and hard of hearing students, but instead due to the failure of adults to intervene. Benbenishty & Astor (2018) note that it is not only important for school staff to be actively involved in promoting positive interactions between students in the classroom, but that they also have a responsibility to create a safe environment throughout the school, particularly in frequently “unowned” or unmonitored spaces, such as hallways, playgrounds and school yards, and parking lots, where negative subclimates can develop.

Rural environments

While children and young people with disabilities face barriers to education everywhere, they often face greater barriers in rural areas. The barriers they face can include school violence and bullying. This may be due to a greater degree of disability stigmatization in some areas due to local beliefs

and/or less knowledge, awareness, and resources regarding disability. These local factors can be reflected in the school environment. For example, teachers drawn from the community may hold many of the negative beliefs about persons with disabilities as other community members. Similarly, school administrators may have less experience with inclusive education, and thus be reluctant to enroll children with disabilities in the school or be unwilling to provide reasonable accommodations. Children and young people with disabilities in rural areas also face the same barrier to school as children without disabilities. For example, sexual harassment experienced on the way to and from school is a major barrier to adolescent girls attending school in rural Bangladesh (Amal, 2010). Some rural areas may face other factors, such as higher levels of poverty or migration, that can contribute towards unsafe school environments for certain children. In rural China, for example, “left-behind children,” who are defined as the children who stay in rural areas for an extended period after one or both parents migrated to an urban area for work, experience higher levels of bullying and victimization. Left-behind children were also found to experience higher levels of mental health problems than their peers (Zhang et al., 2019).

There is, however, a relative dearth of research literature on disability and school violence and bullying in rural areas.

A study of inclusive education in Bhutan that compared urban, semi-urban, and rural schools found that while rural schools had fewer resources to support children with disabilities and were less accessible, they were succeeding in providing caring and supportive schools. This was due to the rural schools adopting a policy of appointing older students without disabilities as peer supports, who assisted children with special education needs in using the toilet and transporting them from home to school and vice versa. This practical support was attributed to a strong Buddhist culture that values the dignity of all people (Jigyel et al., p.6).

Preventing school violence and bullying of children and young people with disabilities

There is very little peer-reviewed research into the effectiveness of interventions to prevent school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities but stakeholders consistently pointed to the need to promote an inclusive school culture and involve students, parents, teachers and school staff, community members, and other stakeholders in a whole education effort to eliminate social stigma and violence against children and young people with disabilities. The whole education approach encompasses nine components that are as essential to eliminating school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities as school violence and bullying involving non-disabled students (UNESCO, 2020). These components include:

- Strong political leadership and robust legal and policy framework to address bullying, school violence and violence against children in general
- Training and support for teachers addressing bullying and student-centred and caring classroom management
- Curriculum, learning and teaching to promote a caring school climate
- Safe psychological and physical school and classroom environment
- Reporting mechanisms for students affected by bullying, together with support and referral services
- Involvement of all stakeholders in the school community, including parents
- Student empowerment and participation
- Collaboration and partnerships between the education sector and a wide range of partners (other government sectors, NGOs, academia, and digital platforms)
- Monitoring of school violence and bullying and evaluation of responses.

Each of these components can and should be made explicitly inclusive of and accessible to students with disabilities of all types and in all learning settings. Those components raised most frequently in focus groups and stakeholder interviews are discussed in more detail below.

Laws and policies

“Through education policy, schools must offer safe spaces and psychosocial support for...children with a vice principal or head teacher appointed, charged with the responsibility of ensuring friendly school environment, where each child feels safe and can learn with confidence.”

*(Therese Tchombe, Professor Emeritus,
UNESCO Chair for Special Educational Needs,
University of Buea Cameroon)*

Participants in focus groups in Bangladesh and Nigeria collectively pointed to the need for governments to take the risk of violence against children and young people with disabilities seriously by adopting and committing to laws and policies that prohibit school violence and bullying and require children with disabilities be included in child protection measures and supportive services. A commitment to the elimination of school violence and bullying must be incorporated into national policies and action plans and such commitment must be inclusive of students with disabilities in all learning settings (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016; WHO, 2009). Condemning school violence and bullying as harmful and recognizing that students with disabilities are likely to be its targets sends a message to school administrators, teachers, parents, and students that students with disabilities cannot be ignored in strategies to prevent and respond to violence and that violence against them is unacceptable.

National policies and action plans must recognize the need for prevention of violence involving all learners and should incorporate responses to mitigate against impacts and ensure accountability

that are age-, gender-, and disability-sensitive (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Governments can and should demonstrate leadership at the national and local levels by strengthening connections between education, justice, child protection and family support systems and requiring system-wide review and reforms to ensure that all education institutions, including segregated learning settings and residential facilities serving young people with disabilities, comprehensively address the risk of violence of all types (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016; stakeholder interviews).

Focus group participants also universally called for efforts not only to enact robust and inclusive policies but ensure that they are implemented effectively for all students, especially students with disabilities. Commitments that are inadequately resourced or poorly monitored are unlikely to be effective at reducing violence against children with disabilities.

In Bangladesh participants also pointed to the need for policies specifically targeting sexual harassment of girls and young women with disabilities by male students, teachers and school staff, and policies to ensure that schools, teachers and school staff and administrators are held accountable and subject to monitoring for their adherence to child protection policies and policies to prevent school violence and bullying.

Box 10:

Risk assessment for schools

All schools have a responsibility to ensure that their staff, operations and programmes do not expose students to the risk of harm or abuse. Christian Blind Mission (CBM) created a checklist schools can use to assess gaps in their protective mechanisms (CBM, 2016). It highlights steps schools can take in the following four areas:

On **policy**: Does your school have a child safeguarding/child protection policy? If so, is it accessible to all students with all disability types, including students who are blind or have functional difficulties in sight or memory? Is it easy to understand for students with intellectual or learning disabilities and can it be explained easily to them? Is it accessible to parents of students with disabilities, including those who are persons with disabilities themselves? Is there evidence the policy is being implemented for the benefit of all students, including students with disabilities? Is there dedicated funding to support implementation and provide supports and accommodations for any students with disabilities who may need them to report violence?

On **people**: Do all staff know how to recognize and respond to child abuse if they see it, especially among children with disabilities? Have staff received training on the rights of children with disabilities, including the right to bodily autonomy? Are they sensitized to the needs of children with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities, and supported when necessary in communicating with students with disabilities?

On **operations**: Is there meaningful participation for all students, including students with disabilities, in school program design and assessment? Are there multiple age, gender and disability sensitive mechanisms in place through which students can share experiences of violence confidentially? Are these mechanisms accessible to all students with disabilities, including those who are blind or have intellectual disabilities? Are age, gender, and disability risks considered in assessments?

On **students**: Are all students made aware of what child abuse is and how to prevent and report it?

School climate

“You can start the journey to be inclusive with very little... it just takes the school ethos to make it work. Changing mindsets does not have to cost much money provided schools have some committed people are championing inclusion...”

Julia McGeown, Humanity & Inclusion

Stakeholders and focus group participants universally pointed to a welcoming school culture as fundamental to the full inclusion of students with disabilities. Creating a positive school climate and welcoming environment for all learners can reduce the vulnerability of students with disabilities to school violence and bullying (see, e.g., McLaughlin et al., 2010). Whole education approaches that engage administrators, teachers, school staff, parents, students, and members of the community in efforts to promote respectful relations between students, teachers, and staff, recognize and value diversity within schools and communities, and encourage positive interactions among students with and without disabilities can be effective at reducing the vulnerability of students with disabilities to violence (Ibid.; stakeholder interviews: Julia McGeown, Sian Tesni, Jackline Olanya). The active involvement of teachers, school administrators and parents in fair and consistent enforcement of school standards of behaviour, including codes of conduct that prohibit school violence and bullying involving any student, can also be a critical component to creating a safe and nurturing environment for students with disabilities (see, e.g., Weiner et al., 2013; stakeholder interviews).

In one of the few assessments of an intervention targeting school violence and bullying against students with disabilities, researchers evaluated the Good School Toolkit developed by the Ugandan NGO Raising Voices (Devries, et al., 2018). The Good School Toolkit is designed to promote changes to operational cultures within schools and involve students, teachers and

school staff in activities related to promoting mutual respect, engaging students in decision-making processes, using non-violent discipline, and promoting responsive school governance, among other things. A randomized control trial demonstrated that the Toolkit was accessible to students with disabilities and that it was effective in reducing levels of staff and peer violence (Ibid., p. 307)

Inclusive curricula and teacher training

As one key informant put it, “schools are a beautiful place to end stigma” (stakeholder interview: Mpho Tjope). Schools have a key role to play in transforming the root causes of violence and eliminating discriminatory stigma. Adopting curricula that are inclusive of persons with disabilities of all types, recruiting and promoting teachers and school staff with disabilities, and incorporating transformative teaching materials that challenge social norms on disability and disability stigma, and gender and sexual identity, and instead promote equity and gender equality can be important tools for violence prevention (WHO, 2014; UNESCO and UN Women, 2016).

Box 11:

Transformative education for violence prevention

Disability rights advocates in Colombia working with young people with Down Syndrome and autism spectrum disorders have found that where young people are included in comprehensive sexuality education initiatives and learn to recognize healthy and unhealthy social and sexual contact, they are more resilient and capable of standing up to inappropriate and aggressive sexual behaviour from peers and others.

To address a gap in access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for young people with disabilities, ProFamilia, Liga Colombiana de Autismo, and Asdown Colombia are providing after school CSE classes to young adults with disabilities and their peers without

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disabilities between the ages of 14 and 25 years old. The classes cover topics like menstruation and menstrual hygiene, puberty, body recognition and self-care, and sexual violence prevention. They also include training on the rights of persons with disabilities and advocacy tools so that participants learn how to claim the rights they have, and training on emotional resilience, autonomy, and the right and power to make decisions for oneself. Young adults with disabilities participate as peer trainers in the classes which has promoted an inclusive climate and mutually supportive relationships between peer participants. Feedback from project participants has shown that the more they learn about their rights, especially their right to bodily autonomy, the more comfortable they say they are resisting sexual harassment and sexual violence by peers.

Adopting targeted teaching programmes on social emotional learning can effectively prevent school violence and bullying involving children and young people with disabilities. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes are an increasingly important tool that schools are using to address school violence and bullying. They involve a series of lessons that cover social-emotional skills, such as empathy, bully prevention, communication skills, and emotion regulation. Espelage et al., (2015) found that the level of bullying perpetration by students with disabilities reduced significantly for students with disabilities that had participated in a middle school SEL program for two years in comparison with a control group. The level of victimization of students with disabilities, however, was not reduced, which may be indicative of how vulnerable students with disabilities are to bullying from others. In a subsequent study, Espelage et al., (2016) found that despite not having reduced the victimization of students with disabilities, the SEL continued to be an effective vehicle for increasing prosocial skill development and academic outcomes for students with disabilities. In comparison to students with disabilities in a control group, the students with disabilities who

had participated in the SEL program reported a greater willingness to intervene in bullying situations and had dramatically raised their grades a half grade higher.

Training teachers and school staff on the principles of inclusion and providing them with the competencies and tools to accommodate and create environments where all students can feel respected and included is also a key step to prevent violence and bullying (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2019). Teachers are critical partners to all learners in creating a classroom environment that is welcoming for students with disabilities and that does not tolerate bullying (Ibid.; McLaughlin, 2010; Weiner et al., 2013).

"[T]he spirit that was built by the teachers, particularly to the other students, was the spirit of collectivism... this lasted from the beginning of my school to the end. For example, when I cannot read a book, friends help me to read it. In fact, this is not a school that has previous experience with disabilities at all. But they accepted me wholeheartedly."

Focus group participant, Indonesia

Teacher training should also include training on how to recognize when students have special needs or require additional resources to succeed. Too often, students who struggle to communicate, hear or see are simply labeled slow learners and are not fully included in classroom activities (stakeholder interviews: David Rodrigues, Mpho Tjope).

Accessible reporting mechanisms

"If a student [or teacher or school staff] cannot speak out about smaller issues, a student will never speak out about sensitive topics [like bullying]."

Jackline Olanya Amaguru, CBM

Respecting the input of all students and providing **age-, gender-, and disability-sensitive feedback mechanisms** through which students can share information about their experiences in school, register complaints or concerns, and feel confident **they will be listened to and respected** can reduce the chances that school violence and bullying will go unrecognized and unaddressed and empower students as advocates for their own well-being (stakeholder interviews: Jackline Olanya). An effective feedback mechanism supports accountability, increases transparency, promotes empowerment, and collects input to inform monitoring, evaluation and school programme improvement efforts, while providing early warnings of institutional problems (Educo (Member of the Child Fund Alliance), et al., 2015). Removal of barriers to reporting violence and accessing protection measures should be a priority. Data shows that children and young people with disabilities face multiple significant barriers to reporting violence and receiving protection against it (Plan International, 2016). Plan International identified 3 types of barriers, including:

- Environmental barriers, such as inaccessible infrastructure or public transportation;
- Social barriers, including a lack of training relating to disability among child protection professionals, school staff, law enforcement and other social support service providers, stigma and attitudinal barriers, and communication barriers; and
- Institutional barriers, including policies that are openly discriminatory or not inclusive of persons with disabilities, especially children, and mechanisms that prevent the

full participation of children with disabilities in decision-making about their education.

In addition to these, researchers have found that children with disabilities are less likely to disclose abuse and more likely to delay disclosure than their non-disabled peers (Hershkowitz et al. 2007). As noted above, they are less likely to describe what they experience as abuse or to understand it as violence (Anderson & Pezzarossi, 2012). Child protection practitioners also report a lack of confidence in working with children with disabilities which can affect their willingness to engage protection mechanisms on their behalf (Stalker et al. 2010; Taylor et al. 2014) or to seek and respect their views (Miller & Brown 2014).

Removing these barriers can be accomplished by **training and sensitising teachers, school staff, child protection practitioners and other social service providers** about the rights, needs and capabilities of children with disabilities; involving organisations of persons with disabilities in community education strategies to reduce stigma and address bullying of young people with disabilities, and improving accessibility of programmes and informational materials relating to the rights of children with disabilities and prevention of school violence and bullying (Plan International, 2016; McNamara, 2017).

Student empowerment and participation

Removing barriers to full participation in school settings and promoting equal opportunities for students with disabilities can promote peer interactions and social inclusion and reduce vulnerability to bullying (Blackman, et al., 2017; see also Danes-Staples, et al., 2013 regarding the role of extracurricular activities in reducing school violence against students with disabilities). Providing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in student committees, especially those relating to school culture and prevention of bullying, can also provide meaningful opportunities for students to share their experiences of violence.

Stakeholders report that when children with disabilities are included, awareness of violence and bullying increases and levels of violence are reduced (Stakeholder interviews: Stacey Blackman, UWI-Cave Hill; Sian Tesni, CBM).

As the UN Secretary General noted:

“Children are key experts on bullying as they are the ones who suffer from its harmful effects and are uniquely placed to inform solutions: children must therefore be part of all efforts aimed at prevention, protection and response, must be provided with opportunities to participate effectively and must be informed of available support services; in particular, children in vulnerable situations must be given priority, including through efforts to promote mutual respect and tolerance for diversity that overcome stigmatization, discrimination or exclusion based on, inter-alia, race, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual orientation” (UNSG, 2018).

Recognizing that children with disabilities are in the best position to know what they need most and actively engaging in solutions may go a long way toward reducing stigma and eliminating school violence and bullying.

“When children are given the space to voice their opinion, it increases their self-confidence, thus enabling them to speak up to appropriate and trusted people when facing violence.”

(World Vision MEER, 2014)

Research and data

Action to prevent and respond to school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities should be informed by research and data. Studies that evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to prevent violence against persons with disabilities are rare (see Mikton, et al., 2014) and studies on prevention of school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities almost non-existent. Investing in evaluation and research

on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent school violence and bullying is essential to inform the development of targeted policies and strategies and will go a long way toward providing greater accountability and transparency of existing programmes and practices. A clear monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, relevant and feasible indicators and comprehensive national data collection systems can help schools and education officials to understand what is changing as it happens and therefore improve policymaking and resource mobilization (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016).

Box 12:

10 Principles for My Protection, Well-Being and Development as a Girl, Boy or Adolescent with Disabilities

In 2018, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility launched the Global Campaign for the Good Treatment of Girls, Boys and Adolescents with Disabilities to raise awareness and advance efforts to eliminate violence and children and adolescents with disabilities. The core of the Campaign are the 10 principles below:

- I exist as I am and I am a person just like you.
- I like that you are kind, you love me and play with me.
- I like that you take care of me, protect me and teach me how to protect myself.
- I want you to accept me as I am, help me develop my abilities and talents and give me a good quality education.
- I like that you listen to me, explain to me what is happening and consider my opinion.
- I like that you believe in me and help me grow.
- I like that you understand me, support me and reassure me when I am upset, angry or frustrated.
- I like it when you include me.
- I want you to respect me and protect me from all forms of violence everywhere and under all circumstances.
- It matters to me that you believe me.

Conclusion and recommendations

This literature review collects and synthesizes the available evidence on school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities using an intersectional lens. It is a preliminary effort to uncover the interaction between disability and disability types, gender and gender orientation, age, and other socio-demographic and environmental factors on risk and prevalence of school violence and bullying.

Though the literature on school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities is limited, especially outside the Global North and the findings of studies vary depending on how data was collected and which populations were included, some key messages emerged.

School violence and bullying disproportionately affect students with disabilities at every age and in every learning setting and can act as a barrier to realization of their right to an inclusive education on an equal basis with all other students. In every study reviewed for this report, students with disabilities were as or more likely than their peers to be victims of school violence and bullying.

Gender, age, disability type, prior experiences with violence, poverty, and family disadvantage can all increase vulnerability to school violence and bullying for students with disabilities and can affect whether students are able and willing to report abuse. To ensure that all students are empowered to recognize abuse and speak out against it on their own and their peers' behalf, schools must enable open and accessible platforms that are age-, gender-, and disability-sensitive and allow students to share concerns, raise complaints, and have their voices heard and respected.

Reducing school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities requires a whole

education approach that recognizes learners with disabilities as vulnerable to school violence and bullying at all ages and in all learning settings and engages school administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, and members of the community in creating school climates that are inclusive and welcoming of all students. This includes engaging all members of the school community in efforts to eliminate stigma and negative attitudes about disability and challenge social norms that support discrimination against learners with disabilities. It also requires meaningful efforts to empower students with disabilities and facilitate their right to fully participate in all aspects of their school environments including equal opportunities in classrooms and extracurricular activities, including student leadership.

Future recommendations based on evidence gaps

- National laws, policies, and strategic action plans promoting inclusive education should be reviewed to ensure they adequately recognize that school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities can be a significant impediment to students' ability to realize their right to an inclusive education. Efforts to create inclusive schools must incorporate mechanisms to prevent school violence and bullying and schools and school staff must be accountable for their implementation, including consistent monitoring and enforcement.
- Future work on the causes and prevention of school violence and bullying needs to be inclusive of students with disabilities, recognizing that they are diverse and that disability is one factor among many which can intersect with multiple social, demographic and environmental factors to increase (and reduce) vulnerability to school violence and bullying. Data collected on school violence and bullying should be disaggregated based on gender, age, and disability, at minimum, and should include socio-economic factors and prior experiences of violence to the extent possible.

- There continues to be a need for more prevalence data, particularly data that allows for national and cross-national comparisons and that includes persons with disabilities in the Global South. Data collection should be systematized to use consistent definitions of disability to the extent possible.
- Studies on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent school violence and bullying involving students with disabilities in diverse learning settings are urgently needed to inform the development of targeted policies and programmes.
- Further research into the intersection of gender, disability and vulnerability to school violence and bullying is needed to assess the vulnerability of boys and young men with disabilities to sexual violence and sexual harassment and the role gender plays in encouraging violence by boys and young men with disabilities. Such research can ensure that programs targeting the prevention of school-related gender-based violence are inclusive of boys and young men not only as potential perpetrators but also as possible victims and that such programmes accurately address the ways in which ideas about masculinity can negatively influence the conduct of boys and young men with disabilities.
- Gender-sensitive research with LGBTQI students with disabilities is also urgently needed to understand the nature of intersectional discrimination and the ways in which the experiences of sexual minorities with disabilities may differ from those of other learners, including learners with disabilities.
- Recognizing that few students with disabilities continue into higher education, research with college-age students with disabilities is needed to assess the degree to which disability discrimination including experiences of school violence and bullying may interfere with student learning and present a barrier both accessing and enjoying higher levels of education.
- Given the shift to online schooling for many students, there is an urgent need for increased attention to the risks of cyberbullying involving students with disabilities and the effectiveness of technological and other tools of prevention.

School violence and bullying involving students with disabilities is complex and varied. Its elimination depends on the commitment of all stakeholders, including not only policymakers, schools, teachers and parents, but students and the communities in which they live.

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METHODOLOGY ANNEX

Collecting resources

Sources for the review included peer-reviewed journal articles and books, policy and programme documentation from international agencies, and reports produced by or for international NGOs, UN agencies, bilateral donors and other reputable organizations.

Resources were collected using the electronic databases listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Electronic databases

ERIC (EBSCO)	PAIS Index
Scopus	Web of Science
JSTOR	Ulrichsweb
PUBMED	Google/Google Scholar
EPPI-Centre database of education research	Campbell Collaboration

A sample of the journals available through these databases is contained in Table 2. Extensive searches were conducted in the ERIC (the Education Resource Information Centre)/EBSCO (e-book collection), JSTOR (containing scholarly journals and books across all disciplines) and PAIS Index (social and public policy literature) databases. Based on the results of those searches, narrower search strings were used in the remaining databases until a point of saturation was reached and searches consistently returned duplicates.

Table 2. Sample of journals included

Aggression and Violent Behavior	Journal of Development Effectiveness
American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities
Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal	Journal of Disability Policy Studies
Child Abuse and Neglect	Journal of Education and Research
Child Abuse Review	Journal of Family Violence
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health	Journal of Inclusive Education
Child Development	Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability
Child Maltreatment	Journal of International Development

Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review	Journal of Interpersonal Violence
Development and Psychopathology	Journal of Partner Abuse
Development in Practice	Journal of Public Health
Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews	Journal of Social Work
Disability & Rehabilitation	Learning Disability Quarterly
Disability & Society	Learning Disabilities Research and Practices
Economic Journal of Development Issues	Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology
Exceptional Child	Psychology of Violence
Gender and Development	Psychology Women's Quarterly
Health for All	Socio-Economic Development Panorama
International Journal of Disability, Development and Education	The Comparative Education Review
International Journal of Life Sciences	The Lancet
Journal for Adolescent Research	Trauma, Violence and Abuse
Journal of Advanced Academic Research	Violence Against Women
Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health	Violence and Victims
Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma	Women's Studies International Forum
Journal of Child Sexual Abuse	World Bank Research Working Paper Series

In addition to searches of peer-reviewed journals and books, resources were also collected through reviews of the websites of a selection of international NGOs, UN agencies, international donors and other organizations working in the field of inclusive education, disability advocacy, and prevention of violence against children, including school violence and bullying and gender-based violence.

The organizations included in the website reviews are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Websites reviewed

3ie (3ieimpact.org)	International Labour Organization (ILO)
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ActionAid	includ-ed (European Network on Inclusive Education and Disability)
ADD International (Action for Disability & Development)	Inclusive Education in Action
African Child Forum	Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center
African Youth with Disabilities Network	Pacific Disability Forum
APF France Handicap	Plan International
Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities	RIADIS (The Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families)
Autism Speaks	RISE Anti-Bullying Initiative
AWID	Save the Children
Better Care Network	Special Education Network and Inclusion Association International (SENIA)/SENIA Youth
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	StopBullying.gov
CARE	Tarshi
Child Justice	UNAIDS
Christian Blind Mission (CBM)	UNDP
CREA	UNFPA
Disability Rights International	UNHCR
Disabled Persons International – Asia Pacific	UNICEF
Down Syndrome International	UN Women
End Corporal Punishment	University College-London International Disabilities Research Centre (IDRC)
European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education	World Anti-Bullying Forum
European Disability Forum	World Bank

FIRAH (Recherche Appliquee Sur Le Handicap/Applied Disability Research)	World Blind Union (WBU)
International Association of Special Education (IASSE)	World Federation of the DeafBlind (WFDB)
International Disability Alliance (IDA)	World Health Organization (WHO)
International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC)	

Additional data was also provided by stakeholders and key informants in the course of the consultations described in more detail below.

Search parameters

Search strings were developed to incorporate synonyms for key terms including terms reflecting medicalized approaches to disability. Search strings were adapted as searches revealed new and related terms for the researchers to pursue and as searches using certain terms, e.g. handicapped, consistently yielded few or no results.

A sampling of search strings is provided in Table 4. A complete list of search terms which includes those reflecting a medicalized approach to disability, such as disorder, deficiency(ies) or abnormal(ities), as well as terms specific to a particular disability identity, such as Deaf, neurodiverse, and the like, follows.

Table 4: Sample search strings

Disability	AND			Violence	AND	School		
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Violence	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Abuse	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Bullying	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Cyberbullying	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Harassment	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Exclusion	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Punishment	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Corporal	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Trauma	AND	School	OR	Education

Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Exploitation	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Discrimination	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Stigma	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Aggression	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Targeting	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Maltreatment	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Harm	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Victim	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Survivor	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Impaired	AND	Violence	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Special needs	AND	Abuse	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Rehabilitation	AND	Bullying	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Blind	AND	Cyberbullying	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Deaf	AND	Harassment	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Autism	AND	Exclusion	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Mental health	AND	Punishment	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Psychiatric	AND	Corporal	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Disorder	AND	Trauma	AND	School	OR	Education
Disability	OR	Handicapped	AND	Inclusion	AND	School	OR	Education

Searches were conducted using the following terms:

Relating to disability: disabilit*, disable*, handicap*, impair*, disorder*, deaf*, blind*, autis*, learning, intellectual*, “special needs”, “mental health”, mental*, psychiatric, psychologic*, speech

Relating to violence: violence, violen*, aggress*, neglect, maltreat*, abus*, exclu*, assault, harass*, bully*, punish*, target*, exploit*, discriminat*, stigma*, disciplin*

Relating to education: school*, educat*, student*, study, institute*, university, college, technical, vocat*, rehab*

Search strings were constructed combining at least one term from each group in all databases searched.

Criteria for quality assessment

The resources collected during the steps above underwent a screening process to assess their quality and relevance for inclusion in the review. During this screening process, researchers assessed the quality of studies for inclusion using the criteria in Box 1 below:

Box 1: Criteria for quality assessment

- If not peer-reviewed, is the research/report from a reputable organization or source, and/or has it been cited by others?
- Are the aims and objectives of the research clearly stated?
- Is the research design clearly specified and appropriate for the aims and objectives of the research?
- Do the researchers provide a clear account of the process by which their findings were reproduced?
- Do the researchers display enough data to support their interpretations and conclusions?
- Is the method of analysis appropriate and adequately explicated?
- Does the bibliography at a glance cite material that is in line with the research questions being explored?

Studies were reviewed using the above appraisal prompts to evaluate rigour, credibility, dependability, transferability and relevance. While the methodological rigour of each study was a criterium for inclusion, in keeping with the Best Evidence Synthesis approach the review applied a low threshold to maximise the inclusion and contribution of a wide variety of evidence applicable to this topic.

Consultation processes

A core demand of the disability rights movement is that no decision should be made about the rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities without their participation—in other words, “nothing about us, without us”. Because persons with disabilities are the best ones to speak about matters that affect

them and which are relevant to their lived experiences, inclusion of persons with disabilities in the research process was an essential element of this review.

To facilitate participation by and consultation with persons with disabilities, the review incorporated two processes in addition to the literature review: consultations through student-led discussion groups and key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

Student-led discussion groups

In order to facilitate input from students and young adults with disabilities into the findings of this report, the researchers coordinated a series of discussion groups with support from students, researchers, and NGO staff in China, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, Bangladesh, Jamaica and the U.S. Participants were recruited with the assistance of organizations of persons with disabilities (in Jamaica and China), disability service and human rights centres at universities (in the United States, Indonesia and South Africa), and NGOs working in disability rights advocacy and inclusive education (in Bangladesh and Nigeria). Participation was voluntary and subject to a research protocol adapted from the Ethical and Safety Guidelines for Research on Gender-Based Violence published by Partners for Prevention (http://www.partners4prevention.org/sites/default/files/ethical_and_safety_guidelines_for_research_with_men_final.pdf). Prospective participants were informed of the purpose of the discussion groups in advance, the matters to be discussed, that the discussion was part of a research project, and that their identities would be kept confidential. They were also advised that they could decline to participate or discuss any matter and were asked to consent verbally or in writing to join the discussions. Where quotes from focus group participants are used in the report, names are withheld or pseudonyms assigned.

Accommodations were available for participants on request, including sign language interpreters in Jamaica and China, and captioning services in China. Participation also conformed with local guidelines to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and was virtual where appropriate.

Table 5: Focus group demographics

Country	Number of participants	Gender	Age	Disability
China – Group 1	7	7 female	21-39 (one preferred not to disclose)	Visual impairment (3), autism (1), cerebral palsy (1), dwarfism (1), physical impairment (1)

China – Group 2	7	4 female, 3 male	22-28 (one preferred not to disclose)	Deaf (4), visual impairment (2), scoliosis (1)
Bangladesh (facilitated by Sightsavers' Inclusion Works programme staff)	14	6 female, 8 male	Not available	Physical impairment (8), visual impairment (6), speech impairment (1)
Indonesia (Islamic University of Indonesia Centre for Human Rights)	3	3 male	Average age 23	Visual impairment (2), Deaf (1)
Jamaica (DeafCan)	6	3 female, 3 male	20-29	Deaf (5), hearing impairment (1)
Nigeria (facilitated by Sightsavers' Inclusion Works programme staff)	25	13 female, 12 male	Average age 26	Not available
South Africa (University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights, Disability Rights Unit)	6	1 female, 3 male, 1 queer, 1 unidentified	Not available	Visual impairment (4), cerebral palsy and quadriplegic (1), non-disabled (1)
United States (University of Washington)	4	4 female	19-23	ADHD/anxiety (1), mobility/chronic impairment (1), non-disabled (2)

Key informant interviews

In addition to the discussion groups, the review also included consultations with technical experts and stakeholders to assist in validating the findings as well as provide input on the topics of the review, the evidence identified, and other research that may be relevant. A complete list of key informants and stakeholders interviewed is contained in Table 6.

Table 6: Key informant and stakeholder interviews

NAME	ORGANIZATION
Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo	Global Disability Advisor, World Bank Group
Sergio Meresman	Inter-American Institute on Disability Inclusive Development (Uruguay)
Sian Tesni	Senior Advisor for Education, Christian Blind Mission (CBM)
Jackline Olanya Amaguru	Safeguarding Manager, Global Security and Safeguarding Unit, CBM
Julia McGeown	Global Inclusive Education Specialist, Humanity & Inclusion
Mpho Tjope	Founder, #ICanBe (South Africa)/Albinism Advocacy for Access
Mussa Chiwaula George Kayange	Director General, Southern African Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD)
George Kayange	Director of Programmes, SAFOD
Liesbeth Roolvink	Global Technical Lead, Education Systems, Sightsavers
Purna Kumar Shrestha	Education Lead, VSO International
Lael Mohib	Enabled Children (Afghanistan)
Pashtana Durrani	Learn Afghanistan/Malala Fund Champion
Mohammed Ali Loutfy	Executive Officer, Disabled Peoples International
Mildred Omino	2020 Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity/Women & Realities of Disability Society (Kenya)
Priscila Rodriguez	Associate Director, Disability Rights International
Risikat Toyin Muhammed	Women Disability Self Reliance Foundation (Nigeria)

NAME	ORGANIZATION
Diana Carolina Moreno	Director of Incidents (Directoria de Incidencia), Profamilia (Colombia)
Monica Cortes	Executive Director, Asdown Colombia
Edith Betty Roncancio Morales	Director, Liga Colombiana de Autismo (LICA)
Jean Elphick	Independent consultant (formerly with Afrika Tikkun)
Academic Centers/Researchers:	
David Rodrigues	University of Lisbon, National Counselor of Special Education, President of the Pro Inclusion Association (Portugal)
Stacey Blackman	University of West Indies – Cave Hill Campus (Barbados)
Anjali Forber-Pratt	Department of Human and Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University
Therese Tchombe	Professor Emeritus & Honorary Dean, UNESCO Chair for Special Educational Needs, University of Buea (Cameroon) (email correspondence)
Innocentia Mgijima	University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights, Disability Unit (email correspondence)
Rami Benbenishty	Bar-Ilan University, Israel (email correspondence)
Ron Avi Astor	UCLA (email correspondence)
UN entities:	
Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes	Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General on Disability and Accessibility
Ikponwosa Ero	United Nations Independent Expert on Albinism

Luisa Sotomayor

Office of the Special Representative of the
Secretary General on Violence against Children

Francisco Quesney

Office of the Special Representative of the
Secretary General on Violence against Children