

***“If you dare turn him down, he would then beat you for every slight mistake you do”:***  
**Insights from Ugandan schoolgirls on teacher sexual violence**

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# Introduction

- Sexual violence in schools is shrouded in secrecy, stigma and shame, especially when committed by an authority figure.
- Sexual violence by teachers is often missed or underreported in research, overlooked in VAW and VAC frameworks and interventions – though it has emerged in small scale qualitative studies – sexual taunts or touching, sex for goods/grades, rape and sexual assault.
- Why is it so difficult to find out about? What can be done about it?
- Our aim is to share a mixed methods analysis of girls' experiences in schools in Uganda



Conceptualising  
violence as a  
web of power

# Contexts of Violence in Adolescence Cohort Study (CoVAC)

- Mixed methods, longitudinal research (2017-2023) in Luwero District, Uganda – aims to build understanding on how family, peer, school and community contexts affect young people’s experiences of violence in adolescence and early adulthood
- 3 waves of quantitative data collection with young people (2014, 2018, 2022) – our analysis focuses on wave 2 data with 2773 young people
- Qualitative data collection 2-3 months per year (2018-2022) with 36 young people aged 15-18, & teachers, caregivers, peers, other stakeholders.
- Dialogical analysis – bringing different lenses to interpret and act on emerging findings



## Teacher sexual violence among girls in school: Overall prevalence & girls' characteristics (CoVAC Wave 2)

2018 (average age 17)	No (n=803)		Yes (n=41)		OR (95% CI)
	n	%	n	%	
Prevalence	803	95.1	41	4.9	
Difficulty					
No difficulties	555	95.5	26	4.5	REF
Some difficulties	222	95.7	10	4.3	0.96 (0.46, 2.03)
Disability	26	83.9	5	16.1	4.11 (1.46, 11.55)
Family connectedness					
Low	231	92.8	18	7.2	1.94 (1.03, 3.66)
High	572	96.1	23	3.9	REF
Peer connectedness					
Low	346	93.8	23	6.2	1.68 (0.89, 3.16)
High	455	96.2	18	3.8	REF
School connectedness					
Low	386	93.0	29	7.0	2.60 (1.31, 5.16)
High	415	97.2	12	2.8	REF

# Girls' narratives

## 1) Abusive sexual advances

*“He can approach you seeking for an intimate relationship with you and when you turn down his offer, he can start under marking you with the aim of failing you. He does that so that you can fall into his trap.” (Otim, 16 years)*

## 2) Consensual but concealed

*Ruth (19 years): Why would they report such cases (sex with teachers) because you have a right to say yes or no, he wasn't forcing anyone, but again he was also dating those who were weak and would give in to his advances.*

*Researcher: What interests the girls to date their teachers?*

*Ruth: The favours that come along with that, for instance, getting free marks during an exam, exemption from being caned, financial support.*

## 3) Ambiguous jokes & gestures

## Juliet's narrative (20 years)

*“The teacher gave me a sweet and said to me that that candy was mine. I thanked him. The next time he came and said to me that he gave me a candy and I should reciprocate. I thought he was joking, but he did that every day, he would ask me to go and meet him every day, and he would ask me where his sweet was. He could even ask for me at 8pm. [...]*

*When he started asking students to come and find me, I stopped going to see him. Now, he has become rude to me even in class. But I said to myself that I shall not buy the sweet. It could breed me problems, if I told my parent that I bought a sweet, she would ask me what I was thinking. But I said that if he persists, I shall call mum or the priest and talk to them. But he has since stopped. The students had become inquisitive, they were wondering why I was being called more often.”*

# Conclusion: Implications for violence prevention

- Schools may be sites of sexual violence, in which gendered, institutional authority is used by male staff to sexually abuse and exploit female students.
- Layers of silencing make it difficult to identify, speak out, report and take action.
- Multiple dialogues needed between research, policy, practice partners, teachers and young people, to support work in schools:
  - To strengthen school systems for accessible, safe reporting & response
  - To support professional integrity and accountability among teachers
  - To promote inclusive school cultures that foster equitable gender relations, connectedness & safety
  - And beyond schools, to tackle patterns of discrimination and inequalities – based on socio-economic hardship, gender and disability – that increase vulnerabilities.