



# TACKLING SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

## Summary of an Impact Study on Teachers and Students

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# INTRODUCTION



A baseline study conducted in Battambang and Svay Rieng provinces in Cambodia in the year of 2018 indicates that a substantial share of students in primary and lower secondary education experiences emotional abuse, physical violence or sexual harassment (Cabus et al., 2019). Isolation, verbal assault, humiliation and intimidation are examples of emotional abuse, while hitting, beating, kicking or pulling hair are examples of physical violence. Sexual harassment is defined as touching and non-touching behaviours that the child did not like/approve (see FAWE, 2018, p.99).

Emotional abuse or physical violence within a carer-child relationship at school can be used by teachers in teaching practices as an (acceptable) form of discipline. It is a matter of fact that in many countries, these negative forms of discipline are not considered abusive (Devries et al., 2015; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2016). Violence against boys and girls is often accepted and tolerated; as observed in Cambodia (Hillis et al., 2018). However, it may seriously endanger children's mental or physical health, and, as such, its occurrence cannot be ignored (UNGEI, 2018). The way teachers, or other school staff, and students conduct, perceive and/or experience these negative forms of discipline heavily depends on gender norms and beliefs, gender stereotypes, and perceived inequality between the sexes. Therefore, one cannot disentangle negative forms of discipline from knowledge and understanding of gender equality and of unacceptable forms of gender-based violence. In this respect, and within the broader context of the school environment, previous literature classifies emotional abuse, physical violence and sexual harassment under the umbrella of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV). We adopt the umbrella of SRGBV throughout this abstract by looking at teachers' beliefs and practices of emotional abuse and physical violence, and students' ratings of experiencing emotional abuse, physical violence or sexual harassment at or on the way to school.

# TEACHING FOR IMPROVED GENDER EQUALITY AND RESPONSIVENESS



To tackle SRGBV in Cambodia, a Belgian international organization, VVOB – *education for development* (VVOB), launched the project Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness (TIGER), together with its consortium partners Puthi Komar Organisation (PKO), Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) and Kampuchea Action to Promote Education (KAPE). The project ran between 2017 and 2020.

The TIGER project included teacher professional development (TPD) for in-service teachers and school leaders in primary and lower secondary schools in Battambang province. The TIGER project team created an Action Guide to develop and or strengthen teachers' and school leaders' understanding of gender responsive pedagogy and gender equity and to provide tools and strategies to establish a violence-free school climate. Teachers and school leaders from the participating TIGER schools received several trainings using the Action Guide. At the end of training sessions, there was also a refresher training. This training dealt with the concepts of sex and gender and gender-responsive pedagogy (incl. lesson planning, teacher material development, the use of language and interactions, positive discipline and assessment of gender interactions and stereotypes in the classroom).

Furthermore, the TIGER project team, core trainers and Civil Society Organizations individually coached teachers to address the challenges they face while implementing what's learned in daily teaching practice. Teachers could also receive support in peer support discussions, or 'learning cycles'. Such learning cycles offer teaching staff a platform to share experiences and further strengthen their competences in establishing gender responsive school environments.

Finally, TIGER further included a sensitization campaign at the grassroots-level, and an advocacy campaign at national and sub-national level.

# AN IMPACT STUDY ON TIGER



This abstract summarizes the evidence base of two working papers dealing with the effectiveness of the TIGER project: one working paper addresses the impact at teacher-level (Cabus et al., 2021a), and one paper the impact at student-level (Cabus et al., 2021b). The analyses rely on a baseline study conducted by Cabus et al (2019) end 2018 in 20 treatment schools in Battambang province and 20 control schools in Svay Rieng province, and on new data collection in October 2020 (post-intervention) in the same schools. The treatment schools correspond to all rural schools in Battambang province that participated in TIGER. For these schools we carefully selected a comparable set of rural schools in Svay Rieng province. To support causal claims on the impact of the TIGER project on SRGBV, we have compared teachers' and students' ratings regarding scales of emotional abuse, physical violence and sexual harassment in Battambang province with Svay Rieng province at baseline and post-intervention. The quantitative data were supplemented with qualitative data on key informants, like members of the TIGER project team, school leaders, parents and teachers.

The results on the impact of the TIGER project are presented separately for teachers and students. In line with the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009, p.185), we consider several levels on which the TIGER project could have had an impact. The first level on which the TIGER project can have an impact is the *"increased teachers' knowledge and skills [and corresponding] changes in attitudes and beliefs."* In the questionnaire, we translated this first level into questions underlying scales that reflect teachers' beliefs regarding acceptable forms of discipline. For example, the scale of (un)acceptable forms of emotional abuse deals with answers to the questions: *How acceptable are the following forms of discipline to you? Shout or curse at a child, call it names like "monkey" or "cow", laugh about a child. Deduct marks from tests or homework. Collect a fine from a child or make it buy things. Make a child stand in the front of the classroom or run rounds on the playground. Make a child do chores (E.g.: pick up rubbish, water flowers, clean toilets).* Further, the scale of (un)acceptable forms of physical abuse deals with answers to the questions: *How acceptable are the following forms of discipline to you? Hurt a child (Eg: pull its ears, hit with your hand, a ruler, stick or rolled up paper). Make a child hurt itself (Eg: by hitting its knuckles on the table, standing on one leg for a long time).* Respondents could answer the questions dealing with emotional and physical abuse on a 5-point Likert scale that assesses these forms of discipline as 'very bad'; 'bad'; 'neutral'; 'good'; or 'very good'.

We have also asked questions to the teachers dealing with their changes in performance of emotional abuse and physical violence. Hereto, we asked the same questions as above, but then starting with: *How often do you use the following forms of discipline yourself?* Respondents could again answer on a 5-point Likert scale that assesses the forms of discipline as 'never'; 'seldom'; 'sometimes'; 'often'; or 'very often'.

The questionnaires for teachers did not address sexual harassment.

The second level in the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009, p.185) on which the TIGER project can have an impact is the student owing to an experienced “change in instruction.” We included questions in the questionnaires targeted at students dealing with experiencing emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment. These questions correspond to the same questions asked to the teachers, however, then answered from the perspective of the student. Furthermore, we included one additional question dealing with student ratings of experiencing sexual harassment. The scale of experiencing sexual harassment deals with answers to the questions: *How often did someone say things to you or show you images that were related to sex that you did not like? How often did someone try to touch a part of your body that you do not like to be touched on?* Respondents could answer on a 5-point Likert scale that assess the forms of discipline as ‘never’; ‘seldom’; ‘sometimes’; ‘often’; or ‘very often’.



# THE EFFECTS OF TIGER ON TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



In the tables below, we summarise the impact of the TIGER project on each of the aforementioned scales dealing with emotional abuse, physical violence and sexual harassment at the level of the teachers and at the level of the students. The general findings indicate that there is a substantial change in teachers' beliefs regarding acceptable forms of discipline in both primary and lower secondary schools. We also observe changes in performing negative forms of discipline, with largest estimated effects of the TIGER project on teachers from primary schools. Further, we observe that the TIGER project induced fewer changes among teachers from lower secondary schools regarding performing emotional abuse, and no changes regarding performing physical violence. It is then not surprising that the transfer effects of the TIGER project on students' ratings of experiencing emotional abuse or physical violence in lower secondary schools are small and not significant. On the contrary, the decrease in the students' reporting of emotional abuse, physical violence or sexual harassment in primary schools is small, but significant, for all three outcomes. Finally, there is also a small significant impact on sexual harassment in lower secondary schools.



Photo courtesy: Kevin Faignaert

**Table 1:** The Evidence Base at the Teacher-Level

What worked?	Impact in Effect Sizes for Primary versus Secondary Schools	What didn't work?	Impact in Effect Sizes for Primary versus Secondary Schools
Decreased ratings on two scales of <i>acceptable forms of discipline</i> dealing with emotional abuse and physical violence.	Large impact on emotional abuse (-0.852 SD) and physical violence (-0.761 SD) in primary schools. Large impact on emotional abuse (-0.636 SD) and physical violence (-0.764 SD) in secondary schools.		
Decreased ratings on two scales of <i>performing</i> emotional abuse and physical violence in primary schools.	Moderate impact on emotional abuse (-0.497 SD) and on physical violence (-0.604 SD) in primary schools.	No decreased ratings on two scales of <i>performing</i> emotional abuse and physical violence in secondary schools.	No significant impact of the TIGER project on teachers <i>performing</i> less emotional abuse (-.133 SD) and physical violence (-0.030 SD) in secondary schools.

**Table 2:** The Evidence Base at the Student-Level

What worked?	Impact in Effect Sizes for Primary versus Secondary Schools	What didn't work?	Impact in Effect Sizes for Primary versus Secondary Schools
Decreased ratings on <i>experiencing</i> emotional abuse, physical violence, and sexual harassment, however, for primary schools only.	Small impact on emotional abuse (-0.14); physical violence (-0.20); and harassment (-0.35) in primary schools.	We do not estimate significant effects of the TIGER project on students' ratings of <i>experiencing</i> emotional abuse or physical violence in secondary schools.	The effect size is close to zero and nonsignificant.
In secondary schools, we observe that student' ratings with regard to <i>experiencing</i> sexual harassment decreased.	A small impact (-0.15) on sexual harassment is observed in secondary schools.		



# DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL LEVELS DIFFERENT IMPACTS



To explain the observed differences in the effectiveness of the TIGER project between primary and lower secondary schools, we have taken a closer look at possible implementation issues. Hereto, we use registration data on participation of teachers and school leaders in the TIGER activities and several interviews with key informants. Using the registration data on participation, involving 2 trainings for teachers and school leaders; individual coaching sessions; and learning cycles, we observe remarkable differences between primary and lower secondary schools. We cluster schools with relatively high ( $\geq 95\%$ ), moderate (75 to 94%) and low ( $< 75\%$ ) participation rates together in Table 3 below. We observe that the primary schools do not have low participation rates, and only four schools have moderate participation rates. All other 9 primary schools have high participation rates. On the contrary, there are two lower secondary schools with relatively low participation rates, three schools with moderate participation rates, and two schools with high participation rates. From these data, we retain that teachers from lower secondary schools are less actively participating in the TIGER project than primary schools.

A first explanation comes from the qualitative data collected in October 2020. Interviews with teachers and school leaders from lower secondary schools indicates that lessons on gender equality and gender-based violence were learned, however, sometimes difficult to implement in teaching. They often departed from mixed-gender groups for lecturing or homework. The following quotes are coming from a school leader from a lower secondary school in Battambang province (November 2020).

*"And we divided them into group discussion using the lessons to be discussed. Before, they dared not to sit next to each other, but, after a while, [...] their mind-sets have been changed and their attitudes could be accepted, the attitude of men and women."*

*"[...] sometimes their students are stubborn, so they have to be punished for writing lessons, to collect water to water flowers. This can affect students' feelings. [...] but if we do not force them to do some works, then they would not know anything."*

Second, the fieldwork revealed that teachers from lower secondary education invest time in tutoring classes after the school day ends. Interviews with key informants indicated that, while teachers usually work full time at the public school, they tend to only be effectively at the school to teach their lessons. Besides that they invite students for tutoring at their house. This makes them more difficult to reach at the school. Effective TPD requires ownership and engagement, and a lack of it eventually may hamper an effective change in behaviour (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Merchie et al., 2018).

A PKO<sup>(1)</sup> representative further mentions another possible threat to implementation of the TIGER project. He argued in his interview that the COVID-19 pandemic made possible progress slow(er) than would have been the case without the school closures. For example, students had to study in small groups of 5 to 10 persons, had to follow online, or did not receive full time lessons as foreseen, which made it more difficult to implement strategies learned from the TIGER project. Some

<sup>(1)</sup> PKO denotes Puthi Komar Organization. They are one of the consortium partners of VVOB to implement the TIGER project in Battambang province.

online group discussions were deemed as effective as face-to-face. Then again, the school closures affected both primary and lower secondary schools in Svay Rieng and Battambang provinces, and, therefore, cannot explain why lower secondary schools were (potentially) less effective in the implementation of TIGER.

**Table 3:** Participation rates in the TIGER project in primary and lower secondary schools in Battambang province

School	Primary (1) vs. Secondary (0)	Participation Rates (%)	Classification
1	1	100.0%	High
2	1	95.1%	High
3	1	96.8%	High
4	1	82.5%	Moderate
5	1	93.6%	Moderate
6	1	100.0%	High
7	1	100.0%	High
8	1	100.0%	High
9	1	100.0%	High
10	1	100.0%	High
11	1	93.3%	Moderate
12	1	100.0%	High
13	1	91.7%	Moderate
14	0	41.7%	Low
15	0	87.5%	Moderate
16	0	96.6%	High
17	0	100.0%	High
18	0	92.9%	Moderate
19	0	57.1%	Low
20	0	92.3%	Moderate

\* The categories used denote high ( $\geq 95\%$ ), moderate (75 to 94%), and low ( $< 75\%$ ) participation rates. Source Registration data from VVOB.

A final explanation deals with the interviews with the TIGER project team. From their interviews, it can be concluded that the TIGER project led to incremental changes in daily teaching practices (or instruction), while, at the same time, successfully reaching out to parents and the local communities. The observation that the estimated transfer effects are small but significant for primary schools, and not significant (except for sexual abuse) for lower secondary schools, may be partly explained by the fact that the TIGER project only recently came to an end. We can indeed only reflect in our study upon the short-term impact of TIGER on teachers and students. A key informant from one of the CSOs suggested that the project should run another 3 to 5 years to reap all the fruits. All interviewees agreed that they would further engage in the TIGER project, if it would run additional years.

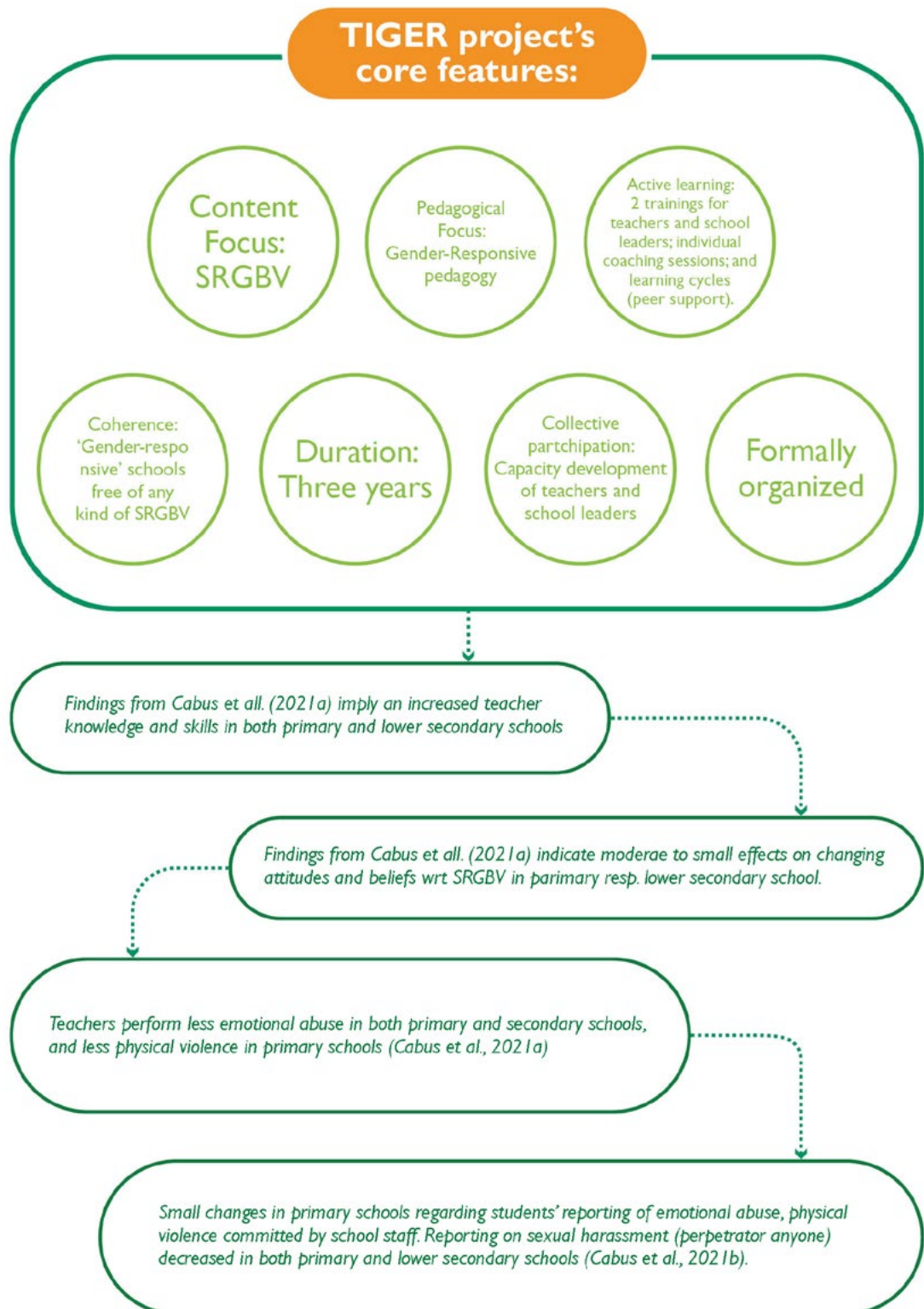
# CONCLUSION



To conclude with, we apply the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009) to the effectiveness of the TIGER project. Figure 1 visualizes the evidence base in a flow chart (or cascade). In line with the theoretical framework, we can conclude that large knowledge gains among teachers, as observed in this study, due to effective teacher professional development, can yield small gains for students, in the event that knowledge gains among teachers spill over (or transfer) to students through changes in attitudes and/or instruction. While we observe changes in attitudes and beliefs among trained teachers in both primary and lower secondary schools in Cabus et al. (2021a), and while we observe incremental changes in instruction, or the implementation of lessons learned on tackling SRGBV in daily teaching practices, the effects on students differ between primary and lower secondary schools. From qualitative research and registration data it seems that teachers from lower secondary schools were less engaged in (or attracted to) following all the TPD initiatives than the teachers from the primary schools. Teacher engagement is considered a prerequisite of effective TPD (Merchie et al., 2018). Previous literature indicates that autonomy is positively associated with teacher engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p.76). While Cambodian schools often fall back on regulations and laws from the government (Cabus et al., 2019), autonomy of school leaders and teachers to experiment with new strategies learned to tackle SRGBV may be (more) limited (in lower secondary schools). This could explain why there are only incremental – but fundamental – changes in instruction that led to the observed significant impact on students in primary schools.

Context: Demographic characteristics of the teachers and students included in this study.

Note: Own handling of the theoretical framework of Desimone (2009).



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**We can conclude that large knowledge gains among teachers due to effective teacher professional development, can yield small gains for students; in the event that knowledge gains among teachers transfer to students through changes in attitudes and/or instruction.**

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