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Assessment Report
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RSE and Adopting a Whole of School Approach: International best practices that Irish schools can implement

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1. Executive Summary

The whole-of-school or whole-school approach develops a cultural paradigm shift to address social problems like gender-based violence or drug abuse. The approach looks to engage local communities, NGOs, and parents to develop partnerships to encourage awareness and behavioural changes on the community level in conjunction with school cultural changes.

This REA with relevant research addresses two main questions:

- i. *“How does a whole of school approach support the effective delivery of a comprehensive RSE that promotes gender equality and prevents gender-based violence?”*
 - ii. *“What are the international best practices that Irish schools can implement in order to foster a whole of school approach to support the RSE curriculum that has the potential for prevention of violence against women, tackling harmful gender stereotypes and promoting reproductive health and rights.”*
- The REA looks at four countries with whole-school approach programs to determine international best practices for a successful whole-school approach. The overview of key documents contains the research articles from each respective case study country, Australia, Serbia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.
 - The key findings across the case study indicate the whole school approach for sexual health and gender-based violence works to address and adjust schools and, at times, communities towards critical understanding and engagement with gender and sexuality through various social and cultural contexts.
 - Disadvantaged schools in terms of underfunding, low parental engagement, socioeconomic status, and community support will struggle to have the same outcomes as more privileged schools.
 - Countries with strong religious and conservative values may face resistance from parental, political, and religious figures to the educational content being "inappropriate" for students. This resistance would be present in other approaches to teaching sexuality and gender.

Recommendations

- The first recommendation is a standardized document for the Irish SPHE whole school approach as a set of guidelines with room for individual schools to adapt their needs to the curriculum.
- Prior to implementing the whole school approach, an evaluation of individual schools for potential indicators for a successful program. Then address inequities found within the assessment by providing greater funding or supporting local organizations, parental, and community involvement.

2. Background and Introduction

2.1 Current landscape of violence against women in Ireland and the SPHE curriculum

On the 19th of March 2023, the Central Statistics Office in Ireland published the Sexual Violence Survey 2022, which highlighted a number of shocking statistics. Some of the key findings included:

“The proportion of adults who experienced sexual violence in their lifetime was 40%, with higher levels for women (52%) compared with men (28%)” (Central Statistics Office, 2023).

“Younger people reported higher levels of sexual violence than older persons with 22% of those aged 18-24 experienced sexual violence both as an adult and as a child” (Central Statistics Office, 2023).

Even the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) shared their concerns for the data in the survey, as they stated in their press release on the publication that: (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2023)

Women reported higher levels of sexual violence than men:

- Four times more women (21%) than men (5%) reported experiencing non-consensual sexual intercourse over their lifetime.
- Women were almost four times more likely to have experienced sexual violence both as an adult and as a child (23%) than men (6%).
- Women aged 25-34 reported the highest levels across all adult sexual violence types.

Hence, it's clear that sexual violence is still a prevalent issue in Ireland, especially for young women. In order to combat this, many academics would recommend a strong RSE curriculum.

Ireland does have its own RSE curriculum, known as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), which is delivered by teachers in both Irish primary schools and Irish secondary schools. In the SPHE primary school curriculum document, published by the Irish government, it states that SPHE “provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being of the individual child, to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society” (Government of Ireland, 1999).

The SPHE curriculum was first introduced in Ireland in 1999 and in 2018, the Minister for Education called for a major review of RSE in Irish primary schools and secondary schools. As a result of this review, updates are now already being made to the Junior Cycle SPHE, due to be introduced in September 2023, and the Senior Cycle SPHE curriculums. In the report on the review, it states that “stakeholders... identified a number of challenges in relation to the current curriculum and its implementation” (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019). In the approach, it provided what the core principles of the new primary, Junior and Senior Cycle SPHE curriculums should be underpinned by. This principles include (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019):

- Student-centred.
- Holistic.
- Inclusive.
- Age and developmental appropriateness.

As well as the above, the report included that the new SPHE curriculums should be underpinned by a “whole-school approach”. The report provided the following explanation on what a whole-

school approach is: “this approach recognises the opportunities for promoting RSE both within and beyond the classroom. It requires a culture of shared responsibility and a vision of RSE that enables students to explore learning through an interdisciplinary approach. It also considers the characteristics, spirit or ethos of a school which for some schools may place emphasis on the spiritual dimension of relationships and sexuality” (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019).

A whole of school approach to RSE is a relatively new concept. However, in this REA, we will discuss in more detail the academic literature written on this approach and examine case studies of other countries who have progressed further in the use of a whole of school approach in the delivery of their RSE curriculums in their schools.

2.1 What is a “whole of school approach”?

A key component of this REA is the assessment and feasibility of the implementation of a whole school approach to promote gender equality and prevent GBV. As such, it is imperative to understand what we mean by “whole school” approach. The idea of including the whole of school rather than utilising in-classroom learning only, was first introduced in the Warnock Report (British Department of Education, 1978). The idea had slowly evolved into a full-fledged programme in the decade or so after the publication of the same (Dyson et al., 1994).

But just what is a “whole school” approach, how does it operate in practice? The method is essentially used to change behaviour of the pupils. It requires all members and stakeholders of a particular school to cooperate and work together in achieving the set targets, whatever those may be. The key difference to other types of methodologies is that education does not end when the bell rings. A more fitting name would perhaps be “whole community approach” as it heavily depends on what a particular student is exposed to before and after school hours.

There are two main objectives to any such programme, at its basics preventing and intervening in whatever behaviour is in the needed focus (Sindhi, 2013). A systematic, well-structured and well-delivered framework is provided for the schools. Through this, they are equipped with the necessary tools and skills to provide an environment in which each student can learn within the ethos of the programme.

In essence, the whole-school approach aims to nurture a cultural landscape in which leadership and students can form a sort of partnership with one another. This is done through carefully crafted curricula and well-thought-out policy tools, in order to induce a behavioural change.

The next logical question is whether or not the method really works. There is evidence, as will be discussed in further chapters from across the globe for the success of the whole school approach. This is illustrated for example by the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) there was evidence that a programme delivered via whole school approach indeed helped to achieve set targets against baseline data (ICCS, 2009) as well as the School Without Violence programme, that has run in Serbia since 2005. (UNICEF, 2014)

3. Approach

During the initial scoping process, our group identified a number of possible avenues to take in terms of reviewing the available literature around the core concepts of this paper. We have opted to complete four case studies from around the world, and understand how countries of different population size, geographical location and spoken language have dealt with issues such as gender-based violence and promotion of reproductive health.

We have streamlined our research methods and agreed on a structure for each case study which allows any reader to fully understand the breadth and depth of each countries' approach to tackling these issues.

Four key aspects of our chosen projects were reviewed in each case study - Firstly, we outlined what projects have taken place in each country with the core object to tackle GBV and gender stereotypes. Second, we collated the outcome of such projects and what research methodologies were used to conduct the study. Third, we illustrated the challenges and limitations each project faced and how they can be relevant in an Irish context. Lastly, we made recommendations to take appropriate actions in relation to the issues at hand.

Based on the reviewed evidence, we have then collated the lessons learnt by each country during the completion of their projects and have outlined them in an Irish context. This approach has allowed us to widen our research base and avoid research bias as our chosen countries all differ in one way or another.

Once we have established our chosen approach to complete our research, we began to narrow the scope and formulate our REA question.

3.1 Formulating the REA question

In order to decipher a primary focus for our REA, we formulated the following core and supplementary research questions:

Core Research Question: *“A revised and modernised Junior cycle SPHE curriculum has significant potential for prevention of violence against women, tackling harmful gender stereotypes and promoting reproductive health and rights.”*

Supplementary Research Question 1: *“How does a whole of school approach support the effective delivery of comprehensive RSE that promotes gender equality and prevents gender-based violence?”*

Supplementary Research Question 2: *“What are the international best practices that Irish schools can implement in order to foster a whole of school approach to support the RSE curriculum that has the potential for prevention of violence against women, tackling harmful gender stereotypes and promoting reproductive health and rights.”*

1. Overview of Key Documents

	Study	Author(s)	Country	Methodology	Main Findings
1.	Co-production of two whole-school sexual health interventions for English secondary schools: positive choices and project respect	Ponsford, R., Meiksin, R., Bragg, S., Crichton, J., Emmerson, L., Tancred, T., Tilouche, N., Morgan, G., Gee, P., Young, H., Hadley, A., Campbell, R. and Bonell, C.	UK	Formative qualitative inquiry involving 75 students aged 13–15 and 23 school staff, consultations with young people trained to advise on public health advice, stakeholder event and written summaries of workshops and events	Multi-component, whole-school approaches to addressing sexual health that involve teacher delivered curriculum are feasible for implementation in English secondary schools
2.	Beyond referrals: levers for addressing harmful sexual behaviours between students at school in England	Firmin, C., Lloyd, J., and Walker, J.	UK	Practice observations, case and policy reviews, focus groups with professionals and students	Reports how four levers interact to create social conditions which prevent, or reduce the risk of, peer-sexual abuse in schools through the lens of both a whole school approach
3.	Department for Education Statutory Guidance for Relationships and Sex Education in England: A Rights-Based Approach?	Setty, E. and Dobson, E.	UK	Analysis of the Department for Education statutory guidance on RSE for schools in England and how young people’s right to receive RSE is upheld and enacted in the guidance	Analysis suggests that the guidance features contradictory discourses in which young people’s rights are ostensibly advanced, but remain structured by adult-centric, heteronormative understandings of sex and relationships
4.	Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers,	Department for Education	UK	Created as a result of the enactment of The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and provides best practices for schools to use based on consultations	Recommendations and best practices for UK schools to use in their delivery of RSE

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	principals, senior leadership teams, teachers				
5	Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education in primary and post-primary school	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Ireland	Analysis of consultations conducted on the review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland	Recommendations and best practices to apply to the new primary, Junior and senior Cycle SPHE curriculums
6.	The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032	Australian Government of Social Services	Australia	National Survey	1 in 3 Australian women experienced physical violence since 15 1 in 5 has experienced sexual violence
7.	The influence of contextual factors on implementation fidelity in a whole school approach to prevention of violence	Joyce, A., Ollis, D., Kearney, S., Leung, L. and Foenander, E.	Australia	Survey of the 19 Respectful Relationship Education (RRE) pilot Schools	Indicators for success of the whole of school approach
8.	Applying systems theory to the evaluation of a whole school approach to violence prevention.	Kearney, S., Leung, L., Joyce, A., Ollis, D. and Green, C. (2016).	Australia	Surveys, focus groups, and interviews from RRE pilot schools	Feedback is key for implementation
9.	Teaching for gender justice: free to be me?	Keddie, A. and Ollis, D.	Australia	Case Study data from RRE, interviews from a pilot school and classroom observations	The Status Model– engagement with both affirmative and non-affirmative identity politics
10.	Context matters: the take up of Respectful Relationships Education in two primary schools	Keddie, A. and Ollis, D.	Australia	Case Study data from RRE, from two schools	Underprivileged schools need more support when implementing the whole of school approach
11.	Championing Health Promoting Schools: A	Meiklejohn, S., Peeters, A. and	Australia	Interviews, documents, qualitative case study on one secondary school	Importance of external and internal resources to

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	secondary school case study from Australia.	Palermo, C.		in Victoria Australia	support implementing whole of school approach
12.	Addressing Learner-Centred Barriers to Sexuality Education in Rural Areas of South Africa: Learners' Perspectives on Promoting Sexual Health Outcomes	Ayobami Precious Adekola., & Azwihangwisi Helen Mavhandu-Mudzusi	South Africa	Focus group interviews, qualitative study in nine public schools	Improve adolescents' sexual health by school-based education
13.	Secondary school teachers' experiences related to learner teenage pregnancies and unexpected deliveries at school	Antoinette du Preez, A. Johan Botha, Tinda Rabie, Dudu G. Manyathi	South Africa	Semi-structured interviews of teachers, contextual strategies with a qualitative approach	Teachers experiences of learner teenage pregnancies in secondary schools
14.	Feminist Self-Defense and Resistance Training for College Students: A Critical Review and Recommendations for the Future	Christine A. Gidycz, Christina M. Dardis	South Africa	Evaluation of self-defense training on college campuses	Resistance training program for women, self-defense.
15.	Exploring the socio-ecological levels for prevention of sexual risk behaviours of the youth in uMgungundlovu District Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal	Nelisiwe Khuzwayo & Myra Taylor	South Africa	Descriptive qualitative study, group discussions for data collection	Youth sexual risk behaviour, factors influencing sexual risk behaviour
16.	Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape	Carine M. Mardorossian	South Africa	Review of feminist studies	Perspective of feminists on rape
17.	A Growing Outcry of Gender-based Violence and Gender Inequality in South Africa : An Afrocentric Perspective	Moreroa MC & Rapanyane MB	South Africa	Theoretical framework, data analysis	Perspectives such as 'Men are superior to women' lead to gender-based violence and gender inequality

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18.	Preliminary Evidence of Promise of a Sexual Violence Risk Reduction Intervention for Female Students in South African Tertiary Education Institutions	Pinky Mahlangu, Mercilene Machisa, Yandisa Sikweyiya, Ncediswa Nunze, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay & Rachel Jewkes	South Africa	Formative research, participatory methods, focus group discussions and feedback of female students from eight universities.	Empowering female students to assess and deal with sexual assault risky situations
19.	Developing a Sexual Gender Based Violence Intervention Targeting Female Students in South African Tertiary Institutions: Mapping the process	Nunze N., Machisa M., Mahlangu P., Sikweyiya Y., Pillay M., Chirwa E., Dartnall L., Jewkes R.	South Africa	Mixed-methods formative research aimed to gather context-specific data	Developing Ntombi Vimbela sessions based on formative research findings
20.	Parents will have right to withdraw children from new sex education classes	Carl O'Brien	Ireland	News Report	Parental consent in schools
21	Tackling HIV by empowering adolescent girls and young women: a multisectoral, government led campaign in South Africa	Hasina Subedar	South Africa	Data Analysis	Adolescent girls and young women are disproportionately affected by HIV
22	International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach	Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Review of Evidence	Evidence supported requirement for a comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health curriculum
23	Lessons from Serbia: Addressing Gender-based	UNICEF	Serbia	Evaluation of study, conducted by Serbia to prevent and intervene in GBV	Increased awareness around GBV, number of participating schools

	Violence through the School without Violence Programme				increased and incorporation of programme into national strategy
24	Mapping Domestic Violence against Women in Central Serbia	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy in Serbia and UNDP	Serbia	Surveys and data analysis	National policy needs to target GBV and its root cause

5. Critique of Relevant Studies: Case Studies

5.1 Summary of Key Points

Australia

The main finding of the Australian case study is schools with fewer material and social resources lack the capacity to implement the whole-school approach. Feedback and evaluation of the programme are also vital to developing a robust whole-school approach after the initial implementation of a given program.

Key takeaways:

- The indicators for successful implementation of Respectful Relationships Education in Australia are a passion for leadership: political leadership; parental engagement; material resources; and school community partners.
 - Schools with more indicators tend to have higher ease of implementation of the RRE, while schools with lower markers struggle with RRE implementation.
- The whole-of-school approach succeeds in schools with keen stakeholder (parents, community, student, school leadership, and teachers) engagement.
- Schools that already have a socially progressive culture require little change to align themselves with the RRE program.
- Affirmative and non-affirmative gender curriculum is necessary to address GBV.

Serbia

Serbia launched schools without violence in 2005 with a whole school approach; later the curriculum transitioned to focus on GBV in 2013. The programme is successful in many ways, the whole of school approach accommodates for community engagement, after the transition to a focus on GBV the Serbian population began to gain more awareness of GBV. In other ways the programme faces challenges; political, religious, and societal barriers such as resistance to fund comprehensive sex education, and a hesitancy to teach youth sex education due to “inappropriateness”.

Key takeaways:

- Clear and achievable goals throughout the curriculum cycle were key in the success of the program.
- Community driven whole school approach worked well in Serbia in terms of the long-term sustainability of the program.
- Sexual Health Education needs to be integral to school curriculum to keep the youth well-informed on reproductive and sexual health.

The UK

The UK used the whole-school approach to address prevalent sexual harassment and violence within the UK school system—after a 2015 inquiry, and the inquiry recommended a whole-school approach as a piece of the plan to address sexual harassment and violence.

Key takeaways:

- It is vital for schools to have systems in place to address incidents of sexual violence in both a timely manner and encourage the identification of these issues within the context of GBV.
- The whole-school approach does adequately address sexual health and sexual violence within schools.
- A successful whole-school approach engages and encourages interaction between the local community, parental, and charity involvement.
- The whole school approach and content must be engaging for teachers and students and contain relevant and up-to-date content.

South Africa

South Africa began Ntombei Vimbela to tackle gender-based violence (GBV)—by raising awareness of sexual rights, gender inequality, defence skills, stress, depression, and well-being skills. While the programme was successful there were some barriers to the efficacy of sex education in South Africa including: parental opinions; cultural norms; poverty; religion; and substance abuse.

Key takeaways:

- The programme's use of defence skills improved women's confidence and empowered them in daily life and potentially dangerous situations.
- Overall, the building of knowledge and awareness around sexual health, and GBV through education gave students empowered and gave the students of the programme confidence.

5.2 Australia

Overview

In Australia, “one in 3 women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and one in 5 has experienced sexual violence” (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2022). The Australian government produces a National Plan to address violence against women and children over ten-year periods—from 2010-2022; the focus is on the primary prevention of domestic and sexual violence (UN Women, 2016). One strategy to address gender-based violence is Respectful Relationships Education (RRE). This curriculum emphasizes the “whole of school” or “whole school” approach to address harmful gender roles, stereotypes, and norms in Australian primary and secondary schools. The whole school approach holistically engages stakeholders in the school's community; “School Culture, School Leadership, and Commitment, Professional Learning, Support for Staff and Students, Teaching and Learning, and Community Partnerships”(Keddie and Ollis, 2019). From the RRE model, we can draw a few lessons for Ireland's Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE); the importance of context and various factors for the success of the program. In addition, the importance of evaluation for further development of a whole school program. Three fundamental studies of RRE and the whole school approach emerge in the literature; the first looks at systems theory to evaluate violence prevention, and the last two identify the importance of context to implementation. The last study highlights the importance of teaching gender-based violence (GBV) through both affirmative and non-affirmative gender identity lenses.

Methodology

We used Dublin City University's library catalogue to gather the three studies from Australia. Search terms are: “whole of school approach”: “whole school approach”: “violence against women”: and “Australia”. The study selection examines the whole school approach and respectful relationship education—RRE is an Australian equivalent of Ireland's Social Personal Health Education (SPHE). The research looks at indicators for the success of the whole school approach.

Australia is in the selection of case studies to see the diversity, success, and downfalls of the whole school approach in the context of relationship and sexual education in an Australian context.

Research Findings

One study examines the interactions between different systems that interact with each other through systems study—researchers examine interactions between schools, teachers, communities, and government in the context of the whole-of-school approach. The study examines survey data from pre- and post-RRE in the 19 pilot schools in Australia the study found that survey feedback across all contexts was vital for staff to identify areas of improvement (Kearney et al. 2016). Evaluation enhances the implementation of the RRE—it gives staff and faculty clear targets for smoother performance of RRE and the whole school model. The study also identified context as a factor in the successful implementation of RRE. In another study in Australia on health-promoting schools using a whole-of-school approach, external and internal resources are identified as contributors to success (Meiklejohn et al. 2020). Internal and external resources are teachers, administrative leadership, community, and parental support the importance of which can be seen below in two case selections.

Across the studies, the authors emphasize the importance of the context of the school, including external and internal resources, stakeholder engagement, and school leadership. The three studies use the same data set of 19 Victoria schools from the pilot of RRE in Australia; three schools are Catholic. A study from 2018 looks at contextual factors for implementation fidelity, “the degree to which real-world implementation of the intervention adheres to the original trial protocol”(Joyce et al. 2018). The study found replication of the programme intention, rather than the programme strategy allows for greater flexibility in various contexts. The study also identifies determinants for influencing successful implementation:

- Characteristics of those implementing the initiative (the implementation leaders supporting schools with the program).
- Characteristics of those receiving the initiative (the schools).
- Characteristics of the context (the policy context and school community partners).
- Characteristics of the evidence base (evidence on whole school initiatives) and the process of implementation which includes the types of planning and monitoring processes used in the implementation. (Joyce et al., 2018).

Each of these points informs the success of a programme like Respectful Relationships Education—these points are vital to consider while examining the implementation of RRE. Other studies identify similar signals for success, building upon the previous literature.

A heavy emphasis on context is present throughout the literature—context being the culture of the community, school, administration, and other social factors. In a follow-up study, Keddie and Ollis look at two schools of the 19 schools from the original pilot study and compare levels of implementation, Blue Hills and Mountain View have differing needs and success levels. This study affirms the emphasis of the previous literature on the context of the schools implementing the whole-school approach. The researchers identify Blue Hills as a “middle-class and socially progressive demographic”(Keddie and Ollis 2020). Researchers identify parental support, leadership, teachers' commitment to RRE, and funding that supports the implementation of RRE as drivers of success for the program. In addition to policy and political support, these factors aid the development of a successful RRE programme in the school. Due to high material and ideological support, Blue Hills has a substantial “capacity to cope with the demands of RRE” (Keddie and Ollis, 2020). Mountain View, on the other hand, does not have access to the same support factors

as Blue Hills. Mountain View is an “economically disadvantaged, transient, and culturally diverse student cohort”(Keddie and Ollis 2020). In addition, “the prevalence and seriousness of family violence in the community...the lower levels of parental involvement; limited material and human resourcing to support RRE; and the lack of support for RRE at the broader departmental support” (Keddie and Ollis 2020) impact the school's ability to cope with the added RRE curriculum.

These factors hinder the development of the RRE program—making for a complex implementation process for the administration. The researchers found the administration was passionate about reducing violence within the community and families. Still, the violence and poverty experienced by the students and community made implementing RRE intricate and nuanced. Both schools highlight stakeholder engagement as a critical factor for programme success and the importance of proper school funding and access to resources to support public health. The context for implementation is vital to understanding the hurdles a school will face in implementing RRE. The two outcomes are not due to issues within the whole school approach but systemic government failures to fund public education and diverse communities within the Australian context. With adjustments in funding and resources, Mountain View would be able to address violence within the school community and meet the goals and ethos of the RRE.

In another study (Keddie and Ollis, 2019) from the one pilot study schools, researchers conducted interviews with administrators and teachers and observations of the RRE curriculum. The researchers focus on gender-based violence (GBV) teaching in RRE. Researchers split teaching behaviours into gender affirmative and non-affirmative researchers assert that the best practice is a mixed affirmative and non-affirmative approach to support gendered justice. An example of affirmative politics from the pilot school is the administration “recognizing that their resources and attention tended to privilege the boys, these changes involved the teachers deploying affirmative gender politics to support a greater focus on the girls” (Keddie and Ollis, 2019). Affirmative practices were praised and critiqued, as sometimes teachers felt they were reinforcing a gender binary that does not reflect the diversity of gender. An example of non-affirmative practices is the “free to be me” slogan from a Victorian school that the teachers and students created as part of a response to affirmative practices—researchers point out that “free to be me” fails to point out and recognize power inequities between men and women, and the links to gbv. Researchers conclude that Fraser’s status model supports engagement with affirmative and non-affirmative politics, and schools should be considerate as they develop and engage with gender in RRE. The status model, “supports the deployment of a critical affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics that reflects capacity to transform the underlying power relations and structures that generate gender-based violence”(Keddie and Ollis, 2019).

Recommendations

The Irish government should use the success indicators from the Australian case study (passion of leadership/political leadership, parental engagement, government funding, and school community partners) to identify Irish schools with weaker indicators and support the development of success indicators for the whole school approach. Schools with lower success indicators need more governmental support to provide the same level of education. Considering the context of individual schools to help schools meaningfully engage with the new national SPHE curriculum to improve the success rate of the new SPHE programme and seek to standardize the SPHE across Ireland. So every Irish student has the same toolbox to deal with the complexities of human sexuality and relationships.

Limitations

The three main studies all come from the same pilot study of 19 schools in Victoria, limiting the sample size of the research body. The case study is specific to the Australian context; however,

there are lessons to take away from the reality of the whole school approach. The case study from Blue Hills and Mountain View are opposite outcomes and do not represent moderate outcomes of the whole school approach. Another note is that Australian literature comes from the same handful of authors; speaks to the niche and emerging nature of the whole school approach in Australia. On the same note, the first pilot study of the whole school approach began in 2015-2016, so the research area is still emerging.

5.3 Serbia

Overview

Gender based violence is a real issue with long lasting physical and mental health impacts. According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) study conducted in 2013, covering more than 80 countries – almost a third of all women (30%) in relationship have experienced some form of domestic violence (WHO, 2013) The same study further accepts linkage between violence and impact on health both physical and mental (*Ibid.*) In central Serbia however, this number appears to be much higher, standing at just over 54% (MLESP and UDNP, 2008).

Otašević argues that the true extent of the issue remains unknown as a result of the lack of regular data collection which in turn makes the necessary interventions impossible (Otašević, 2005). Indeed, the associated social stigmas to domestic and gender-based violence makes the issue largely hidden from society (Dosary, 2016). To make matters worse, as demonstrated by a WHO Multi-Country Study Team - “the prevalence of suicidality among women and demonstrate a strong association with experiences of violence” (Devries et al., 2011).

To combat the serious societal issues around gender-based violence (GBV), UNICEF in conjunction with the Serbian Ministry of Education, launched a project in 2005 called “Schools Without Violence” (SwV) which used a “Whole of School Approach” as the main methodology (UNICEF, 2014). 8 years later, gender focus was brought into focus and made part of the SwV curriculum. The programme itself had two main objectives. Firstly, to create a safe environment for all those who attend schools and second, to protect those children affected by violence, with a particular focus on GBV. The success of the programme is illustrated by Serbia’s support for its continued run.

Methodology

Delivering the desired outcome of “zero tolerance” towards violence, means four key steps are to be implemented during the lifecycle of the programme:

- Step one, initial research via interviews and surveys are conducted with all relevant stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, and school staff) in order to baseline “attitudes, experiences, needs and school capacities regarding GBV”⁶. This is an important step in the process as measuring change during the evaluation period will require qualitative and quantitative baseline data to measure against. At this stage it is salient to mention that the programme operates on a voluntary basis, meaning school management request to join agreeing that the programme be endorsed and showing by means of empirical data a need for change in respect to GBV. Once baselining is complete, each school receives a report with findings of the initial research as well as trained mentors to assist throughout the delivery of the programme.
- Step two includes training for assigned mentors who are equipped with the knowledge to assist pupils both inside and outside of the classroom. This is a key element of the project. As stated by Jaques Richard, school violence and bullying are assumed to be a systemic problem rather than individual issue therefore a solution also needs to focus on the whole of school (Richard

et al, 2012). Training for mentors include gaining a deeper understanding of GBV and its effects on students, deconstructing ideologies around masculinity and femininity as well as engaging with students on the topics of gender-based discrimination and gender itself. School teachers are also trained to facilitate workshops and group activities around gender-based norms and prevention of GBV.

- Step three focuses on the community as a whole. The programme assumes that much of the students' education around gender and attitude toward GBV comes from outside the school environment. It is therefore important to also involve community-based learning and activities as part of the programme. During the initial research phase, data suggested that gender-based separation during youth activities to deconstruct gender ideologies helps students to understand the cause and effect of GBV. Such activities include debates, theatre performances, and other peer to peer ventures.
- Step four of the programme is completed after an eighteen-month run, resulting in the school achieving its certification, agreeing to a no tolerance approach to violence.

Research Findings

The first run of the programme in 2013 reached almost 25 thousand students and teachers in 50 schools. Baseline data was collected across the regions and evaluation at the end of the programme was based on the same. One of the key outcomes of the data showed the importance of setting apparent, empirical and achievable goals throughout the cycle. It is important to be realistic about what can and cannot be achieved with a programme of this nature.

Some of the key indicators include students' attitude change toward gender and GBV, number of schools adopting the voluntary programme and improved willingness to report GBV cases. At the end of the project cycle the following improvements were observed within relevant key stakeholders:

- Empirical evidence around increased sensitivity towards GBV by teachers who are now able to detect to a greater degree the signs of GBV and are able to report and refer students to obtain relevant help and assistance.
- Majority of teachers (70%) requested further training to be received around dealing with and recognising GBV proving the programme to be successful at creating openness to deal with such a sensitive and difficult topic.
- Greater recognition of GBV within the wider Serbian society.
- Increased ability to recognise gender stereotypes within academic literature thus, helping teachers and policy makers in choosing and producing appropriate textbooks for teaching purposes.
- During the final evaluation of the programme, it was evident that students' attitude toward gender-based norms, stereotypes and violence has changed significantly (UDNP, 2022).

One key component around the sustainability of the programme was left to be answered until the results were finalised. Indeed, the success of the programme, demonstrated by the survey results - conducted as part of the programme - indicate a clear necessity for the wider rollout and institutionalisation of the same. This was completed in 2012 while the programme was still underway, given the early signs of its success. The same figure also shows that the programme also proved to have been impactful in relation to gender stereotypes and acceptance towards members of the LGBTQ community.

Serbia's Violence Prevention Unit was established via UNICEF and it was tasked with working in partnership with and observation of responses from the Ministry of Education, Science and

Technological Development (MoESTD), as well as given specific oversight over the ‘School Without Violence’ programme (MoESTD, 2016). The VPU is functioning and part of Serbia’s expert oversight body over violence to this day.

Overall, the SwV programme was a step forward towards a new generational shift in mindset toward gender, violence and stereotypes. Some however, remain sceptical towards its achievements (Atlagic et al., 2016). Indeed, the programme’s short-term achievements were met, current trends in domestic violence and GBV figures remain high at around 2000 reported cases of domestic violence (Ignjatović et al., 2019).

In terms of the promotion of reproductive rights and sexual health education, Serbia is somewhat of an outlier in the western world. As of the writing of this paper, Serbia does not have a compulsory Sexual Health Education curriculum. In 2014, a pilot programme for a comprehensive sexual education course was successfully completed in the province of Vojvodina, however this was not revisited, and no other such programme took place ever since (Ketting et al., 2021).

While there is no government mandated, dedicated sexual or reproductive health education curriculum in Serbia, there is a basic anatomy course as part of biology. A strong opposition from the Serbian Ministry for Health is in place towards any type of sexual health education, citing inappropriateness for youth (UNESCO, 2021).

While the programme in Vojvodina was a success, the Serbian Ministry for Health decided not to fund the expansion of the same. The key takeaways from this programme are as follows:

- Serbian youth engage in sexual acts at an earlier age than their European counterparts, without receiving any Sexual Health Education (Kapamadzija et al, 2010). These two facts combined pose a dangerous risk to Serbian adolescents. While providing some form of sexual and/or reproductive health programme appears to be basic in terms of education; Serbia’s opposition to the same contributes to the issues around STI and unwanted sexual intercourse as a type of violence (UNESCO, 2018).
- The Reproductive Health Education programme followed the same research methodology as did SwV, in so far as survey completion before and after the completion of the same. This was, a baseline dataset of attitudes and knowledge is established and can be analysed against data collected post completion of the programme.
- It is important to discuss some of the key data points to understand why the lack of education around sexual health is dangerous. A quarter of Serbian 15-year-olds had entered sexual relations (HBSC, 2018). About a tenth of those who had sexual relations done so under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Tomasevic et al, 2022) and a quarter of those claimed they had done so even though they did not want to. Furthermore, socioeconomic status seems to play a key indicator in engaging in unwanted sexual intercourse as the same survey suggests that those who self-identify as “poor” are twice as likely to have had unwanted sexual relations.

Serbia does not seem to be an outlier in relation to these statistical findings, as confirmed by other studies, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are far more likely to engage in riskier sexual and health behaviours (Wardle et al, 2003). While these figures show the dire need for Sexual Education reform, some improvements were observed among the students in the areas of STI awareness, genital anatomy, gender issues, and human as well as in (separately conducted research) self-efficacy (Tomasevic et al, 2022).

Limitations

While the SwV programme was successful in many ways, it is important to call out some of the limitations and challenges it faced. Firstly, the programme runs on an ‘op in’ basis, meaning schools must choose to adopt the ethos embedded within it. Secondly, it requires expert mentors and teachers to be equipped with the necessary tools to run the programme, training takes time. Lastly, success is measured by a number of pre-set targets around students’ attitudes towards GBV and number of participating schools rather than for example occurrence of GBV within the school. The number of women who experience GBV in their lifetime is still standing at 16% as per OECD data (OECD, 2023). The data however shows that while challenges do exist, a whole school approach, when executed correctly, works.

Recommendations

The political landscape of Serbia (not unlike Ireland) is very much impacted by religious ideologies, causing some difficulties in combating systemic issues around GBV, promotion of reproductive health rights and delivery of Sexual Education. However, there are some takeaways that apply in the Irish context in the areas of Sexual Education reform by way of introduction of a whole school approach in order to intervene and prevent GBV and to promote reproductive health. During the evidence assessment of Serbia’s School without Violence programme, it was empirically proven that a community driven, whole school approach achieves its set targets in a sustainable and long-lasting manner. Furthermore, based on the data gathered from the Serbian case, it is recommended that Sexual Health Education must be an integral part of school curriculum in order to educate the youth on matters around sexual and reproductive health.

5.4 UK

Overview

In 2016, an inquiry into sexual harassment and sexual violence was launched by the UK government in order to understand the scale of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and how to actively prevent and lessen it. The inquiry shared that “data published in September 2015 showed that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three-year period, including 600 rapes (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). On top of this, “a 2010 YouGov poll of 16–18-year-olds found 29% of girls experienced unwanted sexual touching at school and a further 71% of 16–18-year-olds said they heard sexual name-calling such as “slut” or “slag” towards girls at school daily or a few times per week” (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

As a result, the inquiry recommended a number of strategies for dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, one of which included adopting a ‘whole of school approach’ (Section 2, part 86-92). In order to better define what a ‘whole of school approach’ is, part 87 referred to UK Feminista’s definition of a whole of school approach “as involving “all members of the school community, including school governors, senior management, staff, students and parents.” and is “an overarching framework, rather than a single policy, which ensures consistency across the entire learning environment.” (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

Moreover, the inquiry referenced the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition who provided the following “key attributes of a whole school approach” (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2016):

- That multiple school policies, including bullying, safeguarding, and equality, specifically address violence against women and girls. So, the bullying policy should recognise sexual

bullying, and the equality policy should recognise that girls are in a hostile environment if sexual harassment is tolerated.

- The senior leadership team holds responsibility for building a zero-tolerance culture towards abuse of girls in the school.
- Links are established between schools and local support services for women and girls.
- Time is created within the curriculum for discussion of respect, equality and consent through compulsory Sex & Relationships Education.
- Girls and boys are included within the school's ongoing response to abuse.

Another action resulting from the inquiry was the implementation of the 'Children and Social Work Act 2017'. "The Children and Social Work Act 2017 bestowed compulsory status on relationships and sex education (RSE), which means that young people's right to receive RSE in England has been codified in law" (Setty and Dobson, 2023). As a result the Department for Education (DfE) created a statutory guidance on RSE for schools in England. Within this statutory guidance, it also references the use of a whole of school approach to RSE, stating that: "the curriculum on relationships and on sex should complement, and be supported by, the school's wider policies on behaviour, inclusion, respect for equality and diversity, bullying and safeguarding" (Department for Education, 2019).

Hence, given the UK government's commitment to a whole of school approach to RSE, there are studies which we can learn lessons from and apply to the SPHE curriculum in Ireland. There are two core studies which have analysed the effectiveness of a whole of school approach to the RSE curriculum in the UK so far. One study examined the co-production process of two whole-school sexual health interventions, in order to implement them in schools in England. The other study identified four different levers to prevent sexual violence in schools in the UK through the perspective of a whole of school approach.

Methodology

We primarily used Google scholar, the DCU online library and the Taylor and Francis online library to research academic literature on the practicalities of a whole of school approach to the RSE curriculum in the UK and its effectiveness to help prevent violence against women, tackle harmful gender stereotypes and promote reproductive health and rights. The main key search terms we used were: "Violence against Women in schools in the UK", "RSE curriculum UK" and "RSE whole of school approach UK".

After researching, we decided upon two core academic studies to examine. The focus of both of these studies is to evaluate the implementation and roll-out of whole of school approaches to RSE curriculums in UK schools, in line with the DfE statutory guidance. From the findings in these studies, we were able to identify transferable best practices for the Irish SPHE curriculum.

Research Findings

One of the studies reported on the co-production process of two whole-school sexual health interventions, in order to implement them in schools in England. The purpose of examining this co-production process is because whole of school approaches have not been widely implemented in schools in the UK yet and their feasibility is unclear. Hence, the first place to start is by developing interventions to test its effectiveness.

The study involved a "formative qualitative inquiry involving 75 students aged 13-15 and 23 school staff, consulting a group of young people trained to advise on public health research, a stakeholder event with twenty-three practitioners and policymakers and written summaries of workshops and

events and key themes identified to inform the design of each intervention” (Ponsford, R. et al., 2021)

Another study looked at different levers to prevent sexual violence in schools in the UK through the perspective of a whole of school approach. The purpose of identifying these levers being to provide the “opportunities for schools, regulators and child protective services to use” them in order “to create social conditions which prevent, or reduce the risk of, peer-sexual abuse in schools” (Firmin, Llyod and Walker, 2019).

The data for this study “was gathered through practice observations, case and policy reviews and focus groups with professionals and students” and it identified “four thematic areas for inspection that would contribute to preventing, and responding to, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) in schools – referred to as levers:” (Firmin, Llyod and Walker, 2019):

- The structures and systems through which a framework for consistent responses to HSB was available to professionals in schools and multi-agency partnerships.
- Measures focused on the prevention of HSB, including creating cultural school contexts that promoted safe social norms and healthy relationships.
- The ability of professionals and students to identify HSB in schools.
- The availability, use and effectiveness of responses and interventions following incidents in schools.

Overall, what both of these studies displayed in their findings was that:

- Multi-component whole of school approaches and interventions to RSE, which include a teacher delivered curriculum, have shown evidence to acceptably address issues such as sexual health and sexual violence in schools.
- It is vital for schools to have sound systems, structures and safeguarding interventions in place in order to have the capacity to address any incidents of sexual violence in a timely manner and create a culture among teachers and students to prevent such violence by identifying the issue as it occurs and treating it as a wider issue and not just individual incidents.
- A whole of school approach includes both schools and the wider community. Both studies referred to the fact that outside of school intervention, parents play a role, as well as wider multi-agency partners in preventing sexual violence, addressing gender stereotypes and promoting reproductive health in schools.
- Ensuring that the RSE curriculum is up to date at all times and reflects young people’s lived experiences today is crucial.
- It is important to create prescriptive materials and engagement strategies for schools and teachers.
- The whole of school approach and curriculum needs to be somewhat adaptable to individual school settings in order to encourage implementation.

Recommendations

After examining both of these studies, it’s clear that there are a number of recommendations that can be taken away and be integrated as best practices into the Irish SPHE curriculum.

Those key recommendations include:

- The Irish government should create a standard guidance document on the implementation of the SPHE curriculum, like the guidance document provided by the UK government to school

across the UK, which refers to a whole of school approach and provides either a definition or a list of certain characteristics which explain what a whole of school approach means and entails.

- Irish schools should ensure that in the development of their approaches to the SPHE curriculum, that the purpose of implementing a whole of school approach is to create a culture of disapproval and quick intervention to sexual violence in schools, and that they need strong cross-level systems and safeguarding interventions to ensure a proactive stance to any sexual incidents at all times, as explained in both of the above studies.
- Schools are not the only actors responsible for the implementation of a whole of school approach to RSE, but also the intervention of outside agencies is vital, such as parents, local community actors and charities. Again, as both of the studies above highlighted.
- Irish schools should be conscious that teacher selection can have a major impact on the delivery of the SPHE curriculum, as described in the above studies. The delivery of the SPHE curriculum, just like the RSE curriculum in the UK, requires a high level of enthusiasm by those that deliver and implement it and should that standard not be reached, it can have a wider implication on the effectiveness of a whole of school approach to the SPHE curriculum in Irish schools.

Limitations

However, there are a number of limitations to each of the studies which need to be mentioned:

- Firstly, both of these studies have been conducted in schools in England. Hence, it can be difficult to identify if they would have the same outcome in Ireland.
- Secondly, both studies were conducted in selective and controlled environments, and it may be hard to associate if the experience of both of these studies can be replicated in other environments, in this case different schools.
- Lastly, the stakeholder engagement in both studies was limited to a certain number of people and groups due to financing and time constraints and it's hard to pinpoint that when conducted with other stakeholders, i.e. teachers, students, parents, community etc., if it will be a similar experience.

5.5 South Africa

Overview

According to Merten (2017), half of the women murdered in South Africa in the year 2017 were committed by their intimate partners. South Africa reported the highest rate of Gender Based Violence (GVB) in the year 2017 says Merten (2017).

Apart from the sexual based violence, South Africa poses a sexual health crisis as 37% of new HIV infections were reported by the females aged between 15-24 (Subedar et al., 2018). Despite the implementation of school-based sexuality education, the unplanned pregnancy among the female students remains alarmingly high which is another concern in South Africa (Du Preez et al., 2019).

The cultural belief systems have kept the gender-based violence igniting in the region. South Africa is a continent which is multicultural and has different ethnicities. Gender based violence is deep rooted in this region. In some African cultures, people still believe that men are superior to women. Zulu, Xhosa and Pedi are some prominent African cultures that emphasise that men are the heads of their families and women are their necks (M C and Rapanyane, 2021).

Ireland schools can adopt some concepts of South Africa's Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) program. The main purpose of NV! is to tackle Gender Based Violence (GVB) and sexual violence in the region. "Ntombi Vimbela! is a manualised sexual violence risk reduction intervention with a self-defence component," (Mahlangu et al., 2021).

To further understand the conditions prevailing in South Africa, we studied the work of (Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021) to highlight the learner centred factors which affect the school based sexual education programmes in the region. This helped us draw patterns on the common problems and recommendations which has the potential to add value to the SPHE curriculum in Ireland.

Methodology

We studied two research articles to review the literature on gender violence in South Africa, its sexual education programs and its recommendations which could be adapted and utilized in Ireland. Inputs from a few more articles were taken to strengthen the study.

We used keywords 'Africa', 'whole school approach', and 'sexual violence' in the Dublin City University's online library section. After reviewing the existing literature, we decided to study, i. Ntombi Vimbela!' (NV!) programme and ii. Learner-centred barriers to sexual education in Africa to draw some best practices and recommendations which could be emulated into Ireland's SPHE curriculum.

Research findings

A study on Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) highlights how the programme was able to create awareness on sexual rights, sensitise about gender inequalities in the society, help participants develop skills to act in risky situations of sexual assault, stress, depression and well-being skills and more. The participatory learning approaches of this programme helped the participants build new perspectives by reflecting their own life experiences rather than imposing a particular way of thinking.

"Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) [Ntombi means girl or woman, Vimbela means to prevent, resist or restrain, or deter in isiXhosa and IsiZulu]," (Mahlangu et al., 2021). The 'Ntombi Vimbela!' (NV!) is a sexual violence risk reduction and resistance manualised intervention with a self-defense component. This intervention provides a whole school approach. Few concepts and methods of this intervention could be emulated to Ireland's Social, Personal, Health Education (SPHE). This programme was executed as a pilot in South Africa. It is a 35-hour workshop which is spread over two weeks, with 3.5 hours for each session. First year female students from five South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVETs) and three university campuses participated in the pilot from which we drew patterns and research findings. The pilot was conducted to establish the relevance and usefulness of the content, and to gather participants' experiences of the intervention (Nunze & Ai, 2019).

Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) is a programme which was formulated by taking inputs from various other sexual educational programs such as Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA), Stepping Stones and SASA. The sessions designed under this programme are adapted according to the South African context, keeping in mind the lives of female students pursuing higher education (Nunze & AI., 2019). When emulating concepts of Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) into Irish context, the content needs to go through certain changes keeping Irish schools and conditions in mind.

A major takeaway from this programme could be the concept of empowering female students. Here, empowering refers to helping female students build confidence, develop new perspectives, and help them think in a different way about themselves. "Women are described as empowered when they

are confident and believe that they possess the skill to detect and respond in a potentially threatening situation without having to avoid social interaction,” says (Gidycz & Dardis, 2014).

The study says that a total of nine themes were generated based on the analysis of the data collected. Few of those themes in relevance to the female students include change in gender attitudes including shift in rape myths, awareness of sexual rights and sexual communication, perceptions about physical self-defence skills and journey of healing (Mahlangu et al., 2021).

To highlight the external factors which impact sexual education programmes in schools, we further studied the literature on ‘Learner-centred barriers’ that throws light on the challenges being faced by the learners which is negatively affecting the school based sexual education programs. We reviewed the work of Adekola and Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2021), where a total of 84 adolescents took part in the focus group interviews. These adolescents are called ‘learners’ in this study. The focus group interviews were conducted in rural areas of King Cetshwayo district, KwaZulu-Natal province. Students from nine public secondary schools took part in the interviews. These learners were asked critical questions about sexual education programmes in their schools. The learners’ experiences and perspectives were recorded and used for this study.

This literature highlights poverty, parental opinions, cultural norms, religion, substance abuse, and school related factors as some of the barriers, and social determinants that impact the effectiveness of sexual education curriculum at school level in South Africa.

Barriers such as ‘parental opinion’ are something which also prevail in Ireland’s whole school approach which impacts SPHE curriculum as they contradict with the whole school curriculum on sexual education. When young adults are provided with correct information about sexual education at school, but their parents talk of contradicting concepts at home, this will negatively affect the learning process for the youngsters (Van Wesenbeeck et al., 2016). They might never understand the real and correct concepts of sexual education which include gender sensitivity, healthy and respectful choices regarding relationships, sexuality, emotional and also physical health.

In one of the key arguments, (Wekesah et al., 2019) states that the parents would likely support sexual education in line with their cultural values and belief systems, and at the same time this might impact a teachers’ attempt to teach sexual education curriculum as they end up skipping key aspects to avoid parental criticism.

At present, in Ireland, parents are given the right to withdraw their children from sex education programs if their opinion contradicts with the content (O’Brien, 2023).

While tackling barriers such as ‘parental opinion’ where students are expected not to backchat, the public speaking training provided under the NV programme helps students become more articulate and confident which enhances their communication skills. In the South African context, the speaking skills did not give much of a relief as the African communities strongly believed in providing utmost authority to the older people where voicing their contradicting opinions was considered to be rude and disrespectful to the elders. However, in the Irish context, this participatory method can improve reasoning skills of the female students where they speak with confidence with their intimate partners and also their parents.

Recommendations

The authors state that the Ntombi Vimbela (NV!) programme was majorly accepted by the students due to its relevance and positive impact on lives. One strong recommendation which the Irish schools should adopt is the training of defence mechanisms that help students improve confidence

levels in daily life and especially while facing risky situations. This recommendation will help empower female students and develop fresh perspectives on people and situations. These skills will help the students identify the coming danger at an early stage and prepare to react. The concept of building overall confidence through the sexual education programme like Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) is something that the Irish schools can adapt in order to provide better implementation and understanding of the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum.

Limitations

Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) is a programme which works more on risk reduction and resistance approaches to sexual violence prevention. But the study (Mardorossian, 2002) states that the resistance approach has been criticised for being victim blaming. Mardorossian (2002) “further argues that these approaches suggest that rape and its prevention is about women who are raped rather than about men who perpetrate.” This is one conceptual limitation which we felt would leave a negative impact on the interventions.

Apart from that, the study is entirely centred around South African conditions, meaning the recommendations highlighted by this study need to go through rigorous changes which could be adapted to keeping the local conditions of Ireland in mind. The literature on sexual education programs in South Africa is limited. The above data represents only the first-year female students from a handful of educational institutions and universities, leaving scope for further research in this area.

Although the Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) was especially designed to train female students in tackling sexual attacks at school level, the execution of their learnings in real life situations was under question after a few females raised concerns on using the learned skills when in risk situations. The authors expressed concerns over evaluating the outcomes of this intervention as the pilot programme did not have a control group. This limited their scope to compare the final outcomes of the intervention from other similar women.

6. Limitations

The study highlights a few limitations after reviewing the literature on the whole-school approach in sexual education programs in Australia, Serbia, South Africa, and the UK. This section will attempt to elaborate on the impact of these limitations. Australia as a case study was limited in itself as the three main studies from this country came from the same pilot study of 19 schools in Victoria. This has mainly limited the size of the research body, making it challenging in exploring more research findings. While Australia as a case study specifically concentrates on its local context, it provides a few lessons that can be adapted to the reality of the whole school approach. One of the other limitations is that Australian literature concentrates mainly on a few authors. The inputs mainly come from the niche and emerging nature of the whole school approach. The research area is still emerging in the country. The first pilot study of the whole school approach started only in 2015-16. The literature on sexual education is still limited in Australia.

Though impactful, South Africa's Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) the programme comes with a few limitations. This is one programme that focuses mainly on risk reduction and resistance approaches sexual violence prevention. This case study (like Australia) is limited in itself as the pilot programme involved only a handful of educational institutions and universities, leaving scope for further research in this area. The data represents only the first-year female students of these select institutions.

This programme was designed to train female students to tackle sexual attacks at the school level. But the female students who underwent this training expressed concerns to execute their learnings in real-life situations. Even the authors expressed concerns over evaluating the outcomes of this intervention as the pilot programme did not have a control group. These limitations impacted their scope in comparing the outcomes of this programme with other female students.

One of the authors states that the resistance approach underwent criticism for being victim blaming. The author argues that sexual attacks are more about women who are being attacked rather than the men who perpetrate them. This can be seen as a conceptual limitation that could leave a negative impact on the intervention.

Another limitation is that this case study mainly concentrates on South African conditions. The recommendations that this study provides need to change to make them more adaptable to Irish schools.

The SwV programme from Serbia works within the boundaries and gives fewer options to schools with its functioning. Meaning, this programme operates on an 'op in' basis where the schools have to choose between adopting the ethos embedded within it. This could be considered as a limitation under which this programme works.

Another limitation is that the teachers who run this programme have to take training which is time-consuming. Teaching this programme needs expert mentors and teachers who need to know the necessary tools to execute the program.

Instead of occurrences of GBV in schools, the outcomes of the programme are measured by some pre-set targets around students' attitudes towards GBV and the number of participating schools. The case study highlights that the number of GBV in a woman's lifetime still stands high. And the data suggests that a whole school approach when executed correctly, works.

When it comes to the UK, the studies were conducted in selective and controlled environments in the schools of England. This is a major limitation as it could pose difficulties while adapting them to Irish schools. Due to financial and time constraints, the stakeholder engagement in these studies from the UK was limited to a fewer number of people and groups. This makes it difficult to pinpoint the same when conducted with different stakeholders which include teachers, students, and parents.

7. Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Now, as we conclude this REA, we can reflect upon the initial research question: “What are the international best practices that Irish schools can implement in order to foster a whole of school approach to support the RSE curriculum that has the potential for prevention of violence against women, tackling harmful gender stereotypes and promoting reproductive health and rights.”

Throughout the examination of the key documents and the four case studies in this REA, there is numerous evidence shown that prescribes how and what the SPHE curriculum in Ireland needs to include, and also not include, in order to be a modernised version that has the potential for the prevention of violence against women, tackling harmful gender stereotypes and promoting reproductive health and rights.

The process of conducting this REA has identified a multitude of lessons learned and best practices, which we will discuss below, and can be adapted to the Irish SPHE curriculum.

7.1 Lessons Learned

First, we can reflect upon the lessons learned from conducting this REA:

- What all of the academic literature inextricably displays is that, overall, more research needs to be done on the implementation of a whole of school approach to RSE in schools. Whilst this REA includes some of the most significant research on the topic, the overall quantity of academic literature out there is scarce. Particularly because, even across the world, there are few schools who are currently and actively implementing a whole of school approach to the delivery of RSE in their classrooms and communities.
- There is no one definition of what a ‘whole of school approach’ is. However, all of the definitions included in this REA tend to have the same characteristics. Some of those characteristics being:
 - “Promoting RSE both within and beyond the classroom”, “creating a culture of shared responsibility”, “an interdisciplinary approach”, “requires clear and achievable goals”, “needs to have a systematic, well-structured and well-delivered framework”, “all of those involved in the delivery need to be well equipped with the necessary tools and skills”, “necessary stakeholder engagement from all, of which include: parents, community, student, school leadership, and teachers and even charities or other external agencies”.

The lessons learned from the case study on Australia include:

- The capacity of schools to implement a whole of school approach to RSE relies on the school’s access to explanatory materials and social resources that can help to guide them on how to implement such an approach.
- After implementing a whole of school approach and its programmes, a feedback process and a post-evaluation report on the implementation of the approach is an important component in the development of the whole of school approach year on year to ensure it is robust and relevant.
- Indicators for the successful implementation of whole school RSE are essential, for example, a passion for leadership, political leadership, parental engagement, material resources and school community partners, and the more indicators the better there are, the better.
- Regular stakeholder engagement from school actors and external community actors is key to a successful implementation of a whole of school approach to RSE.

- A specific affirmative and non-affirmative gender curriculum is necessary to address gender-based violence in schools.

The lessons learned from the case study on Serbia include:

- A particular focus on GBV as part of a whole of school approach is a key success factor in implementation, especially with regards to wider community engagement.
- The providing of clearly defined and achievable goals in the RSE curriculum was another key success factor.
- A whole of school approach should be community-driven in order to result in long term sustainability.
- RSE must be made compulsory in all schools in order to for young people to be well informed on their own personal, sexual and reproductive health.

The lessons learned from the case study on the UK include:

- A whole of school approach to the implementation of RSE is sufficient in order to combat sexual violence and harassment in schools, compared to traditional models, due to its multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary nature.
- Strong structures and systems need to be in place in schools in order for any incidents of sexual harassment or violence to be addressed instantly to establish a proactive disciplinary culture in the school to such incidents.
- The wider local community, parents, and charities need to be engaged and involved in the implementation of a whole of school approach.
- Engaging and up to date materials, content and guidance on a whole of school approach for all involved actors will ensure a more successful implementation.

The lessons learned from the case study on South Africa:

- The key to tackling GBV as part of a whole of school approach to RSE is through raising awareness of sexual rights and gender inequality and teaching defence skills and well-being skills in relation to stress and depression as part of the programme.
- Defence skills, in particular, can help to improve women's confidence and empower them in their daily lives'.

7.2 Best Practices

Secondly, we can reflect upon the best practices shown by the research and case studies in this REA, that can be beneficial to the modernisation of the Irish SPHE curriculum on how to adopt a whole of school approach and have the potential to prevent violence against women, tackle harmful gender stereotypes and promote reproductive health and rights. In the case study on Australia, the successful procedures which produced optimal results included the study by Joyce (2018) identifying four determinants for influencing successful implementation of a whole of school approach to RSE:

1. The characteristics of those implementing the initiative (the implementation leaders supporting schools with the program).
2. The characteristics of those receiving the initiative (the schools).
3. The characteristics of the context (the policy context and school community partners).

4. The characteristics of the evidence base (evidence on whole school initiatives) and the process of implementation which includes the types of planning and monitoring processes used in the implementation (Joyce et al., 2018).
 - Both of the schools in Australia as part of the study highlighted stakeholder engagement as a critical factor for success implementation.
 - The case study displayed the importance of sufficient school funding and access to resources to support the teaching of sexual health in schools.
 - The case study also showed that the inclusion of Fraser’s status model, which supports the deployment of a critical affirmative and non-affirmative gender politics, has the capacity to transform the underlying power relations and structures that generate gender-based violence in an environment.

In the case study on Serbia, the successful procedures which produced optimal results included:

- Increasing sensitivity towards GBV in teachers which found that those same teachers were able to detect to a greater degree the signs of GBV and report any incidents in a quicker time and refer the victim to obtain the help and assistance that they needed.
- The case study also found that the majority of teachers (in this case 70%) requested further training on tackling and identifying GBV, making the implementation of a whole of school approach to RSE more successful, since it created an atmosphere of openness in schools to deal with the sensitive and difficult topic.
- Increasing teachers' ability to recognise gender stereotypes within academic literature helped those same teachers and policy makers to choose and produce the appropriate textbooks for the RSE curriculum, which in turn changed students’ attitude toward gender-based norms, stereotypes and violence significantly, as pointed out in the final evaluation of the programme.
- As well, it was empirically proven in the evidence assessment of the Serbia’s School without Violence programme that a community driven, whole of school approach to the implementation of RSE ensures that it achieves its set targets in a sustainable and long-term manner.
- Lastly, based on the data gathered from the case study, it showed that in order to ensure a successful implementation of RSE in schools, then RSE must be a compulsory subject as part of the overall school curriculum in order to educate the young people on matters around sexual and reproductive health.

In the case study on the UK, the successful procedures which produced optimal included, the study by Firmin, Lloyd and walker (2019) identified four thematic areas for inspection that would contribute to preventing, and responding to, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) in schools – referred to as ‘levers’:

1. The structures and systems through which a framework for consistent responses to HSB was available to professionals in schools and multi-agency partnerships.
 2. Measures focused on the prevention of HSB, including creating cultural school contexts that promoted safe social norms and healthy relationships.
 3. The ability of professionals and students to identify HSB in schools.
 4. The availability, use and effectiveness of responses and interventions following incidents in schools.
- The case study showed that multi-component whole of school approaches and interventions to RSE, which include a teacher delivered curriculum, have shown evidence to acceptably address issues such as sexual health and sexual violence in schools.

- The studies examined as part of the case study also showed that the procedure of having strong systems, structures and safeguarding interventions in place in order for schools to create a culture among teachers and students to see sexual harassment and violence as a wider issue, in order to prevent and have the capacity to address any incidents of sexual harassment and violence in a timely manner.
- Both of the studies highlighted that a whole of school approach to RSE needs to include actors from both schools and the wider community in order to have successful implementation. Those actors include teachers, students, school leadership, parents, local community agencies and charities.
- Based on the findings from the case study, teacher enthusiasm to the delivery of an RSE curriculum is critical in order for successful implementation, as the case study showed, it requires a high level of eagerness by those that deliver and implement it in order for it to have an impact on students.

In the case study on South Africa, the successful procedures which produced optimal included:

- The study on Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) highlighted how the programme was able to create awareness surrounding sexual rights, improve sensitivity around gender inequalities in society, help participants develop skills to protect themselves in dangerous situations of sexual assault, and how to deal with stress, depression through the teaching of well-being skills.
- The case study also showed that the participatory learning approaches of the programme helped the participants build new perspectives by having them reflect upon their own life experiences, instead of imposing a particular way of thinking on them.
- Another procedure from the programme which produced optimal results was the concept of empowering female students, because by empowering young women it helped the female students in the schools that took part in the programme, build confidence, develop new perspectives, and helped them to think in a different way about themselves.
- Furthermore, the study identified that a total of nine themes were generated based on the analysis of the data collected afterwards. Those themes included: a change in gender attitudes amongst students, including a shift in mindset to rape myths, improved awareness of sexual rights and sexual communication, improved perceptions about physical self-defence skills and positive thinking surrounding the journey of healing.
- The authors of the study also stated that the Ntombi Vimbela (NV!) programme was widely accepted by the students in the schools that took part due to its relevance and positive impact on their lives.

8. Recommendations and Next Steps

8.1 Recommendations

This study came across a list of potential recommendations which can be adapted to Irish schools. After reviewing the literature on whole school approaches and their challenges in Australia, Serbia, South Africa, and the UK, we picked the best practices from these countries which we recommend to the Irish Government.

The Australian case study highlights how the success indicators like community partnering, passion for leadership, government funding, and parental engagement could be used to identify the schools with weaker indicators for the whole school approach. These indicators will help the governments to identify which of the schools have lower success indicators. As a further course of action, the government can scale out plans for those identified schools to improve and provide the same level of education. The main takeaway from this case study is that all the school students across Ireland should be equipped with the same toolbox which will help them to deal with issues related to human sexuality and relationships. This can be possible by considering the context of individual schools to help them engage with the new national SPHE curriculum. This will positively impact the success rate of the new SPHE programme and also help standardize the SPHE across Ireland.

Serbia is a country that has a strong presence of religious ideologies which leave a great impact on its political system. This has become one of the primary causes, leaving an impact on sexual education, issues around gender-based violence, and the promotion of reproductive health rights. Serbia as a case study makes a strong recommendation for integrating sexual health education as a part of the school curriculum which will create awareness amongst the young adolescents on the matters related to sexual and reproductive health. Empirical data from Serbia highlights that a community-driven, whole-school approach has achieved set targets in a sustainable and long-term manner.

One of the main recommendations from South Africa to the Irish schools is the adaptation of training defence mechanisms that helps the students improve their confidence levels in daily life and especially while facing risky situations. This recommendation is taken from the Ntombi Vimbela (NV!) programme which is being implemented in South Africa. The students who took part in this programme stated that they find the programme to be leaving a positive impact on their lives. The programme received good feedback from the students which establishes that this programme has the potential to work for the benefit of the young people.

The students accepted this programme due to its relevance in daily life. This recommendation, if adapted into the SPHE curriculum may help empower female students to develop fresh perspectives on people and situations. The whole concept of this recommendation is to build overall confidence through a sexual education program. Adapting this recommendation to Irish schools can help provide better implementation and understanding of the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. The students will be able to identify the coming danger at an early stage and prepare to react with confidence by honing these skills.

There are a few recommendations from the UK which could be emulated into the Irish SPHE curriculum. One of the first recommendations we would like to highlight is to introduce a standardized guidance document. This document will help with the implementation part of the curriculum and refers to a whole school approach. This document will also be able to provide a list of certain characteristics that explains the meaning of the whole school approach.

Another recommendation to the SPHE curriculum is to develop a culture of disapproval and quick intervention to sexual violence in schools, and a need for strong cross-level systems and safeguarding interventions. This will ensure a proactive stance to any sexual incidents at all times. Irish schools could ensure these approaches be developed into the SPHE curriculum for an effective sexual education program.

The selection of the teachers may have a major impact on the delivery of the SPHE curriculum. The teachers need to have enthusiasm while delivering this curriculum. If a set of standards are not reached through teaching methods, this may leave a wider implication on the effectiveness of the whole school approach to the SPHE curriculum.

Drawing from the individual recommendations from the case studies—we recommend the whole-of-school approach as a policy to complement the update of the SPHE program. From the synthesis of the recommendations, the group recommends that when formulating the SPHE whole school approach:

1. Create a standardized document for Ireland that explains the whole school approach. Within this document emphasize the importance of community and parental engagement when it comes to the whole school approach.
2. Assess Irish schools for indicators of a successful whole-school approach. A presence of high parental engagement, passion for school leadership, material resources, school community partners, and political leadership indicate that the school has the foundation for success. Across the literature, the lack or presence of these indicators was a barrier or an aid to the whole school approach. A national assessment of school resources would identify schools that need more governmental support to implement the whole-school approach.

8.2 Next Steps

The whole-school approach is a rapidly emerging strategy to address GBV globally. While there are some barriers to implementation, the approach manages incremental change and challenges the culture around gender and GBV. Future research will need to look at the long-term implications of the whole school approach since a few of the case studies were on pilots. In addition, examine the whole school approach and how it impacts the community or society at large—or, in other words, what echoing effects the programme has on society and social behaviours. This research will come with time as more governments and schools implement the approach, and researchers will gain greater diversity in contexts and case studies. Overall, the approach is becoming widely used; as a strategy to address social problems like GBV.

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