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PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION TO ADDRESS GENDER-BASED AGGRESSION: YOUTHS' EXPERIENCES IN MEXICO, BANGLADESH, AND CANADA

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ABSTRACT

Building durable peace through education requires addressing the gender ideologies and hierarchies that encourage both direct physical aggression and indirect harm through marginalization and exploitation. Although formal education systems are shaped by gendered patterns of social conflict, enmity, and inequity, schools can help young people to build on their inclination, relationships, and capability to participate in building sustainable, gender-just peace. In this paper, we draw from focus group research conducted with youths and their teachers in public schools in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada to investigate how young people understood the social conflicts and violence surrounding them and what citizens could do about these issues, and how their teachers used the school curricula to address them. The research revealed that gender-based violence was pervasive in students' lives in all three settings, yet the curriculum the teachers and students described, with minor differences between contexts, included few opportunities to examine or resist the gender norms, institutions, and hierarchies that are the roots of exploitation and violence.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an incremental, normalized emergency that occurs alongside everyday violence in both war zones and non-war contexts. However, despite its omnipresence, GBV has been insufficiently problematized in peacebuilding education research and practice (Bourgois 2009; Kovinthan Levi

2019). Gender-sensitive perspectives are crucial to inquiry and practice in relation to conflict, peacebuilding, and education for peace (Davies 2008; Reardon and Snauwaert 2015). Gender is implicated in the ways conflict is addressed, whether negatively or positively, in both relatively peaceful contexts (e.g., Schultz, Buck, and Niesz 2000) and intergroup conflict situations (e.g., Bekerman, Zembylas, and McGlynn 2009). Hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity are deeply entrenched in existing hierarchies, ideologies, and practices of violence (Connell 1995; Dunne and Leach 2007; Mlamleu et al. 2000).

The research presented in this paper is an examination of the gendered dimensions of social conflict and violence experienced by a selection of female and male youths in three countries, and of teachers' responses to their students' concerns. The participants, who included youths and teachers from several schools in each country, live in the relatively peaceful context of Canada, the moderately violent context of Bangladesh, and the relatively violent, non-war context of Mexico. By engaging in dialogue with youth and teacher participants in a few schools per country, we investigated the conflicts that preoccupied these young people. We also compared their views about possibilities for and impediments to transforming these conflicts with those in the curricula their teachers used in their daily practices.

DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENCE AND PEACE

Direct and indirect forms of violence reinforce one another (Galtung 1990). Indirect violence includes the social-structural patterns of inequitable access to tangible resources and the power to meet human needs, such as discrimination against women and girls that results in their disproportionate levels of poverty and vulnerability (Burton and Dukes 1990). Another form of indirect violence is psycho-cultural, which refers to the norms, narratives, and symbols that legitimate direct violence, oppression, and enmity, such as misogyny and male chauvinism (Ross 2007). As argued by the peace and conflict theorists cited above, alleviating direct violence is not possible without also transforming its social-structural and cultural roots.

Social justice, which is the opposite of systemic violence, means that people in all sectors of society have access to substantive resource equity (social-structural redistribution), inclusion (cultural recognition), and equitable participation (i.e., political representation) in decisionmaking processes about the conflicts that affect them (Dahl, Stoltz, and Willig, 2004; Fraser 2005). As John Paul Lederach

(2003, 73) explains, achieving social justice requires collective communication and problem-solving, as well as "creating and addressing social and public spheres where human institutions, structures, and patterns of relationships are constructed." This is why transitional justice processes for peacebuilding often include education as a way to enable people to face the social harm and injustice embedded in their difficult pasts (Davies 2017; Paulson and Bellino 2017).

Acknowledging and applying these intersecting dimensions of justice enables us to discern the potentially nonviolent, transformable conflicts that underlie violence, and thus to create potential spaces for humans to redress the conditions that limit sustainable (just) peace. Figure 1 presents the three dimensions of destructive conflict or violence: participating in direct physical violence (represented at the top of the triangle), and in indirect cultural violence and social-structural violence (represented at the base of the triangle). Figure 2 presents the analogous dimensions of potentially constructive conflict that are needed for systemic peacebuilding: participation or political representation in decisionmaking processes (top of the triangle), and indirect systemic peacebuilding through inclusion and equitable resource distribution (base of the triangle).
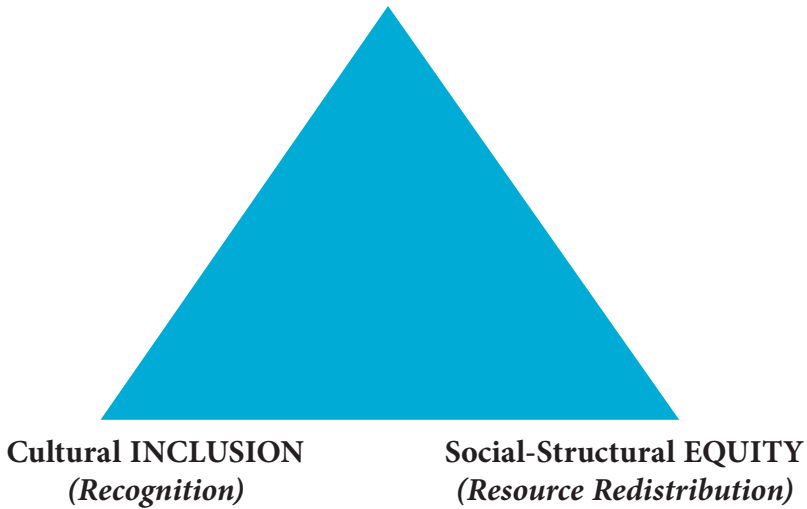
Figure 1: Dimensions of Direct and Indirect Violence

(Direct Violence) **PARTICIPATION**

Cultural EXCLUSION   *(Indirect Violence)*   **Structural INEQUITY**

Figure 2: Dimensions of Systemic Peacebuilding
***(Political)* PARTICIPATION and REPRESENTATION**

Cultural INCLUSION
(Recognition)

Social-Structural EQUITY
(Resource Redistribution)

Correction: The original publication of this figure in June 2022 erroneously labeled the lower left vertex "Cultural EXCLUSION." The figure has been corrected in this version (August 2022) to represent cultural INCLUSION as a dimension of systemic peacebuilding.

These mutually reinforcing dimensions of conflict, violence, and peacebuilding shape the lived learning experiences of young people, and their opportunities to learn through formal, nonformal, and informal education. Therefore, educating for just and sustainable peace means engaging in constructive conflict communication and addressing the systemic and direct causes of violence, including GBV.

Education and Social Conflict

While the scholars cited above offer possibilities for systemic justice-based peacebuilding education in informal and nonformal settings, we focus in this paper on uncovering the thin and broadly distributed spaces for socially transformative education in public formal schooling. Clearly, education alone cannot resolve entrenched structural and cultural conflicts, such as inequitable distribution of resources, othering, the concentration of power, and gendered aggression. However, some feasible changes in public education can help to mitigate and avoid reinforcing, and even begin to transform, such destructive conflicts.

Mieke Lopes Cardozo and colleagues (Lopes Cardozo, Higgins, and Le Mat 2016) have articulated the kinds of education policies and programming that can contribute to learners' development of agency in each of these peacebuilding

dimensions. Social-structural redistribution of resources includes work-related programming; recognition of cultural identity includes intercommunal arts, sports, and multilingualism; political representation includes citizen-action initiatives, participation in governance, and interpersonal peacemaking. Our research, presented below, shows how schools can give diverse students opportunities to understand and learn how/where to challenge dominance, violence, exploitation, and the paralysis of disengagement—to build this three-dimensional repertoire of constructive options for participating in collective democratic peacebuilding citizenship and for managing the inevitable social conflicts of life.

Young people's capability and inclination to participate in identifying the causes of and remedies for direct and systemic social conflict are learned "feet first" (McCauley 2002) in lived relationships and in social and political institutions. Implicit experiences with social hierarchies and governance may complement or contradict the explicit messages of curriculum lessons. Inevitably, such feet-first learning experiences reflect differential, gendered cultural and social-structural hierarchies and direct violence. In violent contexts in particular, citizenship education and related development initiatives may function as securitization that frames certain social identity groups (including youth) as an internal threat, or that ignores the barriers some people face (such as GBV) rather than encouraging democratic engagement (Kassimir and Flanagan 2010; Novelli 2011; Pearce and Perea 2019). Relying heavily on peacekeeping and policing to temporarily prevent violence—for instance, to protect vulnerable people from child abuse, rape, or war—can be the crucial first step educators take toward making space for peacebuilding. However, securitization efforts can also impede systemic peacebuilding by not enabling people to understand or handle indirect forms and causes of violence, such as sexism, male chauvinism, and gender discrimination (e.g., Cremin and Guilherme 2016; Novelli 2017).

Globalized discourse that is embedded in educational materials may indoctrinate students into a Western neoliberal view of the citizen as an economically useful, law abiding, implicitly male, autonomous individual who is alienated from historical contexts of injustice and possibilities for collective action (Espínola 2005; Kennelly and Llewellyn 2011; Quaynor 2012; Young 2011). Rather than holding public institutions or collective processes responsible for addressing social conflicts, mainstream citizenship, and peace education in particular, may emphasize individual responsibility and ignore gender and socioeconomic status (Davies 2011; Ross 2010).

School antiviolence initiatives also focus too often on surveillance and punishment—which reflects a disproportionate distrust of particular youth populations—instead of on education, resolution, or the transformation of underlying problems (Bickmore 2011; Skiba et al. 2002). The discourses of *convivencia* (peaceful living together) in Latin America, along with UNESCO's similar notions about a culture of peace, have been taken up in various ways and sometimes even reimagined as being in compliance with oppressive hierarchies (Ascorra and López 2019; Fierro-Evans and Carbajal-Padilla 2019; Morales and López 2019; Perales Franco 2019). For instance, in the Mexican state of Guanajuato, a 2014 convivencia school regulation emphasized regulation and punishment rather than equity or inclusion (Zurita Rivera 2012). This project thus investigates participants' opportunities to learn about social dynamics and democratic citizen action, which offer precious resources to bring about social transformation and build sustainable peace.

Public school education may build on, or contradict, students' experiential knowledge that has been shaped by their gender and intersecting identities in their respective communities. Resources for peacebuilding and conflict transformation are rooted (albeit often buried) in each community's languages, narratives, and strategies for approaching conflict; education may help people to name, critique, and build on these context-responsive cultural and social-political resources (Lederach 1995). Comparative international qualitative research can help to identify the risks and opportunities students face in their classrooms, and to elicit and recognize a wide variety of experiences, insights, and critical perspectives.

Gender-Based Violence, Education, and Building Peace

In a wide variety of contexts around the world, women and girls suffer disproportionate physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, especially intimate partner violence (United Nations 2015). Formal education can help young people and educators recognize and resist everyday violence against children, GBV in particular, but it often does not. School textbooks worldwide, which are indicators of the governing cultural and political values as well as the core resources for students and teachers, increasingly do address GBV (30% of 2005-2011 texts surveyed); this is especially true when the textbooks also address gender equity more generally (Russell, Lerch, and Wotipka 2018). On the other hand, even where macro-level GBV policies are in place, local districts and schools may not adhere to them (Parkes 2016; Parkes, Ross, and Heslop 2020).

Until quite recently, many research and intervention approaches to such violence often ignored the gendered school practices and structures that implicitly reinforce discrimination and sexualized gender violence (Leach, Dunne, and Salvi 2014; Manaen 2011). For instance, research in Latin America has mainly considered gangs, guns, and drugs in nongendered terms (Dunne, Humphreys, and Leach 2006), and programs to prevent bullying and corporal punishment at school have been similarly gender blind (Parkes et al. 2016). This remains true, even as gender experiences, roles, and hierarchies intersect with other social identities to reinforce such violence.

There is little robust qualitative research on the processes, sustainability, and long-term impact of GBV interventions in schools, particularly outside North America or sub-Saharan Africa (Parkes et al. 2020). Nevertheless, scholars have begun to identify key elements of relatively effective practices. These include applying wholistic school approaches rather than stand-alone GBV prevention programs (Dunne et al. 2006; Heslop et al. 2019); giving attention to the broad sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts of violence inside and outside schools (Lundgren and Amin 2015; Parkes 2016; Parkes and Heslop 2013); and justice-oriented consideration of the intersectionality among social identities such as gender, age, class, and race with social-structural inequalities and GBV (Bhana et al. 2021; Parkes et al. 2016). In sum, narrow or isolated initiatives focused on the symptoms of GBV in schools are unlikely to have much success in reducing the phenomenon; in contrast, initiatives that are effective seem to be broader, to be based in understanding and transforming the roots of misogyny and gender inequity, and to intersect with other facets of identity and context inside and beyond standard schooling practices.

Building on these insights, our justice-based peacebuilding framework takes into account the intersecting social-structural and cultural causes of, and the actors involved in, young people's direct experiences of violence, including explicit and implicit GBV, in three contrasting contexts. Participatory dialogical pedagogies and research methodologies are also important in helping students and teachers develop the "action competence" needed to address GBV and other injustice (Biström and Lundström 2021), and in linking learning with their experience and understandings in their particular contexts (Adriany, Yulindrasari, and Safrina 2021; Allen and Rasmussen 2017; Carl and Ravitch 2018; Parkes et al. 2020). Therefore, our methodology centers on teachers' and youths' expression of their experiences and understandings of gender, and the intersecting elements

such as race and economic status, in the conflicts they are concerned about (see examples below). Informed by Lederach's (1995) notion of culturally "elicitive" (versus prescriptive) conflict transformation education, our methodology was designed to facilitate participants' constructively critical reflections on the relation between education and social conflict, as experienced by marginalized youth and their teachers in particular contexts. Gender-based aggression is embedded in the complex contexts of social conflict described by the female and male young people who navigate them.

RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND METHODS

The larger research project from which this paper is taken examined the curricula experienced by our young participants, juxtaposed with their understanding of certain social conflicts affecting their own non-war urban settings and of what citizens, including them, could do about them. We focus in this paper on the participants' education and their experiences of gender-based aggression in selected marginalized urban communities in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada. Because we examined the relation between school and society in violent non-war contexts, we purposively selected countries whose cultural and political contexts had differing levels of violence. Table 1 summarizes some of these countries' characteristics. Because more than 80,000 people have been killed and many more displaced by drug gang violence and associated police/military activity in Mexico in the two decades preceding this study, it is ranked low on the Global Peace Index (IEP 2015, 2016). Bangladesh is ranked in the middle of the Global Peace Index, due to fairly high rates of social exclusion and some direct violence among the supporters of rival political groups. Even in Canada, a relatively peaceful country, marginalized high-poverty communities endure considerable direct and indirect violence, including GBV, that is largely hidden from its privileged neighbors (Cotter and Savage 2019; Doob and Cesaroni 2004). Thus, the contexts for this research are neither (post)war zones nor completely peaceful zones. Much of the review above is of literature that examines contexts of armed conflict and/or intergroup division, whereas this research focuses on other contexts of urgent, deadly violence, including GBV, that also deserve attention.

Table 1: National Research Contexts

	Canada	Mexico	Bangladesh
Global Peace Index rank (IEP 2016, 2021)	8 (2016), 10 (2021)	140 (2016), 140 (2021)	83 (2016), 91 (2021)
Population, 2022	38,388,419	131,562,772	167,885,689
Percent of population ages 0-14 (World Bank 2020)	15.9%	25.8%	27.2%
Human Development Index rank (World Population Review 2022)	13	75	133
Gender Inequality Index rank (UNDP 2020)	16	71	133
Government system	Democratic constitutional monarchy	Democratic federal republic	Parliamentary democratic republic
Some key axes of conflict and violence	• Francophone and Anglophone populations • Settler-colonial and indigenous populations • (Some terrorism)	• Spanish colonial and indigenous populations • Indigenous resistance to current government • Criminal gang and drug war violence	• Internal political rivalry • Anticolonial (British India) • Bangladesh–Pakistan • Refugee–citizen populations
School system	Secular, mixed	Secular, mixed	Religious, gender segregated

Our fieldwork sites within these differing contexts (2014-2016) were publicly funded urban schools in economically marginalized areas: Ontario, Canada (three schools in one city), Guanajuato, Mexico (four schools in one city), and Bangladesh (four schools: a boys' and a girls' school in a large city experiencing significant political violence, and a boys' and a girls' school in a smaller, politically more tranquil city). The heart of the research process was a series of voluntary focus group workshops with students and teachers at each school. The researchers

engaged 3-6 groups of student volunteers from grades 4-8 at each school, and each group had 4-6 students of similar ages. Table 2 presents the research participants and sites.

Table 2: Research Sites and Participants

	Ontario, Canada	Guanajuato, Mexico	Bangladesh	Total
Number of Schools	3	4	4	11
Students:				
Number of participants	55	81	36	172 students (82 female, 90 male)
Number of focus groups	12	16	4	36 focus groups 1 session each= 36 sessions
Teachers:				
Number of participants	14	21	16	51 teachers (mostly female)
Number of focus groups	3	4	4	11 focus groups 3-5 sessions each=32 sessions

Each student focus group met once. In most schools, we also held follow-up sessions with participants similar to the original groups to present and invite feedback on our initial results. In the focus group workshops, the students expressed their understanding of and concerns about social conflict and violence, what they believed citizens including themselves could do about these problems, and what relevant education they had received at school. The focus group participants were shown 10-12 (non-gory) images that reflected a range of locally relevant incidents of direct violence and indirect systemic conflict, including at least one that reflected GBV (see descriptions below). After viewing and briefly discussing the images, each group chose the conflicts they considered most important in their lives, and then worked together like reporters to name and discuss the "who-what-where-why-how and now what?" of each conflict. They shared their understandings of what stakeholders were affected, which factors had caused or exacerbated the problems, and what authorities and ordinary citizens, like themselves, could do about those problems. Students also told how their school curricula had addressed these concerns, or had not, and offered suggestions for the teachers. As dictated by ethics protocols and the informed consent process, the children retained a sense of security during this process by continually making

autonomous decisions about whether, how, and in what ways to participate. In addition, the focus groups took place in students' school spaces, where they had access to support if they needed it.

Four to seven teachers from each school voluntarily participated in separate focus group discussions that were based on their interest in educating for peace and/or citizenship. Each group attended three to five workshops held a month or more apart. They discussed the pedagogical practices they considered relevant to conflict, citizenship, and peace education. In the first focus group session, teachers shared what and how they were already teaching about various conflict issues and peace actions, and what their students were facing in their respective contexts. The teachers then vetted the image prompts that were to be used in the student focus groups, suggested adjustments for comprehensibility and local relevance, and communicated their own understandings of the conflicts represented in the images. Weeks later, after completing the student focus groups, the research team met with the same teacher focus groups to present anonymized results from the student focus groups at their school. The teachers reflected together on how the curriculum and pedagogies they implemented corresponded (or did not) with students' understandings and concerns. The subsequent teacher focus group sessions were prompted by summary analyses of official curriculum guideline documents in each location, which prompted further conversation about the (mis)fit between democratic peacebuilding goals, students' concerns and understandings, and the constraints on the teachers' work.

In keeping with the methodological guidance of Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), these cases were dynamic and not neatly bounded, and all were affected by local and national history, culture, social-economic inequity and power dynamics, and by the globalized shape of schooling. Our analysis was an iterative, interactive, constructivist process that engaged participants and an evolving research team. The unique participants, schools, and urban communities were comparable in the limited sense that all were economically stressed urban public schools in non-war zones that were experiencing considerable community violence. The team selected contrasting national-cultural conflict contexts in order to shed light on factors that could contribute to and/or impede young people's development of the capability, inclination, and confidence to contribute to building just peace in violent contexts. Our analyses and presentation of these findings, which were guided by the three dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding noted above, responded to our research questions: How did these young people understand and feel about various kinds of social conflict that were affecting their lives, including the factors underlying

direct and indirect violence? What challenges, roles, and repertoire of possibilities did they see in citizens' action for democratic peacebuilding as a way to help remake their worlds? How did they feel their schooling was helping them, or was not helping them, to overcome those challenges? How did their perspectives compare with those embedded in the curricula their teachers implemented? The comparisons between and among participants, schools, and urban-national communities shed light on factors that could contribute to, or impede, young people's development of citizenship agency for peacebuilding.

Our research goal was conceptual and illustrative; we sought to invite participatory dialogue more than to quantitatively represent attitudes or experiences. We enhanced reliability by including multiple student focus groups at each school, by meeting with each teacher focus group multiple times over a period of months, by vetting discussion prompts and, later, the aggregated student responses with their teachers, and by making follow-up visits to the schools and classrooms to critique and discuss our analysis with research participants.

We next present select findings from the student and teacher focus groups to highlight the participants' perspectives on gender-based aggression and gender-equity conflicts, which were vividly experienced by every group of young people in every research setting. Our analysis of gender conflicts highlights the interplay among the intersecting cultural, social-structural, and participation dimensions of conflict, peace, and education in each context.

FINDINGS

In this section, we first present findings about the gender-related experiences of violence described by the young participants in each country context, which their teachers then corroborated and discussed. We then use the three-dimensional conceptual framework introduced above to structure an analytical summary of the young people's understanding of the actors, factors, and causes behind that violence, and what they thought people like them and their families could do about those problems. They also described how their teachers' curricula addressed their concerns, or did not. We note the similarities and differences in the results from the three countries, and between students' and teachers' responses, for each dimension of gender-based conflict and peacebuilding: cultural bias or inclusion, social-structural equity, and participation, including citizen representation.

Gendered Personal-Physical Aggression:
An Acute Problem in All Research Settings

The focus group prompts used in each country included an image of a large clenched masculine fist of indeterminate ethnic identity in front of a smaller image of a person cowering. The young people in every focus group and country location identified the problem the image suggested as gender-based domestic violence. They then described their own experiences of gender-based harassment and assault, inside and outside their homes. GBV was prominent in the lived concerns expressed by students in all the participating schools and locations. They vividly described the actors involved in direct GBV: male perpetrators, female victims, and children, whom they described as both witnesses and victims. The students also identified other actors who could intervene but, in their experience, usually did not, including neighbors, family members, the police, and the courts.

Several male and female Mexican students emotionally described their vivid personal experiences of domestic violence: "Sometimes my dad hits my mom." "My aunt lives next to a man who killed his wife with a gun." Several girls said their freedom of mobility was severely curtailed by curfews and the risk of violence, and young people of both genders mentioned that rape was a particular risk for female migrants traveling northward to seek work outside of Mexico. Most of the focus group participants from a Mexican intermediate school and an elementary school chose to discuss gender-based aggression in depth; at the other two schools, this topic was eclipsed by implicitly gendered concerns, such as gang violence, pollution, and the economic exploitation of women and children. The Mexican students also described fighting, bullying, and street violence, primarily with male perpetrators, as major problems in their lives.

Student participants in the focus groups in Bangladesh similarly identified direct GBV and harassment in the community and at home as very serious problems in their personal experience. Most of the female students, especially in the smaller city, described experiencing gender-based harassment and violence in their own families and neighborhoods: "[Men] beat women for small mistakes." "Spoilt boys harass girls." They were outraged that females who had been assaulted were often stigmatized and noted that economically powerful men were particularly abusive. Girls in the larger city also had experienced GBV and sexual harassment. One said that her uncle frequently battered her aunt, and another lamented that "we always see women get beaten." Boys in both cities stated that "[gender-based violence] happens a lot in my neighborhood" and that "when husbands do not

like something about their wives, they beat them." Boys in the larger city also said sexual harassment was pervasive.

Student participants in every Canadian school focus group identified GBV as an issue of primary concern. Female and male youths from two of the three Canadian schools also expressed concern about homophobic/transphobic harassment, sometimes identifying their family members as targets. Canadian students, like their Mexican and Bangladeshi counterparts, all shared stories of GBV in their communities: women being murdered by men, a woman raped and beaten on the street near one of the schools, a male teacher fired due to his alleged sexual abuse of female students. Most students in one Canadian school and many in the other Canadian schools also expressed deep concern about the frequent interpersonal aggression, both in-person and cyber bullying, in their schools and communities, which was perpetrated by males who targeted weaker boys and girls. Despite Canada's identification as a peace zone, several Canadian students said they had been personally victimized. A boy and a girl from different focus groups at one school shed tears while describing being persistently targeted by aggression. In sum, GBV was a vivid daily concern of the young people in all three research settings.

Student participants in all three countries expressed considerably more concern about gender-based aggression than most of their teachers, although the teachers did affirm, when asked, that such offenses were widespread. The participating teachers' lessons addressed gender aggression conflict symptoms generically, if at all; this left the responsibility for stopping aggressive or intolerant behavior, and for avoiding others' aggression, up to the students. Echoing the students' narratives, a teacher at a Bangladeshi girls' school said he had warned students that "there will be naughty and spoilt boys on the street, trying to harass you."

Domestic GBV was addressed in a few Mexican elementary civics and ethics lessons, but they often emphasized poor communication between husbands and wives rather than patterns of violence stemming from a power imbalance. In one lesson, students created skits portraying the perspective of each party in a story from their textbook about a marital conflict over money. A teacher at a Mexican intermediate school said she had learned of her students' experiences of abuse by having them submit autobiographical journal entries, but she did not offer lessons to address their issues. Some female teachers in Mexico reported teaching self-care, empathy, and mutual respect in intimate relations, which implied but did not address gender roles.

Some of the participating Canadian teachers expressed a similar awareness of gender-based and heterosexist aggression in their students' lives but, despite the strong concern their students voiced in the focus groups, they all said the topic was too sensitive to address explicitly in class. When discussing direct violence in general, teachers and students in all three countries consistently referred to the aggressors as "he," without commenting on the gendered aspect of violence. In sum, the participating teachers, especially those in Canada, avoided teaching explicitly about GBV or about its roots in gender injustice.

Gender as Cultural Norms and Beliefs: Bias and Inclusion

Students in all three countries showed some awareness of how social-structural gender discrimination was reinforced by sexist cultural beliefs that in turn perpetuated GBV, as well as indirect harm. The young people in each context identified sexism and male chauvinism (and, in Canada, homophobia) as attitudes and beliefs perpetuated by family and community norms. A few also mentioned misrepresentation or invisibility of girls, women, and LGBTQ+ people in the media as another cultural perpetuator of gender injustice and aggression. Essentially all the participating teachers and students who addressed gender-based aggression named bad attitudes and faulty morals as the cause. Mexican teachers and students described a culture of normalized gender-based and domestic violence that was passed on through the generations. Girls and boys described and lamented the pervasive *machismo* (male chauvinism and sense of superiority) that was exacerbated by stress and drug use. An elementary school-age girl said that "men . . . want to feel like kings . . . Sometimes men hit women for no reason." A girl from an intermediate school stated that "[men] are, according to them, the best, and they believe they have the right to hit women." The boys sometimes mentioned alternate causes of domestic violence, such as stress, alcohol, or mass media representations, and they occasionally blamed women for provoking men's violence.

The Bangladeshi girls also described the cultural dimensions of gender-based conflict. They said the girls in their communities were generally less valued than the boys, and that their activities and mobility were severely limited by sexism and protective curfews enforced by fathers, grandmothers, and in-laws. Boys attending the larger Bangladeshi city boys' school shared the girls' pervasive view that women were expected to "serve and satisfy men" or to be "sex slaves" (boy participants in the smaller city did not discuss gender roles). They also agreed that victimized women were stigmatized: "If a woman, being abused, goes to the police station, people of the society look down upon her. They call her disobedient."

Worth noting is that one participant at each boys' school argued that Bangladeshi politics were corrupt and ineffective because the country's prime minister was a woman. The student and teacher participants said that proper Islamic behavior protected against sexist cultural practices, including aggression. As a teacher put it, "Men and women are equally respected in the real Islam." One boy explained that, "in Islam, women must wear *hijab* and veil, and men cannot legally touch or look at women . . . [Sexual harassment] happens mainly because of violating this Islamic law." The few Hindu minority students in each focus group remained silent, neither affirming nor contradicting this view.

The participating Canadian girls and boys also recognized the cultural dimensions of gender violence, such as biased representations of males and females in the electronic media and a school culture that normalized sexist and heterosexist aggression. They said they often heard sexist expressions, such as "don't cry like a girl, don't hit like a girl." They said that boys who did not conform to the dominant masculinity norms were bullied. One boy explained that "[male students] are just trying to prove they are better than [female students] . . . through violence." As in Mexico and Bangladesh, these Canadian young people said they disagreed with sexist ideologies. One girl sighed and said, "Boys . . . consider themselves stronger than girls, which is not true." A few Canadian teachers mentioned students whom they knew had been victimized by GBV, suggesting that sexist patterns were learned at home. One teacher lamented that a boy in her class recently had called a female classmate a "whore" but didn't say how she had responded. Several Canadian students noted the intersection of ethnocultural bias with gender-based aggression, noting particularly that Muslim women wearing the hijab were harassed and that Indigenous women were murdered in disproportionate numbers. However, several students and some teachers at one school also blamed the male members of one particular immigrant community for much of the aggression they suffered in school. Some Canadian students identified media representations (movies, sports coverage) as exacerbating sexism and male aggression; some also expressed optimism that alternative media representations could counteract such attitudes.

Although the participants in all contexts typically referred to the perpetrators of aggression as "he," the schools' curricula rarely or never explicitly addressed the cultural gender dimensions of the challenges they addressed. Most participants, both teachers and students, said they spent little or no class time on sexism or gender relations. Just a few Mexican and Bangladeshi teachers said they mentioned GBV in the classroom; neither the teachers nor the students in Canada reported having classroom lessons about GBV or sexism. Moreover, although the Canadian

students had attended presentations at school by guest speakers who opposed homophobia, few or none of them had encountered this issue in their regular classroom work. The Canadian teachers spoke little in the focus groups about gender-related conflict or injustice.

One Mexican elementary teacher had organized a unique class "debate" about gender-based domestic violence. She had allowed three of her male students to argue that women sometimes deserved to be beaten, while the teacher and their classmates voiced their disagreement. On the one hand, this lesson probed gender-based conflict and enabled the teacher and students to express their opposition to violence in more depth than the other participating teachers' curricula. On the other hand, this pedagogical framing could have been seen to legitimize an anti-human-rights viewpoint. In sum, the participating students in all three countries understood GBV to be part of a larger cultural problem of ideologies and attitudes that support male domination, which is learned largely at home and through the media. Neither the students nor the teachers in any of the focus groups acknowledged that their school played any role in reinforcing a culture of chauvinism or misogyny. The Bangladeshi and Mexican students and teachers instead suggested that moral values education might persuade individuals to be more tolerant or less violent. Despite acknowledging the presence of GBV in students' lives, the Canadian teachers suggested that sexist cultural beliefs were a problem in places such as Pakistan, not in their own culture.

SOCIAL-STRUCTURAL INEQUITY: GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND (LACK OF) INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION

All the student participants recognized to some degree how indirect social-structural gender injustice reinforced aggression, and that patterns of gender-based aggression reinforced economic marginalization. Many students in each context described the gendered status and occupational hierarchies in their communities, specifically that women's jobs tended to be poorly paid, and that women and girls had limited freedom but primary responsibility for caregiving in the family. Some students, especially those in Bangladesh and Mexico, described how the risk of GBV contributed to indirect gender injustice by impeding women's mobility and job opportunities. Some elementary and many intermediate Mexican students mentioned women's disproportionate economic vulnerability and dependency on men as an obstacle to escaping domestic violence. A few intermediate students described the gender "slavery" and prostitution linked to drug trafficking gangs and noted that gender discrimination intersects with the structural disadvantages rural indigenous people are already facing. The participating girls in the smaller

city in Bangladesh and the participating boys in the larger city said that a family's demand that a prospective bride's family pay a dowry reinforced direct GBV.

The Bangladeshi teachers taught a mandated social studies chapter about the immorality of dowry practices, as one elaborated: "Because of dowry, women get physically beaten or killed." A few female students in Bangladesh but none of the teachers mentioned girls' unequal access to education. A few Canadian students but none of their teachers mentioned social-structural discrimination against women, such as employment and wage inequity, and they were most animated and specific when describing heterosexist discrimination. Just one Canadian teacher mentioned the social-structural problem of females being constrained from fleeing violence because of their financial dependence on men. Another lamented that two-thirds of her students lived in economically marginalized female-headed households. However, these topics were not included in their practice. A few Mexican teachers said they had mentioned gender inequity in their lessons; however, this included generally urging girls and boys to stay enrolled in school and was not related to GBV. In sum, many of the participating students expressed awareness of how economic inequity reinforced gender-based vulnerability, or vice versa. Only the participating teachers in Bangladesh taught lessons about the social structures of gender inequity, and this was primarily in relation to the cultural practice of paying a dowry.

Participation in Cultural and Social Action to Resist Multidimensional Gender Injustice

As suggested above, the cultural, social-structural, and participatory political dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In this section, we reconnect these strands by examining the direct personal, political, cultural, and social-institutional elements in the students' and teachers' suggested responses to GBV and other gender injustice. The young participants in all three locations demonstrated that their repertoire of responses to GBV and other gender injustice was limited. None of them had confidence that any potential actions or actors would successfully confront or mitigate gender-based injustice or aggression.

Responses of the students in Mexico and Bangladesh to gender-based aggression almost universally focused on individual self-control, as inculcated via moral (Bangladesh) or values (Mexico) education and associated punishment. Most participating Canadian students suggested monitoring and punishment of perpetrators by authorities, alongside values of tolerance and opposing sexism/

homophobia. One Canadian student advocated for girls to take self-defense classes. Reflecting their teachers' representation of GBV as miscommunication that escalated into a dispute rather than a form of systemic injustice, several students in one Mexican elementary school suggested that conflict resolution dialogue and psychotherapy for abusers would be helpful responses. For instance, one Mexican boy suggested that a grandmother could mediate in a marital conflict: "[She could] talk to them and calm them down and ask them why they fight and hit each other." One or two Mexican girls suggested that neighbors or friends could physically restrain or retaliate against the perpetrators of violence. Thus, in each context, students' understandings of what could be done about gender-based or homophobic aggression emphasized changing individual attitudes, self-regulation, and occasionally force, rather than collective political or cultural action for change.

Participating students in Canada, Mexico, and Bangladesh said they wanted to discuss conflict and violence issues, including the gender-related aspects, more often and in more depth in their classrooms, and they expressed a desire to learn about the roots of and potential solutions for this behavior. Some students requested relationship-building and creative arts activities, such as role plays about how to handle disputes and aggression. Several students argued that teachers blamed them too much for disputes, rather than listening to their perspectives, and they wanted students to have a greater voice in solving conflicts in ways that were more sensitive to diversities such as race, ethnicity, and gender expression. However, other students wanted school staff to monitor hallways and the schoolyard more vigilantly, to intervene more often to enforce safety, and to punish aggressors.

Students in the focus groups in all three countries offered very thoughtful conflict analyses. A Mexican intermediate teacher described to her focus group members how some of her students had demonstrated their brilliant ability to speak about and probe deeply into gender relations and equity in the classroom. When her students were assigned to present panels on topics of their choice, one group of girls chose to address how much a parent should constrain a girl's freedom to keep her safe from GBV. They articulated the contrasting perspectives of father, adolescent girl, psychologist, and sociologist. The youth participants in all three contexts expressed both enthusiasm and ability to confront the challenges of gender injustice that enabled GBV. They wanted to know more about what they could do to confront these problems.

In terms of cultural action for change, several Bangladeshi girls and boys and a few Mexican girls suggested undertaking grassroots community mobilization to combat gender injustice. A Bangladeshi girl said that "common people have to [become] aware, so that they . . . never oppress women." Several girls in the smaller Bangladeshi city and one boy in the bigger city were optimistic that they could challenge patriarchal attitudes and promote justice for women. One girl explained: "We can make changes in our society by using the power of rallies to protest and raise people's awareness." So, even in the face of their discouragement and the lack of information about how to promote cultures of gender justice, the participating youth, especially those in Mexico and Bangladesh, believed in the possibility of and need for change.

The biggest gaps in the participating students' understanding of how to promote gender justice were in the dimensions of social-structural change and collective political participation. Most of the participating students in Canada, in contrast to those in Mexico and Bangladesh, were aware of at least one place where victims of GBV could turn for help, such as an anonymous helpline or a domestic violence shelter. They were not aware of the political actions and institutions that had created and funded these supports, but they assumed that they should and would be provided. None of the Mexican or Bangladeshi participants seemed aware that such institutional protection was available, or that people could mobilize to demand or create it. Like their Canadian counterparts, the Mexican and Bangladeshi youth suggested denouncing the perpetrators of GBV to law enforcement, but the focus group participants in Mexico and Bangladesh expressed their discouragement with and distrust of these political authorities. They said that the police would not come, or would take bribes, or "would do nothing" to punish perpetrators or to protect women and children. One Mexican elementary girl suggested that there were no protective laws: "We need a law to protect women." Clearly, the lack of awareness about the relevant social-political institutions demonstrates a need in all three research locations for curricula that address these issues.

The overwhelmingly common response to GBV among the participating teachers in Mexico and Bangladesh was the need for self-control—that is, that perpetrators should be persuaded that violence is wrong and that potential targets should be urged to protect themselves. Teachers in three Mexican schools emphasized the need to quell student aggression by using the curriculum to instill positive values—not skills, not institutional support, not citizen action. Teachers in the Mexican intermediate school emphasized "discussing" conflict issues as preferable to punishing disputants. Some teachers and students in this school described a lesson in a mandatory civics course that addressed GBV, legal equality, and

discrimination, but the students complained that the lesson that addressed the problem had not discussed any potential solutions in depth. One other lesson that included citizen action against gender-based injustice was a history unit on the Industrial Revolution, in which two Mexican teachers mentioned women's acquisition of the right to vote.

Meanwhile, the participating Canadian teachers avoided educating their students about GBV and gender injustice almost entirely. When one teacher suggested that they "should" teach respectful gender relations, her colleagues replied that such issues were too sensitive and "personal" to address in the classroom. Only one lesson about gender conflict was reported in one grade in one Canadian school: a global education lesson about Malala Yousafzai, the heroine who campaigned for girls' right to education in Pakistan. Beyond this single mention, the infrequent antihomophobia presentations made by visitors to the school, and the helpline information distributed, the Canadian students and teachers did not name or implement any lessons on personal, cultural, social, or institutional actions that could be taken to mitigate gender injustice or aggression.

Communicative conflict resolution capability, which some of the participating Mexican teachers included in their curricula, could be one necessary ingredient of nonviolent citizen action to promote gender justice. However, this remedy is not sufficient because it locates the problem only in the individual, not in the enabling and impeding institutions. Teaching about how social, cultural, and political change for gender justice has been possible in a community's history also could contribute to gender justice for sustainable peacebuilding. Teaching about inequitable gender regulations, as in the lesson about the need to prohibit dowry payments in Bangladesh, could provide a sense of how particular social practices that exacerbate GBV can be changed. Teaching about heroes in a distant fight for gender justice, as in the Canadian lesson about Malala Yousafzai, might inspire a sense of possibility, but it would not provide knowledge of the underlying local problems. In sum, the students and teachers who participated in the focus groups in Bangladesh, Canada, and Mexico point out a few potential avenues to pursue in creating justice-oriented, anti-GBV education.

DISCUSSION

The comparative international evidence resulting from this study, which centers on youths' and teachers' voices in diverse settings, demonstrates the urgent need to attend to GBV, and to its underlying cultural and social-structural causes

and remedies, as part of everyday school life and peacebuilding. The female and male participants in all the Mexican, Bangladeshi, and Canadian focus groups described having frequent experience with and concern about direct gendered violence. These students and their teachers also showed some awareness of the cultural and social-structural dimensions of gender exploitation that legitimized and exacerbated GBV. However, gender conflict was almost never addressed in any curriculum practice the teachers and students in the Canadian schools described, and it was rarely mentioned by the Mexican and Bangladeshi participants. Thus, the similarities in the experiences of the three country cases were more prominent than the differences. Despite the youth participants' extensive and troubling lived experiences of gendered conflict and violence, the responses to GBV and its roots in gender injustice were woefully inadequate in the curricula experienced by students in all the participating schools in all three national contexts.

Most students in all three contexts understood that GBV and discrimination were illegal in their countries—and wrong. However, most of the students, especially those in Mexico and Bangladesh, expressed deep distrust and skepticism that the existing legal protections would be upheld or enforced. Only students in the Canadian schools were aware of any institution where victims of gendered violence could go for help.

The participating youth and their teachers showed understanding that direct gender-based aggression was reinforced by indirect gendered cultural processes and intersecting social-structural inequalities. However, they were generally unaware of any political or institutional mechanisms to remedy these roots of violence. The youths in Canada were aware of recently enacted legal protections for same-sex couples, yet none mentioned the collective action or political processes that led to that legislative protection. A few students in Mexico and Bangladesh, mostly girls, expressed optimism that people could promote change in legal protections by collectively protesting injustice and changing community awareness. However, none could name or describe any particular social movement or mediating institution that might undertake such action for change. Their distrust of governments' unjust and ineffective securitization policies exacerbated the students' fear and frustration. In sum, the participating youth had had few opportunities to witness communicative peacemaking or problem mitigation, much less to participate in the large-scale social transformation and reshaping of institutions needed to address the indirect dimensions of the conflicts that underlie gendered violence.

A few teachers in some of the schools did touch on some direct and indirect dimensions of gendered conflict. A few curriculum mandates and textbooks had provided opportunities to recognize some gendered social problems—and, less often, their social-structural and cultural roots—and to teach critical analysis or communicative capabilities for citizen participation in the context of social justice conflict. However, the participating teachers and students, especially in Canada, told us that their lessons usually did not address these topics. In Canada, lessons occasionally named conflicts stemming from injustice, but none addressed contemporary local gender-based injustice and violence. In contrast, several Mexican and Bangladeshi teachers taught a few brief lessons opposing local gender-based aggression and discrimination.

The teachers in all three study locations were constrained by neoliberal individualism, which led them to frame their teaching-learning goals in terms of individual self-control, morality, and character, rather than conceptual understanding, institutional processes, or the development of skills to take action for peacebuilding. There was little evidence that teachers in any of these settings had guided practices to analyze or discuss gender-related conflicts, even those at an interpersonal level. The curricula implemented by the participating teachers apparently did not examine factors of social-political interest or expose students to possible collective actions they could take to resist GBV. This finding is consistent with Ross' (2010) critique of the typical peace education driven by international aid.

Further research could seek out comparative examples of gender-based peacebuilding education that would be viable in public schools in particular cultural and political contexts. Future researchers also could examine what kinds of lessons about gender conflict and aggression might serve as building blocks in the development of young people's capability and confidence to resist pervasive direct and indirect gender-based harm. Further research also could uncover more ways for young females and males, as well as teachers and institutions, to find the courage and the opportunity to address the systemic dimensions of gendered conflicts, violence, and peacebuilding. There will be no durable peace without gender justice.

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