



University of Gondar

Faculty of Education

Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education

INEDIS Project

Seminar Report on
Gender Based Violence

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A Seminar to get substantial points as an input for the research to be undertaken entitled, “Gender-based violence among female students with disabilities in some selected higher education institutions in Ethiopia”

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Gender-based violence is a very complex concept and it is of different kinds from community to community and from culture to culture. Hence, it was wise to thoroughly understand first the concept before undertaking a research on the issue. It was for this primary reason that a seminar was held with twenty female students with disabilities attending their education in primary and secondary schools in and around Gondar City Administration. Furthermore, to get a clearer and more comprehensive picture about the actualities of the incidence and prevalence of gender based violence against female students with disabilities in and around Gondar City Administration the concerned focal persons were invited.

The participants were twenty female students with disabilities attending their education in primary and secondary schools, four parents and six teachers in and around Gondar City Administration. Furthermore, to get a clearer and more comprehensive picture about the actualities of the incidence, the extent of the problem, type and form of gender-based violence against female students with disabilities in and around Gondar City Administration social affairs and police focal persons and representatives of the University of Gondar Gender Directorate and Disability Association were also invited and they were made to have amicable discussions over the issue at hand.



Picture1: Participants (partly)



Picture 2+3: Participants (partly)





Picture 4: The panelists

For the participants to get them all to attend the seminar a nice job was done by Mr. Belay Sinshaw and Mr. Kagnew Tarekegn in writing the invitation letter and in asking permission at different offices for the participants to be allowed to attend the seminar. The discussion points were prepared by Mr. Tadesse Abera and Mr. Tewelde G/mariam who was an invited scholar from the Gender Department of College of Social Sciences and the Humanities of the University of Gondar. He was chosen by his department after the core team members sent an invitation letter there. Mr. Wondwosen Mitiku was chosen to be a secretary. Beyond and above all Mrs. Meseret Hassen who is the Dean of the Faculty of Education and who is the chairwoman of the core team members at University of Gondar was the masterpiece of this seminar who excellently chaired and distributed tasks to all members of the core team.

Ruth Hotel was selected as seminar hosting hotel due to its closeness to the university, accessible to female students with disabilities and it has a well furnished meeting hall.

At 8:30 all participants arrived at Ruth Hotel and the seminar started exactly at 8:40. Here, after how the seminar started, underwent and what points collected and how it was closed will be presented.

1. How the seminar was opened:

Mr. Tadesse Abera was chosen to facilitate the seminar. He then, greeted and welcomed all attendees. He then said, "I have to invite Mrs. Meseret Hassen who is Dean of Faculty of Education and chairperson of the core team members (of the INEDIS project), to explain about the purpose of the seminar and to undertake the welcoming and opening speech". Then, she took the stage and sent a very warm welcome to all attendees of the meeting. She first thanked all attendees that they have managed to come to the meeting by sacrificing their valuable time and their keen concern in the issue. Next, she explained about the project and the purpose of the seminar. She said, "The University of Gondar along with Dilla University, Addis Ababa University and University of Vienna in Austria was able to get funding from the Austrian Government to create inclusive education and inclusive society in Ethiopia where people with disabilities are included." She said, "For this it was necessary to avoid any sort of female students with disabilities double disadvantage." In other words, "female students are victims of gender-based violence when they come to their schools; as a result we (UoG) wanted to study gender-based violence among female students with disabilities in some selected higher education institutions in Ethiopia. However, the concept is so complex and it is more contextual in nature in terms of culture and community. Consequently, it was necessary to get basic fundamental concepts from you (the participants) to frame the final research. Therefore, I hope you now have understood why you have been invited to come here." She then finally said, "I ask you humbly to share with us all of your ideas, thoughts and experiences over the issue. And, I thank you in advance for your participation."



Picture 5: Dean of Faculty of Education, Meseret Hassen in the middle

2. How the seminar was started:

The seminar was started by the wise questioning technique of Mr. Tewelde G/mariam, who was invited to be a member of the research from the Gender Department of the College for Social Sciences and Humanities as explained before. Next, the questions he raised and the answers given will be presented below. The procedure followed was, when Mr. Tewelde asked questions Mr. Tadesse gave the participants the chance to speak by memorizing and calling names when the participants wanted to contribute subsequently to the discussion; it was done for a better attachment and communication.

3. Questions asked

3.1. What is gender-based violence for you, (a conceptual question)?

It was agreed that sexual violence could be explained in terms of rape, early marriage, gender-based violence, flattering and/or hassling a female in a way she does not want to be admired or embraced. It was also taken for granted that there are two types of gender-based violence of two kinds. These are physical and psychological, internal and external. The internal sexual violence could be performed by people who are close to the abused. The external violence could be forced marriage.

3.2. Is there sexual harassment against female students with disabilities?

It was fully agreed by all participants that there is always sexual violence against female students with disabilities. In this regard, factors for the incidence of the violence were mentioned to be as follows:

- Unsuitable learning environment;
- Poor attitude of the society towards people with disabilities;
- Poverty and its incapacitating effect for parents of female students to afford everything required for the education of their children;
- Distance of schools from home; and
- Inability of the female students with disabilities to flexibly escape the trap of violence, especially blind and those with intellectual disabilities.

3.3 Who is the perpetrator of the sexual violence?

The participants openly revealed the perpetrators as follows:

- Bajaj drivers (a motor bike with three tires that accommodates four people including the driver). The drivers say, “Let me accompany you on your way to your home, if I help you I will be righteous and will enter to paradise” and when female students with disabilities enter to their Bajaj, they abuse them. Many females with disabilities have been abused in this way and a few have scarcely escaped;
- Renters and re-renters: because, female students with disabilities see the cheapness of the renting cost, they do not see the distance from home and the danger to be followed as most are coming from poor family and distant rural areas;
- Passerby on foot on the road side, by saying, “let us show you the safest road ways”;
- Youngsters;
- Taxi conductors (weyalawoch in Amharic);
- Teachers and school guards (one mother participant said, the teacher and the guard has sexually abused her daughter and she is still under legal persecution with the abusers);
- Civil servants; and
- Public civil servants.

3.4 When does the sexual violence happen? Is the violence reported to the concerned government higher officials? What solutions do they give?

The participants all in one word said, “at any time at any place violence against female students with disabilities is performed by all segments of community.” They have also explained where it happens. It happens for example, at schools, residence areas, when going to shopping, while using Taxi and Bajaj (even those students who use a contract Bajaj got frequently sexually abused), while walking alone, in the town when they are there for a certain purpose, generally speaking at any place, even, those who are married and have children commit the act.

Here to show the full picture let us raise specific cases. One mother participant said, “Her child was sexually abused at her home by a neighbor who was a former Dean at the University of Gondar. At first, her child was with mental retardation and she was unable to speak for herself and there was no eyewitness. Finally, she got a kind witness and now she is following the legal process”. This mother said, “Currently, I am not going to church because I fear my child could possibly be abused.” A teacher participant said, “In her school one female student with

disability was sexually violated and got pregnant by a school's guard and now he has disappeared to avoid legal persecution." Sadly, the pregnant student was with intellectual disability and did not know about what had happened to her. It was her classmates who witnessed the violence. The doubly disappointing fact is, as one teacher participant said, "There are cases when sexual violations happen at the kitchen in a house in the presence of the whole family at home. Also, there are families who force their children to take contraceptives to avoid unwanted pregnancy. But, they have already believed sexual violations will happen to their children at any time and at any place."

Over the issue of to whom the violence is reported, participants reported that they report to the office of Women and Children Affairs and to the police office.

At this juncture, Mr. Tadesse, the facilitator interrupted the seminar for a break. As you can see the participants were provided with a cup of tea, coffee, cookies, kolo, and the like. Discussions on the issue continued after break.

As you can see from the picture below there was a police commander invited to the meeting. He explained his experiences to the issue at hand. He said, "The violence happens at any time by neighbors, step fathers, and by those who do not have a humanitarian personality." He further said, "Though the incidence is rampant here and there the solution giving to these people is quite weak for different reasons." He said, "For example, the starting from the official who investigates up to a higher level who finally passes the decision to penalize the abuser." However, sometimes, he said, "there are times parents argue against the favor of the abuser. For example, last year a female student with disability was abused by a boyfriend of the mother, the police was informed of the fact and started the legal investigation, but, unfortunately the mother was against of this good deed of the police's job." He added, "Lately, there was a girl who was raped by her father and the police knew the fact and aborted the pregnancy." He also explained, "the police knew recently one fact and is following the case seriously, there was a 1st grade student aged 13 who was raped and pregnant by her uncle. This was known by her teachers as reported under investigation, why she stopped attending class and went to her mother living in the rural area."

Other participants reinforced what the commander explained in a plain matter. One teacher participant said, "There was a sexual violation over a female student with disability, who is a foster child. The abuser was the woman's nephew. The women hid the case and it was negotiated in disguise with elderly people and was not reported to police." Another teacher

added, “There was a man who sexually abused his own sister knowing the non-presence of his wife at home. We accused him, but his own mother, who is the mother of the abused similarly, defended the man as if her daughter is insane and accusing groundlessly.”

3.5 What are the consequences of the sexual violence against female students with disabilities?

As described by participants the negative consequences were observed to be:

- Educational problems. For example, low academic achievement, dropping out;
- Health problems. For example fistula;
- Psycho-social problems. For example depression, anxiety, loneliness, poor self-confidence, and the like;

3.6. What should be done to alleviate the problem and empower female students with disabilities?

The discussants put forward all possible solutions, strategies and recommendations to avoid the challenges and enhance the academic progress and future fate of female students with disabilities as follows:

- Full implementation of policies, declarations, legislations and proclamations of the national and international documents;
- Establishing systems that investigate and put a resolution when sexual violations happen and especially a due focus/emphasis should be given for early intervention and prevention;
- Capacity building training (e.g. life-skill training) should be given for female students with disabilities to equip them with better knowledge, skill, and attitude to properly avoid themselves from possible harms;
- Free phone call service should be arranged;
- Distance from school is a problem to many, so government kebele housing should be arranged near to schools;
- Legal bodies: when they pass the resolution it has to be exemplary and a good lesson to anyone;
- Social media should raise the issues in many of their programs;
- There should be the opportunity to connect parents and schools;
- We should educate parents by raising model people in this regard;

- When students are absent from school teachers should ask parents why the students became absent;
- Parents should be educated that all children are equal and all can equally be educated and become contributing members of their family, community, the nation and to the world;
- There should be cloth and food accommodation supports; and
- Finally, it was agreed that parents and the government should work together.

Finally, Mr. Tadesse, the facilitator summarized all the discussions held with all the discussants and expressed the whole objective of the seminar was met adequately. He then, invited Mrs. Meseret Hassen to give the closing speech. She thanked all the attendees for sharing their valuable time to share such fundamentally informative experiences quite supportive and guiding to the research to be undertaken. She has explained and promised for the attendees that the future research study will be communicated to all and when certain arrangements are done for example training attendees will be considered. She then, finally said, “The meeting is over and lunch is served at the hotel and everyone should enjoy it”. This closing was done right at 12:00 PM.