



EXPLORING CHILD PROTECTION MEASURES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN ZAMBIA

Moses Chisala¹, Daniel Ndhlovu², Joseph Mwape Mandyata²

¹Research Scholar, MOE-HQ-Directorate of Curriculum Development, Zambia

²Prof. Research Supervisor, University of Zambia, Zambia

²Dr. Research Supervisor, University of Zambia, Zambia

ABSTRACT

The study sought to explore child protection measures on bullying, discrimination and neglect in selected special education schools. Constructivist/Interpretive paradigm and qualitative intrinsic case study design were employed because the case study outcomes were solely about the learner with disability's experiences and special education school was of primary interest in the study. The sample size comprised of 38 participants and purposive critical case sampling was used to select 2 head teachers, expert sampling was used on 12 teachers and criterion sampling was used to select 12 learners and 12 parents. Data collection from head teachers and teachers used semi-structured interview guide and from learners and parents focus group discussion was used and data were analysed thematically. Learners with disabilities were protected from bullying using the 3R's bullying prevention strategies; recognising, responding and reporting strategies. Then, safety strategies, punishment strategies and prevention strategies were used to protect learners with disabilities discrimination in schools. Also, learners with disabilities were protected from neglect using material support strategies, social and emotional support and professional development strategies in selected special education schools. These strategies enable to protect children with disabilities from bullying, discrimination and neglect in selected special education schools. The study recommends that for the schools to ensure child protection from bullying, discrimination and neglect should develop and implement child protection policy (rules and regulations), ensure professional development training among member of staff on child protection measures taken when recognizing and responding to bullying, discrimination and neglect in schools.

KEYWORD: Child Protection measures, bullying, discrimination, neglect,

INTRODUCTION

The reality of a safe learning environment from a global perspective is that many children with disability do not fare well (UNICEF, 2017). United Nations (2019) reported that despite important progress made in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) violence remains a harsh reality for millions of children including those with disabilities around the world. Children need to be protected against all sorts of physical, mental, sexual abuse including bullying, discrimination and neglect, while in the school environment (Augustin & Abubaker, 2016).

Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development (MYSCD) et al. (2018) reported that child abuse in school has taken a range of forms including verbal abuse, bullying, discrimination and neglect. More and more children continue to experience bullying, discrimination and neglect in schools and this has caused on the increase of drop from school among children with disabilities (Musonda and Qinglin, 2015). Cervancia et al., (2019) found that children with disabilities are at a greater risk of bullying, discrimination and neglect as compared to regular children those without disability. Likumbo, et al (2021) revealed that more and more children are bullied, discriminated and neglected. Kanchiputu and Mwale (2016) reported that little progress has been made to lessen the risks children face from bullying, discrimination and neglect by fellow pupils and their teachers.

UNICEF (2019) reported that close to one in three students with disabilities between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide experiences bullying on a regular basis. In the study of Bibou-Nakou & Markos (2017), found that many children with disabilities in schools are exposed to different forms of violence and threats in schools and other educational settings. Similarly, UNESCO (2019) reported that persons with disabilities, those from disadvantaged backgrounds are among those who face the worst discrimination, affecting both their right to go to school and their rights within schools. Human Rights Council (2019) also confirmed that children with disabilities face disproportionately high levels of discrimination. In the study of Sharley (2019) also, found neglect to be the most common form of child abuse in schools, but frequently goes unrecognized within the school-aged population and represent major threats to child health and well-being in school. However, if that is the case there is need to know how protected are children with disability in selected special education schools in Luapula province of Zambia. There is increasingly concerned, with the increasing cases of bullying, discrimination and neglect amongst children in special schools (UNICEF, 2018); MYSCD et al 2018; Chirwa, 2019; Dankyi, et al, 2021). Bullying, discrimination and neglect are significant and long-standing social issues facing learners, teachers, and parents in schools. Violation of children rights in form of bullying, discrimination and neglect is underreported and under-punished when



discovered leading to high prevalence of bullying, discrimination and neglect in schools (Better Care Network, 2017). If that has been the case, the question is how protected are children with disabilities in special education schools? Children with disabilities are a vulnerable group. It is crucial to bridge this gap, by ensuring a safe school environment that may provide protection among children with disabilities in school. As such there is need to explore how protected are learners with disabilities from bullying, discrimination and neglect in schools. Hence, the study explored child protection measures on bullying, discrimination and neglect in special education schools.

Methods and Materials

The ecological approach by Bronfenbrenner (1979) was selected for the study had it has often used in child protection research. Ecological system theory was applicable for the study because it brought about child-teacher relationship, which is the tenet of child protection in school. The study was guided by a constructivist paradigm, it enabled the researcher to have in-depth understanding of the subjective world of head teachers, teachers, parents and learners on protection measures children with disabilities are subjected to due to bullying, discrimination and neglect experienced special education schools. An intrinsic case study design was employed because the case study outcomes were intended to tell the researcher something that was solely about the learner with disability's experiences and special education school was of primary interest in the study.

The study population consisted of two head teachers and critical case sampling was used to select them, then, expert sampling was used on 12 teachers and in-depth interviews was used to collect data. While criterion sampling was used to select 12 learners and 12 parents and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to collect data. Interviews and FGD were appropriate for this study because they gave participants opportunity to fully describe their experiences. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The study used an Inductive thematic approach for data analysis using six major stages that included familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and report writing, and, where possible, verbalisms were used to indicate actual voices of the participants.

RESULTS

In an attempt to how learners with disabilities were protected from bullying in selected special education schools in Luapula province. The major emergent themes indicated that learners with disabilities were protected from bullying in selected special education schools using recognising strategies. These strategies included recognizing the statistics or acts of bullying in the school, recognize the warning signs of victims and stereotypes of bullies and routine checking to stop harassment and bullying acts. In support of the findings above, participant (SCH2 ST10 M) had this to say:

"The school make sure that it provides routinely check to ensure that harassment and bullying ceases in

school". Teacher and learners have the responsibility for look out for any signs of bullying in school"

Another great theme that emerged from the findings was Regarding responding strategies that involved formulating child protection rules or policies, involved parents, held meetings that reinforced positive behaviours expectations, provided guidance and counselling on how to respond to bullying and punished learners using discriminatory language or derogatory remark. Further, participants reported that they formulated of anti-bullying programmes, formulated of support groups to sensitize learners, trained staff members on how to recognising incidents of bullying and taught anti-bullying social skill. In support, participant (SCH1 HT1) had this to say:

The school has put in place school rules that prohibit any form of bullying from taking place ill-treatment are reported"

In support participant (SCH1 HT1) indicated that:

"My office also usually discussed the issue of bullying with other parents, individually or in a support group.

Talking with the parents of the bully, or the bully him/herself, are some of the things I do with my teacher to ensure these children are protected from bullying from teachers and fellow learners with or without disabilities".

Contributing on the same another participant (SCH1 ST4 M) had this to say:

"We talk to the children and provide guidance and counselling services to learners who are bullied because of their disability. We provide on-going opportunities for continued open discussions on how to deal with bullying in school and, checking in with the child regularly".

The participant (SCH2 ST11 F) said:

"During anti-bullying club and activities all the learners are educated that bad effect of bullying. The school from time to time has been providing up-to-date and timely in-service training for staff to help them best handle and recognize bullying problems and potential disability harassment.

Another theme that emerged from the findings was the reporting strategies that included reporting all forms of ill-treatment, bullying incidence in school settings, any form of harassment and bullying acts. These strategies enabled the teachers in the school to protect learners with disabilities in schools from bullying. In support participant (SCH2 HT2) indicated that:

"There are teachers who are involved in sensitization on the same during school assemblies and engage them to report all form of bullying to teachers in school and then the teachers bring them to the administration for action.

Contributing on the same findings the above, one other male learner participant during the first focus group discussion (FGD 1 ML) had this to say:



“We are protected from bullying acts in schools by reporting any form of harassment and bullying acts to the teachers. If one tries to harass us, we quickly report them to our teachers or the administration for action”.

The second research question of this study focused on how learners with disabilities were protected from discrimination in selected special education schools in Luapula province. The themes that emerged included safety strategies that included developing school child protection policies, reacting to acts of discrimination in schools, reporting all forms of ill-treatment to the administration and routine checking to stop harassment and discrimination acts. This was evident from participant (SCH1 HT1) had this to say:

“As a school! We work towards reducing discrimination by promoting religious activities, respect for human rights and preaching love for one another. I ensure that all learners’ needs are met equally, even those who are not supported by their parents with school requisites, the school with well-wisher we try our level best to help such learners”.

Yet from the focus group discussion, participant (FGD 3 FP) said:

“To protect children from discrimination the school has rules and regulation which stop everyone, parent, teachers or fellow learners from discrimination others by word of mouth or action or denying them access to what they are entitled to in school. We report all forms of ill-treatment to the administration so that the offenders are punished”.

Punishment strategies came out has an emerging theme. These strategies included punishing children using discriminatory language or derogatory remarks, providing positive and negative reinforcement, material support, punishing children with disruption of activities and punishing learners with unwanted social behaviour. In support, participant (SCH1 HT1) said:

We usually punish children using discriminatory language or derogatory remarks. Children with disruptive behaviour are usually punished”.

Participant (SCH 2 ST8 M) in his contribution on how children with disabilities were protected from discrimination, reported that:

“We provide positive and negative reinforcement to the children. By positive reinforcement, we give praises and awards to good performing children. Concerning negative reinforcement, we withdraw certain incentives from the children”.

Another theme that emerged from the findings was the prevention strategies, participants revealed that some of the prevention strategies employed included in house training for staff on discrimination issues, engaging in Continuous Professional Developments (CPDs) and teacher group meeting on handling learners and provision of Guidance and

counselling. In contribution the participant (SCH1 ST6 M:) had this to say:

“The school provides capacity building programs to the teachers, we engage teachers in the in-house training on discrimination for them to have knowledge how to meet the specific learning needs of each child”.

In support of this finding, Participant (SCH1 ST3 F) said that:

“We provide guidance and counselling services to both sighted children, children living with disabilities, teachers and parents, we advise to give hope in this learner by being positive on them”.

The third research question for the study was aimed at establishing how learners with disabilities were protected from neglect in selected special education schools. The study findings indicated that learners with disabilities were protected from neglect using material support strategies. These strategies included providing mobility aids, auxiliary aids and services, financial and material support, and provision of the school requirements to learners. Other strategies included providing school requisites like washing and bathing soap, exercise books and pencils or pens to learners, and involving of parents. In support, participant (FGD 3 MP) had this to say:

“The teachers share some of the support services that are available for children with disabilities who may be victims of neglect in this school. I have seeing Sisters from the church coming in school to assist those who don’t have books, soap and enough clothes. not only that the school is supported financially by well-wishers to meet school requirements to meet specific learning needs of each child.

Participant (FGD 3 MP) has this to say:

“The school provide school requisites like bathing and washing soap, assistive devices and equipment such as wheelchair, crutches and walking white canes”.

Another great theme that emerged from the findings was the use of social and emotional support strategies, participants revealed that some of the social and emotional support strategies employed included provision of guidance and counselling sessions, providing motivational talks and engaging in religious activities. Other Social and Emotional Support Strategies that were employed were providing encouragements to children, psychological care and involving parents. Participant (SCH1 ST2 M) had this to say:

“The school always engages our parent if there is something, we have seen some parents come in school, like me when I was not feeling well they called by parents and they came to pick me and take me home”.

Also, participant (FGD 3 MP) during focus group discussion said:

“The school also through the guidance and counselling teacher always counsel these children when in school and make them understand that disability is not inability”. the teachers also share word of



encouragement to our children through bible verse discussion

Another theme that emerged from the findings was the use of Professional Development Strategies. These strategies included conducting disability-awareness trainings, orientation of new staff on how to handle learners, conduct workshops and counselling sessions on how to handle children as well as encouraging teamwork and love amongst children. In support, participant SCH1 ST4 M) had this to say:

“Usually the school has CPD and TGM services, counseling’s service, motivational talk service to promote positive attitude in teacher towards these children with disabilities. Through teacher group meeting we try by all means to induct and orient new staff on how to handle different learners with disabilities with their specific learning needs”.

In contribution, participant (FGD 4 FP) stated that:

“As for me, the Schools should identify staff to be responsible for monitoring bullying, discrimination and neglect and to whom learners with disabilities can talk freely in case they are bullying, discrimination and neglect. School has prefects who monitor, control and report bullying incidents because in most of the times these incidents are not reported to teachers”.

Based on the findings on the first research question above, it was evident from the study that children with disabilities were protected from bullying, discrimination and neglect in special education schools.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the first research question, it was evident from the study that learners with disabilities were protected from bullying using the 3R’s bullying prevention strategies namely recognizing, responding and reporting strategies. Recognizing bullying prevention strategies included recognizing the statistics or acts of bullying in the school, recognize the warning signs of victims and stereotypes of bullies and routine checking to stop harassment and bullying acts. Similarly, Falla et al (2021) pointed out that the teachers and administration need to recognize the warning signs of bullying in schools that children are involved in. Responding strategies included holding meetings that reinforce positive behaviours expectations, providing guidance and counselling on how to respond to bullying, punishing learners using discriminatory language or derogatory remarks, formulation of anti-bullying programs, formation of support groups to sensitize learners, training staff members on how to recognizing incidents of bullying and teach anti-bullying social skills. Other strategies identified include reporting bullying prevention strategies, which included reporting all forms of ill-treatment, reporting bullying incidence in school settings, reporting any form of harassment, and bullying acts. These findings were in conformity with the study by UNESCO (2021), which revealed

that establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms for learners affected by bullying, together with support was a key component of child protection program in schools. These bullying prevention strategies enabled the teachers in the school to protect learners with disabilities in schools.

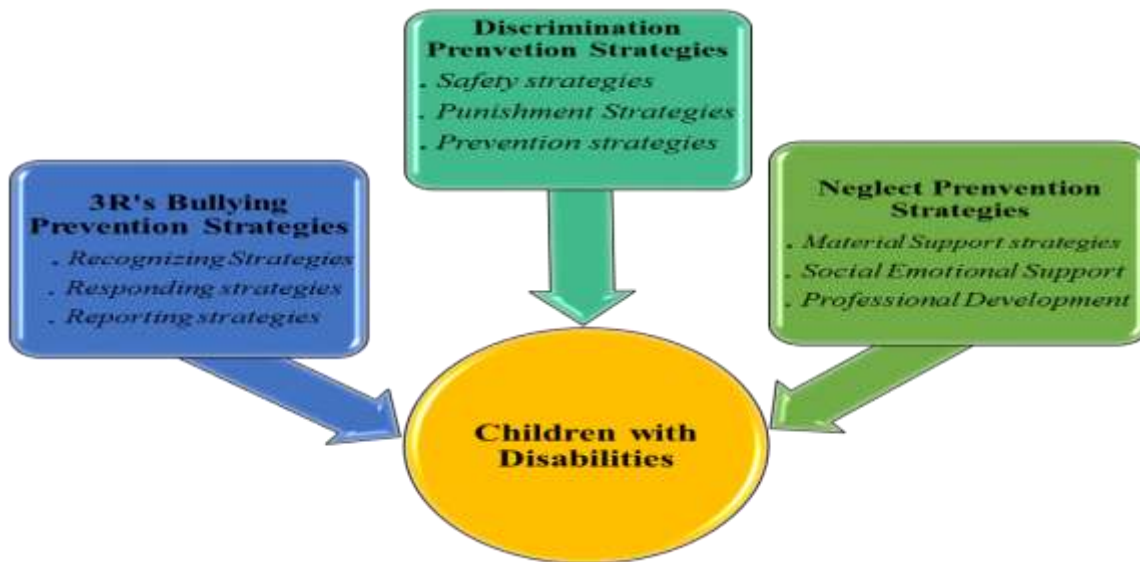
The second research question, children with disabilities were protected from discrimination in selected special education schools using safety strategies, punishment strategies and prevention strategies. The safety strategies that were used to protect learners with disabilities from discrimination included developing schoolchild protection policies, reacting to acts of bullying in schools, reporting all forms of ill-treatment to the administration and routine checking to stop harassment and discrimination acts. Punishment strategies included punishing those using discriminatory language or derogatory remarks, providing positive and negative reinforcement, punishing learners with disruption of activities and punishing learners with unwanted social behaviours. Further, in house training for staff such as Continuous Professional Developments (CPDs) and teacher group meeting on handling learners and provision of Guidance and counselling were used. These findings were in line with the report of Maciver et al (2019), which reported that schools provided training for school personnel, raised awareness on non-marginalized learners. These strategies enabled the teachers in special education schools to protect learners with disabilities from discrimination.

The third research question, learners with disabilities were protected from neglect in schools through material support strategies, social and emotional support and professional development strategies. These findings were in conformity with the study by Daro (2019) who revealed that to protect learners who were neglected due to lack of support service, teachers were to provide equitable access to quality universal services for children with disabilities. These strategies enabled participants to protect learners with disabilities from bullying, discrimination and neglect in selected special education schools. However, these findings were in line with the principle of the model that states that teachers and peers who are the elements of the mesosystem influences or affect the behaviours of the children in schools. These strategies must be considered in terms of their existence at each level, as well as their interaction across each level so that learners with disabilities.

Constructed Child Protection measure in special education schools

The emergent framework is nicknamed Chisala’s Child Protection (CCP) Framework, which is a result of twenty-four months of deep reflection on the elements or constructs that may lead to effective protection of learners with disabilities from bullying, discrimination and neglect in special education schools. Figure 1 below gives the silent features of the proposed CCP framework arising from the study.

Figure 1: Chisala's Child Protective (CCP) Framework



Source: Researcher's Proposed Child Protective Framework (2023)

Figure 1 above shows the four sections of the CCP framework. At the centre of the CCP framework, are learners with disabilities who are the beneficiaries surrounded by three strategies to protect them from bullying, discrimination and neglect in special education schools. The first section of CCP framework focuses on strategies that may be used to protect learners with disabilities from bullying acts in schools. The CCP framework affirms that to protect learners with disabilities from bullying, teachers need to first recognise or identify the acts of bullying in the school. This would involve recognising the warning signs of victims and stereotypes of bullies and routine checking to stop harassment and bullying acts. After recognising the bullying acts, teachers would need to employ responding strategies. This involves formulation of child protection rules in school, parental involvement, holding meetings that reinforce positive behavior expectations, provide guidance and counselling, punishing learner, formulation of anti-bullying program and training staff members. Lastly, teachers should employ reporting strategies, which include reporting all forms of ill-treatment, bullying incidence in school settings and any form of harassment and bullying acts.

The second section focuses on strategies that may be used to protect learners with disabilities from discrimination in schools. The CCP framework states that to protect children with disabilities from discrimination, teachers should employ safety strategies, punishment strategies and prevention strategies. Examples of safety strategies that should be employed by teachers include developing schoolchild protection policies, reacting to acts of bullying in schools, reporting all forms of ill-treatment to the administration and routine checking ups. Regarding punishment strategies, teachers should punish children using discriminatory language or derogatory remarks, disrupt activities and those with unwanted social behaviours as well as provide positive and negative reinforcement. Some preventive strategies that should be used include in house training for staff on discrimination issues, engaging in Continuous Professional Developments (CPDs) and teacher

group meeting on handling learners and provision of Guidance and counselling.

The third section of the CCP framework focuses on neglect strategies that may be used to protect learners with disabilities in schools. The CCP framework states that to protect learners with disabilities from neglect, teachers should employ strategies such as material support strategies, social and emotional support and professional development strategies. The examples of material support strategies that must include provision of mobility aids, auxiliary aids and services, financial and material support and provision of school requisites. Social and emotional support strategies that may be employed to protect learners with disabilities from neglect include provision of guidance and counselling sessions, motivational talks, in religious activities, offering encouragements and involving parents. Professional development strategies include conducting disability-awareness trainings, orientation of new staff on how to handle learners, conduct workshops and counselling sessions on how to handle children as well as encouraging teamwork and love amongst children. The CCP framework affirms that when these neglect prevention strategies were employed, learners with disabilities would be protected in schools.

Finally, the fourth section of the CCP framework focuses on the learners who are the beneficiaries on protection measures on bullying, discrimination and neglect in selected special education schools. Children in special education schools should thus be exposed to all the strategies highlighted in the CCP framework if they were to be protected in special education schools.

The study has provided an understanding to stakeholders inside and outside MOE on how learners with disabilities were protected from bullying in selected special education schools. In the context of the present study, the CCP framework emphasises on teachers and children without disabilities to



employ these strategies in order to protect learners with disabilities from bullying, discrimination and neglect in selected special education schools.

Recommendations

From the research findings and conclusion, the following are the recommendations made:

- i. Schools should develop and implement bullying, discrimination and neglect rules and regulation (policy) that promote inclusion and diversity in all aspect of school experience among learners with disabilities.
- ii. The school needs to ensure that administrators, teachers, staff, and learners have up-to-date professional development training needed to recognise and respond to incidences of bullying discrimination and neglect, and to adopt strong policies for preventing and addressing bullying in special education schools.
- iii. There is need for collaboration among teachers, parents and learners with disabilities in schools for the purpose of identifying and reporting all forms of direct or indirect bullying, discrimination and neglect among learners with disabilities.

Ethics Approval

The ethical approval was provided by the University of Zambia, Zambia with the reference number HSSREC:2022-JUL-047

Consent for participants

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

Acknowledgements

I wish to sincerely acknowledge the professional and moral support of my Supervisors; Prof. Ndhlovu Daniel & Dr. Joseph Mwape Mandyata for the guidance throughout my work. I would further like to extend my appreciation to the respondents who willingly helped in data collection as they responded to my interviews

REFERENCES

1. Augustin, S. A., & Abubaker, I. S. (2016). *The effects of child abuse on the academic of school children: Implication on the Nigerian economy*. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Science*, 3(3), 23-27.
2. *Better Care Network*. (2017). *Violence against Children and Care in Africa: A Discussion Paper*. New York: Oak Foundation. Pg 21
3. Bibou-Nakou & A. Markos (2017): *Greek teachers' experience and perceptions of child abuse/neglect*, *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion. Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1754730X.2017.1333916>
4. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Harvard University Press.
5. Cervancia, J.M, Hernandez, K.U, Rodavia, M., Roxas,E. (2019). *Child abuse and compliance on child protection policy in private and public basic educational institutions*. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education*, 10, (1), 3957-3963
6. Chirwa, J. (2019). *Child Protection in Zambia* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/child-protection-zambia-joseph-chirwa-llm-ma-mzihrm-mciarb/:text=Premium%20for%20free,Child%20Protection%20in%20Zambia,-Published%20on%20May>
7. Dankyi, L. A., Laryea, J. E., Dankyi, J. K., & Arhin, V. (2021). *Child abuse in basic schools in Ghana: Awareness and utilization of safety net structures*. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 11(3). Retrieved from <https://hipatiapress.com/hpjournals/index.php/remie/article/view/7519>
8. Daro, D. (2019). *A Shift in Perspective: A Universal Approach to Child Protection*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. VOL. 29 / NO. 1
9. Falla, D.; Sánchez, S.; Casas, J.A. (2021). *What Do We Know about Bullying in Schoolchildren with Disabilities? A Systematic Review of Recent Work*. *Sustainability* 13, 416. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010416>
10. Human Rights Council (2019) *Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children*, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/40/50, 2019
11. Kanchiputu, P. G. and Mwale M. (2016) *Effects of Domestic Violence on Children's Education: The Case Study of Mpemba, in Blantyre District [Malawi]*. *Journal of Psychological Abnormalities*. 5: 152. doi: 10.4172/2471-9900.1000152
12. Likumbo, L. C., Muleya, G. & Simui, F (2021). *Involvement of Selected Secondary Schools in Child Protection against Violence, Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in Lusaka, Zambia*. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI) |Volume VIII, Issue IX, September 2021|ISSN 2321-2705*
13. Maciver D, Rutherford M, Arakelyan S, Kramer JM, Richmond J, Todorova L, et al. (2019) *Participation of children with disabilities in school: A realist systematic review of psychosocial and environmental factors*. *PLoS ONE* 14(1): e0210511. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0210511>
14. Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, University of Zambia, United Nations Children's Fund, Save the Children International, United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2018). *Violence against Children in Zambia: Findings from a national survey, 2014*. Lusaka: Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development.
15. Musonda, M.M & Qinglin, Z. (2015). *A Study of Domestic Violence Legislation in Lusaka-Zambia*. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol.5, No.16
16. Sharley, V. (2019). 'Identifying and Responding to Child Neglect in Schools: differing perspectives and implications for inter-agency practice'. *Child Indicators Research*. 13, pp551–571. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-019-09681-z>
17. United Nations (2019). *Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence against Children by 2030*. New York: United Nations Publications.
18. UNICEF (2017). *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*. New York: UNICEF
19. UNICEF (2018). *INSPIRE Indicator Guidance and Results Framework Ending Violence against Children: How to define and measure change*, New York: UNICEF.