Violence against girls: their experience and protection in West Africa

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Characteristics of the research: “Listening to the Experiences of Children and Young People: Agents of our Contemporary World”

• Five countries – Benin, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Senegal
• 12 native speakers ethnographers residing for 5-6 months in villages and neighborhoods
• Children and youth researchers
• Tools to facilitate the expression and reflection of Children and youth
• Final results in October
Societal context:

• Childhood crucial ages, 7 years old and 12-13 years old- Participation in the household tasks
• Learning through work, corporal punishment, endurance
• Options? Agriculture, apprenticeship, marriage, school
• Girls as the weakest group- seniority and gender
• Violence linked to:
  • Girls own rejection of the priority of social order over self-realisation, individual rights
  • The hegemonic position of the male elders (masculinity), and their enforcement of the social order
  • Lack of resources
Experienced violence

- **Control** over their bodies by adults
  - Confinement to domestic space
  - As producers and reproducers – forced marriage
  - Pleasure / reward
  - Prestige
  - Economic

- Beatings to conform

- Insults, harassment, rape by adults and boys

- Economic responsibility of divorced mothers

- Fear- witchcraft, isolation
Girls’ responses:

- Gendered age-set groups
  - Expression
  - Economic

- Connecting to the wider world

- Using of their bodies
  - Transactional sex
  - Early marriage
  - Pregnancy / Abortion

- Conformity/ endurance/ suicide
Issue, Social Change:

• Sensitization is not enough- Knowledge exists
• About power, “distressed” local societies
• Limited allies and spheres for girls
• Services, judicial, support are scarce
• Disturbing times but where are new social alliances?
**Intervention proposed:**

Lack of locally available resources for transition

Empowerment

- Economic initiatives of natural groups
- Age-set groups to be coached, expression & reflections
- Intra- & inter groups dialogues on common predicaments
- Support expression and communication