METHODOLOGY

This study, undertaken under the auspices of GCPEA, builds on the previous two *Education under Attack* studies published by UNESCO in 2007 and 2010. For the first time, it is published by a group of agencies rather than a single agency. Since the last study, which covered incidents up to mid-2009, there has been a huge increase in reporting of attacks and, in turn, our understanding of the problem and what should be done about it has deepened and changed. This study aims to make new information and analysis available, extensively covering four years of attacks on education from January 2009 to December 2012, but also including information on key incidents in the first nine months of 2013.[5] Changes in the amount of information available and the scope and research resources of the study make it impossible to determine whether there has been an increase in attacks or, rather, more extensive monitoring or reporting of them.

Definitions of terms for data collection purposes

Types of attacks

This study focuses on violent attacks on education: threats or deliberate use of force against students, teachers, academics and any other education personnel, as well as attacks on education buildings, resources, materials and facilities, including transport. These attacks may be carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic or religious reasons.

The common thread is that these incidents involve the deliberate use of, or threat to use, force in ways that disrupt, harm or deter the provision of education and enjoyment of the right to education.

The study additionally reports on the use of schools for military purposes or security operations by armed forces, or police or other security forces, or by armed non-state groups, including rebel forces or any other armed military, ethnic, political, religious or sectarian group. This is an issue of concern because the military use of education buildings and facilities can turn them into a target for attack and can displace students, teachers, academics and other education personnel, thereby serving to deny students access to education.

It also reports on some aspects of systematic denial of the right to education by the state or armed non-state groups, for instance, where a government punishes student involvement in political protests by preventing participants from continuing their studies or where armed groups issue edicts ordering schools to close or stay closed.

Some incidents that do not involve direct violence are reported if they represent a denial of education imposed by force. An illustrative example is the unilateral imposition by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) of a firing range within a few hundred metres of a school in Janiba village in the West Bank in 2012 putting children at risk and the future of the school in doubt; teachers were arrested on their way to classes because they had entered the firing zone even though the IDF had not informed them that the firing range had been established near their school.[6]

The study does not count general collateral damage as an attack on education, except regarding incidents in the vicinity of education buildings and facilities where the likely effect of intentional violence is harm to students, education personnel or facilities. For instance, if a bomb is detonated alongside a school with the intention of harming a passing military patrol and the school is damaged or students are killed, that would be counted.

Moreover, the study does not include one-off, non-politically motivated violence by students or individual adults, such as the killing of 20 children and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School by a lone gunman in Newtown, Connecticut, United States on 14 December 2012. Such incidents, while devastating, are not addressed by this study because they are not carried out by armed groups or armed forces, or individuals associated with them, for ideological, political, military, religious or sectarian motives.

Targets of attack

Victims may include students, teachers, academics and all other education personnel, including support and transport staff (e.g. janitors, bus drivers, building contractors); education officials (local and national); education trade unionists; and education aid workers. 'Personnel' includes anyone working to support education, paid or unpaid, short-term or long-term.

Other targets include education structures and buildings (e.g. temporary learning spaces, schools, colleges, universities, district education offices, education ministry offices, temporary and permanent examination halls, educational printers' and publishers' offices, warehouses or printing works), education resources, materials and facilities, and transport and supply vehicles. Targets also include education-related occasions or special events which may or may not take place in a recognized education building, such as graduation ceremonies; school/university festivals or celebrations; education conferences; or education protests, sit-ins and demonstrations. These may have special symbolic importance and put high numbers at risk.

Motives

Although the study focuses on deliberate attacks against students, education personnel and facilities, the inclusion of incidents among the data presented in the study is not dependent on establishing motive, since this is difficult to prove in many cases through simple data collection unless there are published or publicly broadcasted orders or threats. Instead, data collection has focused on the type of target and effect or likely effect. However, motives have been included in the analysis when they are sufficiently clear or could be reasonably inferred from the data.

Perpetrators

The types of perpetrator covered by the study include armed forces (including international armed forces), police forces, intelligence services, paramilitaries and militias acting on behalf of the state, and armed non-state groups, including rebel forces or any other armed military, ethnic, political, religious or sectarian group. Perpetrators may also include violent mobs that are not organized as an armed group but are animated by similar motives. Although the study does not generally include attacks of a criminal nature, it does look at the phenomenon of attacks by armed organized criminal groups, including drug cartels, and the impact of related security operations in those situations where violence is widespread and there is a pattern of attacking education targets. These are included where the criminal organizations operate on a scale compa-rable to some armed groups, using military grade weapons, seeking to control or dominate areas of territory, perhaps provoking a military response, or extending their violence beyond pure criminality to include political targets.

Schools

For the purposes of this study, 'school' is often used as shorthand for a recognizable education facility or place of learning. In other places, the short form 'schools and universities' is used to refer to the whole gamut of early learning centres, schools, colleges and universities.

Students

'Student' refers to anyone being taught or studying at any level, from kindergarten to university, or in adult learning, in both formal and non-formal programmes.

Criteria for including country profiles

A significant number of attacks on education occur in countries where there is conflict. But incidents, notably those targeting higher education, also occur in countries not affected by conflict, particularly those where fundamental freedoms are restricted. Therefore, the focus of the study is not restricted to situations of armed conflict.

Although all countries where known attacks have been committed during the reporting period are included in the study, only those countries in which a minimum threshold of attacks has been documented are analysed in depth in the *Country profiles* section of the study. The threshold is an approximate measure, referring to countries where at least five incidents have taken place or five people have been harmed, and where either at least one of those incidents is a direct attack on a school or university or at least one student, teacher or academic has been killed from 2009 to 2013.

Criteria for categorizing intensity of attacks

Where the study uses aggregate figures for the period 2009-2012, including in the maps, it does so because these are the years for which data have been collected systematically, whereas for 2013 only data for key incidents up to September have been collected.

Use of education data

The statistical information on enrolment and literacy rates in profiled countries should be treated with caution, especially in the case of those countries that have experienced considerable disruption due to armed conflict, insecurity or instability. Though formally correct, such statistical data may contain outdated information and may not capture with full accuracy the actual educational situation of a country or of a particular area where attacks are occurring within a country.

Methods of data collection and analysis

The research team undertook a comprehensive review of the literature in English and conducted research into and analysis of information made available by UN agencies, human rights and development organizations, government bodies, scholar rescue organizations and trade unions as well in media reports, using standard sets of research terms. To research specific incidents, online searches were carried out using a detailed list of combinations of search terms for each country. The terms included the name of the country or geographic area, year, type of victim or target, and type or method of attack. The resulting information was then screened for reliability and compatibility with the study's definitions and terms of reference. For media and human rights sources, reliability was assessed using a range of criteria, including in the case of media reports, whether a professional news agency was used, whether the language was objective, whether professional standards of good-quality journalism had been observed and whether there appeared to be any political bias. Where there was uncertainty about the quality or independence of the source, advice on its reliability was sought from in-country researchers and development and human rights experts.

Tailored online research was carried out in four languages: English, French, Spanish and, to a limited extent, Arabic. In addition, a detailed questionnaire on incidents in 2009-2012 was sent to selected field offices of some GCPEA member agencies to complement information culled during the extensive review of government, UN, NGO and media reports covering 2009-2012. More limited research was carried out into incidents in the first nine months of 2013.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of human rights and development organizations and relevant trade unions in affected countries, as well as those monitoring particular countries. Focused follow-up investigations were carried out by researchers based in a small number of affected countries, including Colombia, Egypt, Mexico, Thailand, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Where numbers of attacks are cited in the study, they are drawn either from a particular reliable source such as the UN, in which case the source is cited, or they are a tally of reported individual incidents compiled from other secondary sources, including media reports and reports by human rights organizations of individual attacks, each of which is cited.

A summary of incidents for each country was prepared and a tally produced for broad categories of incident, target or victim. From this information, and in some cases from complementary interviews, data were triangulated, where possible, to avoid double counting of incidents. A chronological list of reported incidents for each country was created, along with citations. All reports of incidents concerning the same named victim, or same named target in the same location within several days, were compared to remove duplication and ensure reliable reporting. Where figures for the same incident differed, the more conservative count was used.

The study was extensively reviewed by experts in human rights, international law, education-in-emergencies and research methodology.

Challenges and limitations of data collection and analysis

Monitoring and reporting of attacks on education are improving but, without a global system for systematically gathering data, all figures on attacks should be treated with caution. The figures in this study are compiled from a wide range of sources of varying quality – from UN monitoring to human rights and media reports – each of which has its own limitations. For example, data in the UN Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict include only those incidents that the UN has been able to verify, which are typically a small sub-set of the number of violations actually taking place.[7] The researchers for *Education under Attack* have striven to present a minimum count of the number of attacks. However, in many places, attacks simply are not being reported consistently or even at all; in others, the dearth of official information necessitates a heavy reliance on media and human rights sources. From those sources,

we used only those that we judged to be reliable. The research team, however, did not seek to verify each case presented in this study. What the figures presented in this study do indicate – with all their limitations – is that the problem is serious and widespread.

Among organizations collecting information on attacks on education there is no commonly agreed data set that would enable accurate analysis of trends across countries. The lack of reliable baselines from which to monitor trends over time, even within the same country, makes it difficult to know with certainty whether attacks in general, and specific types of attack in particular, have increased or decreased over time or have changed in nature or geographic distribution or whether observed changes are more likely to be attributable to increases, decreases or inconsistencies in reporting.

The nature of the situations in which many attacks on education occur – where armed conflicts are ongoing or security constraints limit the availability of information – places heavy restrictions on how many incidents can be verified or even reported. In many locations, victims are afraid to report to international NGOs on education-related or other types of incident because they are scared of retribution if they are identified. For instance, in Gaza, many human rights groups are reluctant to report on child recruitment by Palestinian armed groups for fear of reprisals.[8] In many parts of Afghanistan, it is too dangerous for community elders to visit the offices of NGOs to provide information lest they be tracked back to their villages by anti-government groups. And the local staff of those NGOs may themselves be reluctant to report what information they do receive for fear of reprisals. For these reasons, the picture presented by the study is inevitably incomplete.

In some locations, there is limited access to mobile phone networks, telephone landlines, faxes or email to report information, along with a lack of information management systems in which to store it and compare sources. For example, the Nigerian military banned the use of satellite phones in north-east Nigeria because, they claimed, the group Boko Haram had used satellite phones to plan attacks on schools.[9]

Rigorous collection and verification of data are similarly complicated in some contexts where governments tightly control the flow of information and may themselves be perpetrators of attacks. Often, in these situations, there are very few sources of information and the few organizations that may be monitoring attacks may sympathize with the opposition group being targeted by the government and therefore may be biased in their reporting. Even where governments are not responsible for committing attacks and may be taking measures to prevent them, there may be political sensitivities that make them reluctant to publicly share data about attacks.

For some types of attack, there appear to be systematic gaps in information. For example, data collected on child recruitment and sexual violence do not always specify the location in which these violations occur; consequently, it is more difficult, in many cases, to determine whether there may be a pattern of these kinds of incidents occurring in schools or along school routes. In cases where teachers, academics or other personnel are killed, wounded or arrested, information is often missing that would help to distinguish whether or not they were targeted because of their professional status or the exercise of their profession, or for unrelated reasons that fall outside the scope of this study. The same is true of students, particularly in higher education. When figures are provided for the number of schools damaged or destroyed, typically there is no information on how many of these were targeted and how many were incidents of collateral damage. In this study, it is specified when it is unknown whether attacks are targeted and those incidents are not counted in any aggregate figures of attacks. As a result, the aggregate figures are likely to be undercounts.

The difficulty of cross-checking incidents across different sources, with the exception of major incidents that have drawn considerable national or international attention, is also a limitation of the study's data collection and analysis. Even where electronic information management systems are being used to assist verification and are able to draw on data from a number of systems, as they are in Palestine, it may not be possible to match up data

from different sources unless the same unique identities are assigned to the same schools where attacks have occurred or the same spelling is used.

To date, rigorous research – whether quantitative or qualitative – into the impact of attacks, particularly the long-term impact, is lacking. So, too, are in-depth evaluations studying the outcomes of measures taken by governments, NGOs and communities aimed at preventing or responding to attacks. As a result, for the sections on the impact of attacks and responses to attacks, the study has had to rely primarily on case study evidence and reports of measures undertaken and challenges faced.

Finally, due to time and resource constraints, field-based country research, particularly into the impacts of attacks and the outcomes of prevention and response measures at local and national levels, was extremely limited. For this study, it was not possible to undertake in-depth discussions with students, teachers and other education personnel, and the families and communities of which they are a part. Consequently, these important voices are often missing from the analysis. However, interviews with country-level informants, including ministry staff in a small number of cases, human rights researchers, and NGO and UN programme staff, as well as data provided in response to requests for information and a thorough review of existing literature, have helped to provide a more complete picture.

A soldier inspects the site where a teacher was shot dead while riding to a school on a motorcycle in Thailand's Yala province, 19 May 2009.
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