

# SHELTERED YET EXPOSED

A Report on Issues Affecting Girls  
Progression in Education in Ghana



Report By the **GIRLS EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT**

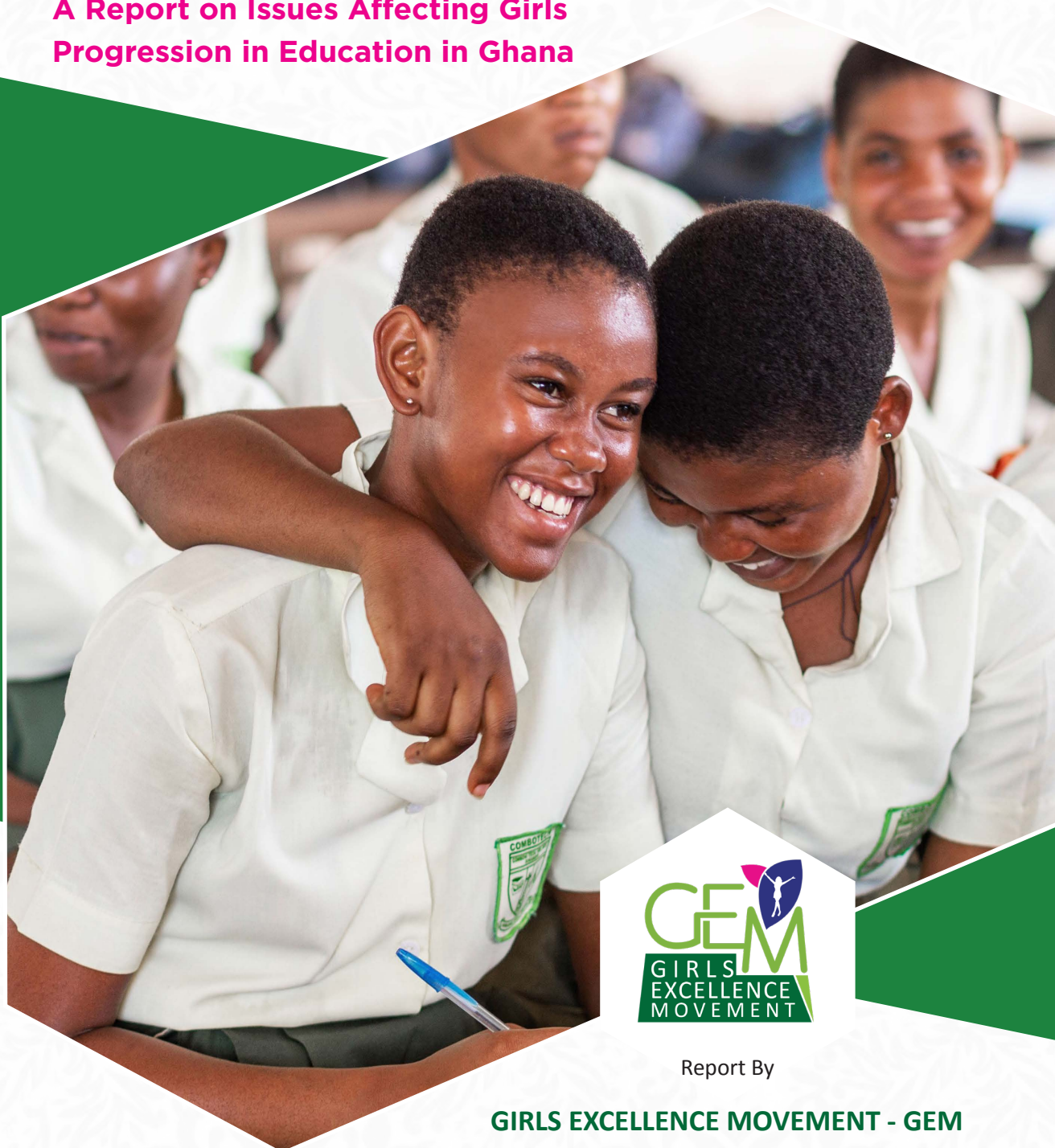
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**Canada**

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A Report on Issues Affecting Girls  
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**Canada**





*We leave indelible impressions on  
the hearts of girls wherever we go.*

[www.thegemworld.org](http://www.thegemworld.org)

Report By the Girls Excellence Movement  
with printing support from **UNFPA Canada**



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## A brief about the Girls Excellence Movement

# GEM

The Girls Excellence Movement (GEM) is a team of dynamic, passionate, and benevolent Ghanaian, Nigerian, Tanzanian, American and British young professional Volunteers who devote their skills, time, and other resources to delivering carefully curated capacity building programs for girls.

## OUR VISION

To Inspire, Educate,  
Mentor, and Inform  
to transform girls  
into change leaders.

We are grooming girls into excellent, independent, confident, well informed and fearless women who are able and willing to take on leadership in all spheres of life particularly, careers in the STEM fields.

GEM has been in existence as Exotik Girls Excellence Club since 2008 but became a registered non-profit organization in Ghana in 2018, after 10 years of consistent impact. GEM took home the Award for Girls Education Advocacy at the National Philanthropy Awards held in December 2021.

Our activities align and contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 4, 5, 10 and 17 respectively. We are Generation Quality Champions!



Our team of eighty-five (85) young professionals who serve as Mentors, Project Coordinators, Program Directors, Volunteers and Team Leaders avail their expertise and other resources to:

- Build leadership capacity for girls.
- Mentor and guide girls towards a purpose-driven life.
- Educate girls on how to set and diligently work to achieve goals.
- Seek financial help for brilliant but needy girls.
- Advocate for girls menstrual and reproductive health.
- Distribute Mathematical Sets and Sanitary Pads to underprivileged girls
- Conduct surveys, write reports and papers to influence policy in the interest of girls.
- Introduce girls to STEM careers they can pursue in this digital dispensation.
- Advocate against sexual and gender-based violence.
- Teach girls about and advocate for their online rights.

With a fervor to inspire girls to aspire to excellence and leadership in all spheres of life, GEM has since its inception, engaged with over 15,000 girls on 63 outreach programs as of November 2021.

Within this period, we have instituted THE STEM DRIVEN GIRL module which introduces girls to the STEM fields through easily replicable science experiments.



**We secured the 501(c)(3) approval/ tax-exempt status in the USA and also registered as a charity in the State of Washington in 2021.**





We are geared towards implementing an additional STEM program which will prioritize current trends in global technological education dubbed “Coding-On-Wheels” starting this 2022.

Over 10,000 units of Mathematical Sets have been distributed to sustain the interest of the beneficiaries in the STEM subjects. We anticipate a greater influence in the lives of girls extending beyond the southern part of Ghana in the coming years.

GEM has engaged in menstrual hygiene advocacy which includes the distribution of sanitary pads to girls in the schools that we visit. We have so far procured and distributed over 32000 packets of sanitary pads to keep the beneficiary girls comfortable in the classroom during their menses for at least three months.

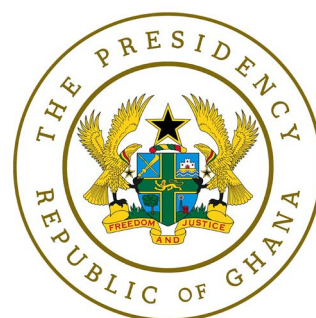
In seeking a lasting solution to period poverty, we acquired 470 signatures and wrote to relevant institutions to lobby the government to remove the unjust luxury tax on sanitary pads to make the commodity affordable for all women, especially for underprivileged girls.





*Our team of volunteers use the crowd funding approach to raise funds to finance our activities.*


The following notable institutions have also consistently supported our projects both in cash, products and in kind.





**This report highlights challenges of girls shared with GEM in candid conversations held within open and non-judging environment.**





We hope the details of this report nudges you to lend your voice and other resources to the cause of girls' excellence.

**YOU  
are  
inclusive.**

**Your Voice  
Matters!  
It starts  
today!!!**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of a study conducted by the GIRLS EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT – GEM to explore and highlight the underlying challenges affecting girls' education in Ghana.

It is aimed to kickstart a broader conversation around the subject and also to influence policy and provoke positive action to promote girls' excellence and progression on the academic ladder towards the attainment of the UN Agenda 2030. Primary data was collected using a survey instrument designed by GEM with the help of educational research experts from the University of Cape-Coast, Ghana.

The study used the descriptive survey design while employing the mixed method approach. We used convenience sampling method to select 2000 girls across fifteen (15) schools located within four (4) regions in southern Ghana from February, 2019 to September 2021. Data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, and infographics. The findings puts a spotlight on the challenges affecting girls' education in Ghana.

We found that about 50.4% of girls are being raised by guardians other than both parents, exposing them to financial difficulties, which further makes them vulnerable to sexual exploitation with trauma flashbacks and other mental health challenges affecting their ability to make the best out of school. 43% of the respondents have experienced one form of abuse or the other. And 51.9% of them have been sexually abused.

Also, 1 in 4 girls is in a non-platonic relationship with little or no sex education. And about 1 in 2 girls finds mathematic and other STEM subjects difficult though they are aspiring to careers in the health and medical sciences. About 34% of them want training in how to develop confidence. From the findings, 80% of the girls look up to people in their immediate family, yet the data also revealed parents as the highest perpetrators of physical and verbal abuse.

In summary, school-related gender-based violence, financial difficulties, personality-development factors such as the lack of confidence and self-worth, stereotypical fears towards STEM subjects, lack of clarity on career path choices, sexual abuse and related medical and mental health factors, family influence, the desire for it or the lack thereof are the factors affecting girls' progression in higher education in Ghana.

In the light of the above, we recommend deliberate girl-focused institutional reforms in the education sector especially in the area of guidance and counseling units in the pre-tertiary institutions.

We further propose STEM focused interventions; increased parental attention to girls and the involvement of religious and traditional leaders in awareness creation towards building a nurturing society that values girls' education by providing the enabling environment for the girls to thrive into powerful and transformational leaders.

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them have  
been sexually  
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# INTRODUCTION

Ghana's female population according to the provisional report from the 2021 Population and Housing Census (PHC) is approximately 15.6 million while that of the male stood at 15.2 million, yet women are woefully underrepresented at important decision-making levels across disciplines. This is the gap GEM strives to bridge by advocating and investing in building capacity for girls to become transformational leaders.

To achieve this desired goal of gender parity in leadership, the political and socio-economic values of educating girls cannot be overemphasized. Over the years, globally coordinated efforts have been directed to help girls explore fully, the transformational benefits of education as embedded in their rights.

To achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, most countries including Ghana implemented policy interventions toward attaining gender parity in education.

These have yielded some desired results as Ghana has almost achieved the desired gender parity in education, largely in the area of enrolment according to the Global Education Report, 2020. This means, currently, there are as many girls enrolled in school as boys. The challenge however is that Ghana is still struggling to retain a significant number of the girls in school, especially in the area of transitioning to tertiary levels. As reported in the Ghana Education Fact Sheet 2020, more girls are out of school at the upper secondary level, than boys.

Also, a survey conducted by Sasu (2019) and published on Statista.com in 2020 revealed that "male students dominate in all program disciplines in public universities in Ghana". For instance, there were 1,694 females pursuing Engineering as against 9,585 males and similar disparities run across all program disciplines. The question is why?

As players on the field, the Girls Excellence Movement observed through stories shared by the girls that, further to the known obstacles, there are other challenges hindering their ability to concentrate in school, study effectively, boldly take on STEM subjects, and actually stay on through university. These girls have reported having financial and academic difficulties while some have been raped, defiled, harassed, verbally and physically assaulted, and bullied, leaving them physically and mentally traumatized. Unaware, most guardians expect outstanding academic performance from their girls.

When the girls fall short of such expectations, guardians get frustrated and release that tension and resultant aggression on the girls, further compounding the issues. While the larger society also consistently push, insisting girls produce exceptional academic results, a subtle pressure requiring the girls to prove they are worthy of the opportunity without ever asking “if the girls were really, ok”.

But the question is, what makes a girl who was excelling in lower primary gradually become slow academically, socially withdrawn and eventually drop out by the time upper secondary is over? As the number of reported abuse stories increased from one school to the other, GEM began to ask probing questions. When asked what makes her struggle with her studies, the 16-year-old recounted in tears:

*“I was born by mistake by my mother so they took me to the man and because of money, he gave me to some man who sleep with me by force before giving me money for school. I am worthless because I am a mistake. Because of that, nobody cares about me.” - Girl, 16*

When asked why she thought of herself as a mistake, she said:

*“My mother says that to me any time she is angry and insulting me. - Girl, 16*

Unfortunate right? How is she to make the much-desired strides in school when she feels worthless? We probed further by asking a fifteen-year-old Form 2 pupil what her challenge was, and her reply is heartbreaking.

*“I have been raped three times in my life. By my ICT Teacher, my cousin who comes to visit occasionally and my relative who stays with my grandparents. This makes me feel bad and sad” Girl, 15*

It’s painful to read right?  
No one should feel this way.  
No one should cause this pain.  
No one should ignore this pain.  
No one should justify this crime.

Pains and struggles as these, are unseen catalysts to distraction.



Hearing and reading these stories, we wondered how difficult it must be to ace the academic expectations while dealing with the troubling and traumatic experiences. It became obvious that, sexual abuse and its associated traumas might pose a significant challenge to a victim's ability to meet the academic expectations of our educational system. But as a society, until someone close to us becomes a victim, whenever we read about rape, defilement or sexual harassment, most people trivialize the situation and make appalling jokes. A typical example is the awful rape tweet a Ghanaian Musician popularly known as Shata Wale made recently.

He seemingly admitted to engaging in rape in an exchange with Burna Boy, a Nigerian Musician. Though the post was taken down by twitter as reported by Starr Fm on January 5th 2022, hundreds of rape survivors had already been triggered by the time the post was deleted. In another example, a Ghanaian comedian, Michael Owusu who was also a teacher employed by the Ghana Education Service (GES) at the time, made a distasteful rape joke in 2015. Many women groups took him on, but he stood his grounds, insisting his statement was a harmless joke. (He has since been sacked by his employer, not for the rape jokes by the way). But in a twist of events, he has recently issued an apology on 8th February 2022 after seven long years. (Links to these two cases are attached).

Would our response to rape stories change if we knew the effect it has on the educational aspirations of girls? Would we as a society abhor rape jokes if we knew how badly such jokes triggers girls who might be dealing with such trauma while striving to meet their educational goals?

All the above examples inspired the Girls Excellence Movement to conduct a survey to explore the buzzing questions on the challenges affecting girls' progression in education in Ghana.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study sought to explore, verify, and highlight the underlying challenges affecting girls in Senior High Schools to initiate a broader conversation on the challenges affecting girls' progression in Ghana's educational system.

This report aims to influence policies and provoke positive action to promote girls' excellence, general welfare and progression on the academic ladder towards achieving the UN Agenda 2030.

## METHOD

The study employed the descriptive survey design while using the mixed method approach. The convenience sampling method was employed to select 2000 girls across fifteen (15) schools located within four (4) regions in southern Ghana. Data was collected on monthly outreaches from 2019 to September 2021. The main instrument used for the study was a questionnaire developed by the Girls Excellence Movement – GEM with the help of experts in the field of educational research.

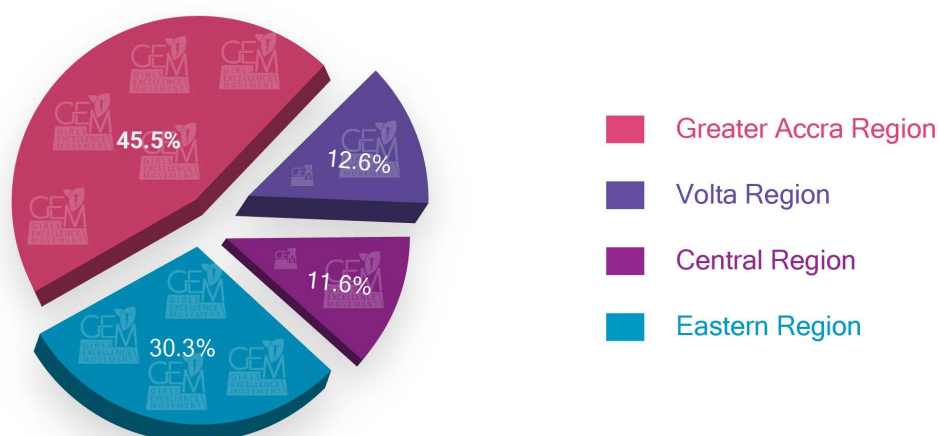
Supplementary data was obtained by engaging the girls directly in candid face-to-face conversations during breakout sessions on outreach using an interview guide. Data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, and infographics.



## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

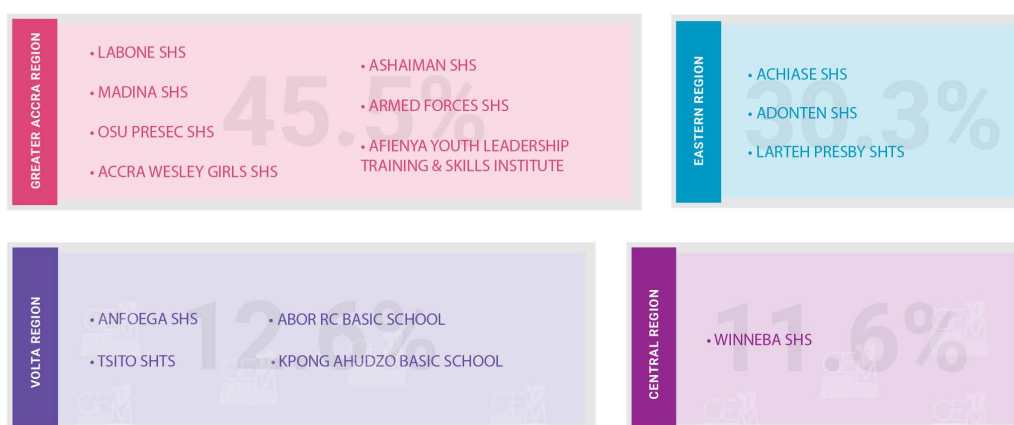
The preliminary findings of the survey include the demographics of the respondents. The demographics cover region, school, age, course of study, class etc. The results are presented in charts below.

**Figure 1: Regional Distribution of Schools**

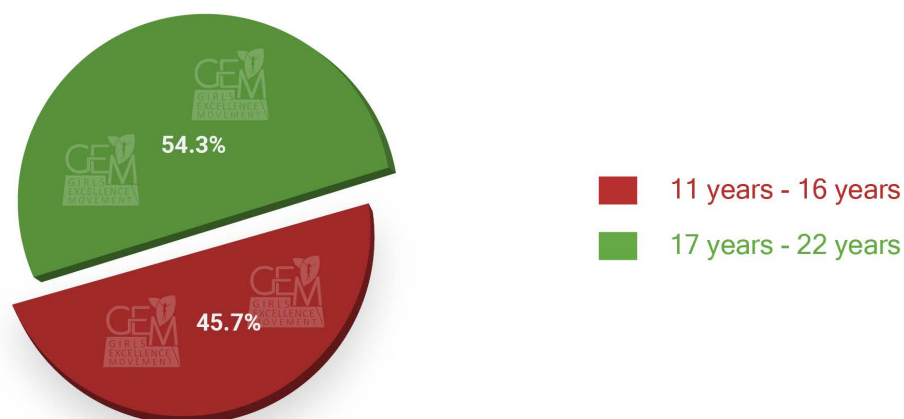


Seven out of the 15 schools sampled were located within the Greater Accra Region. Four schools were sampled from the Volta Region, three from the Eastern and one from the Central regions respectively.

**Figure 2: Schools involved in the study**

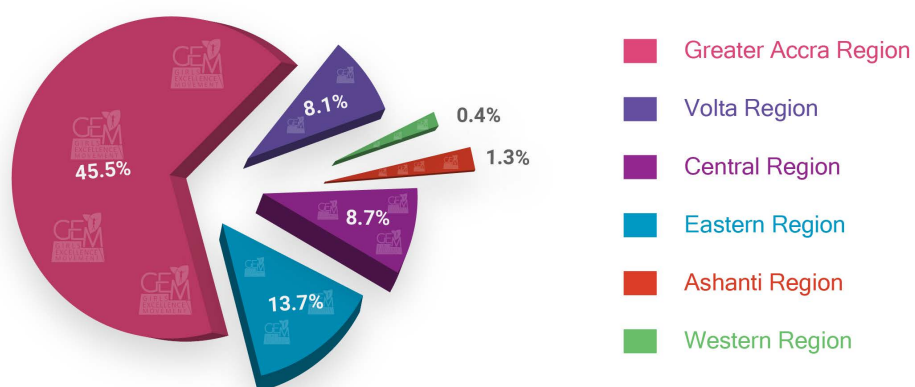


**Figure 3: Age Distribution of Respondents**



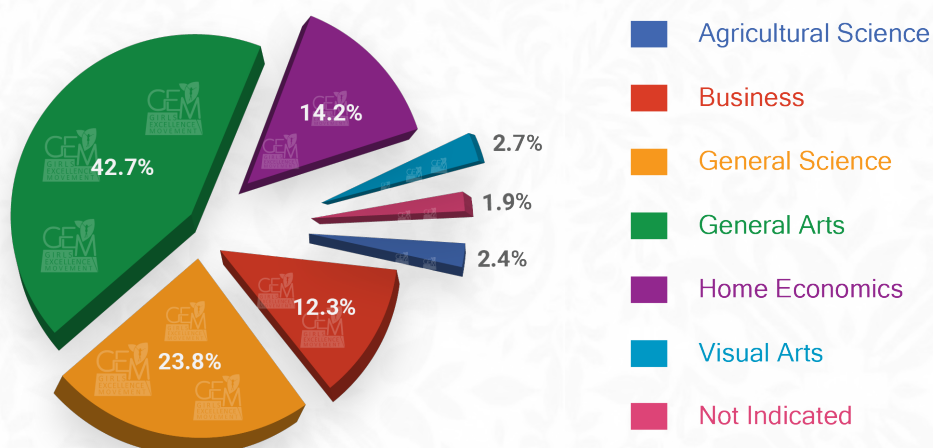
54.3% of the girls were within the age range of 17-22 years while 45.7% of them were within the ages of 11 and 16 years respectively.

**Figure 4: Region of Residence of Respondents**



45.5% of the girls sampled resided in Greater Accra Region. The rest were residents of Volta, Central, Eastern, Ashanti and Western Regions respectively.

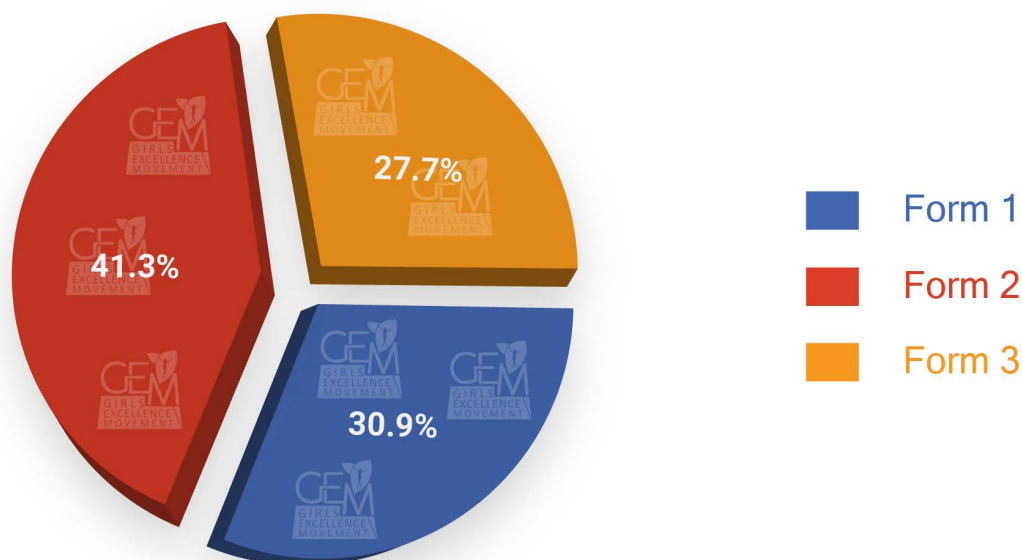
**Figure 5: Distribution of Respondents by Course of Study**





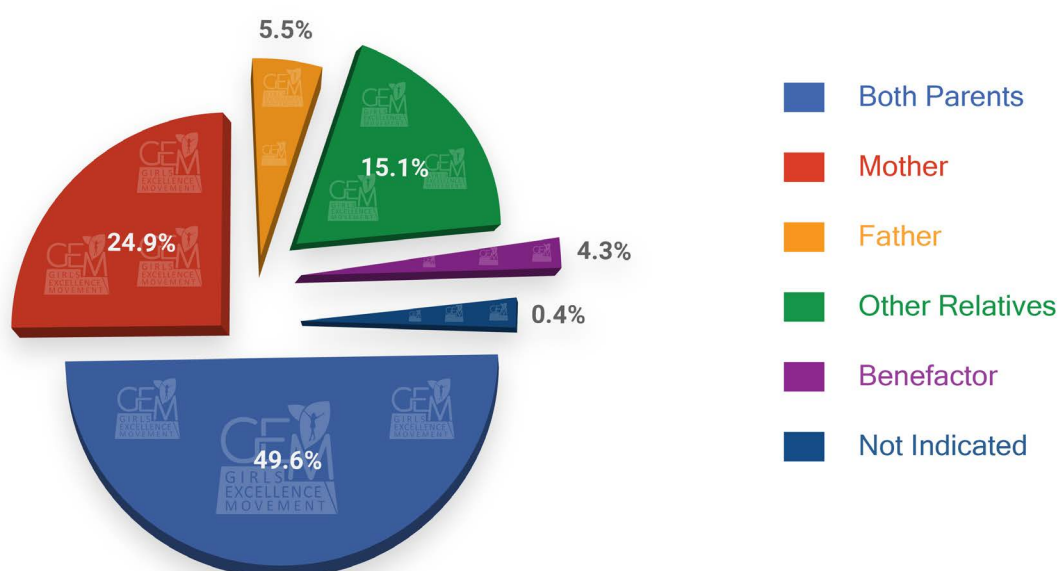
Nearly 1 out of 6 girls is studying General Arts. 23.8% of them were Science Students. The others studied Business, Home Economics, Visual Arts and Agricultural Science respectively.

**Figure 6: Distribution of Respondents by Class/Form**



Girls in form two represents the majority of respondents covered in the survey.

**Figure 7: Distribution of Respondents by Type of Guardian**



Almost 50% of the girls are catered for by both parents while close to 25%, representing 1 in 4 girls are being raised by single mothers.



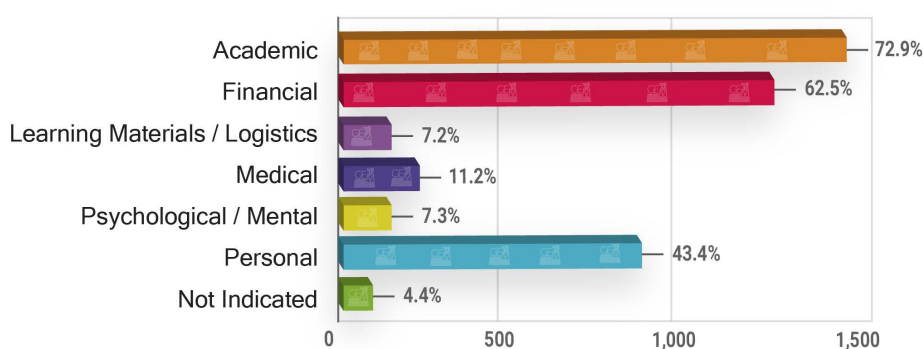
## MAIN FINDINGS



## REPORTED CHALLENGES

The charts below show a distribution of the reported challenges affecting girls in the course of their education. We have grouped the challenges into three categories namely: Primary Challenges, Specific STEM Subjects Challenges and Specific Subject Area Challenges.

Figure 8: Primary Challenges



From the responses, 72.9% of the girls reported having academic challenges, 62.5% have financial and 43.4% reported having personal challenges.



Girl, 16

"My parents are not together anymore. My mom side is poor but my father side is rich, but they refuse to help my mom to take care of me. So I it difficult to pay for practicals and all that I need in school"



Girl, 15

"I have financial problem because I stay with my mother alone and my mum find it difficult to pay my fees and give me money for practicals for me"

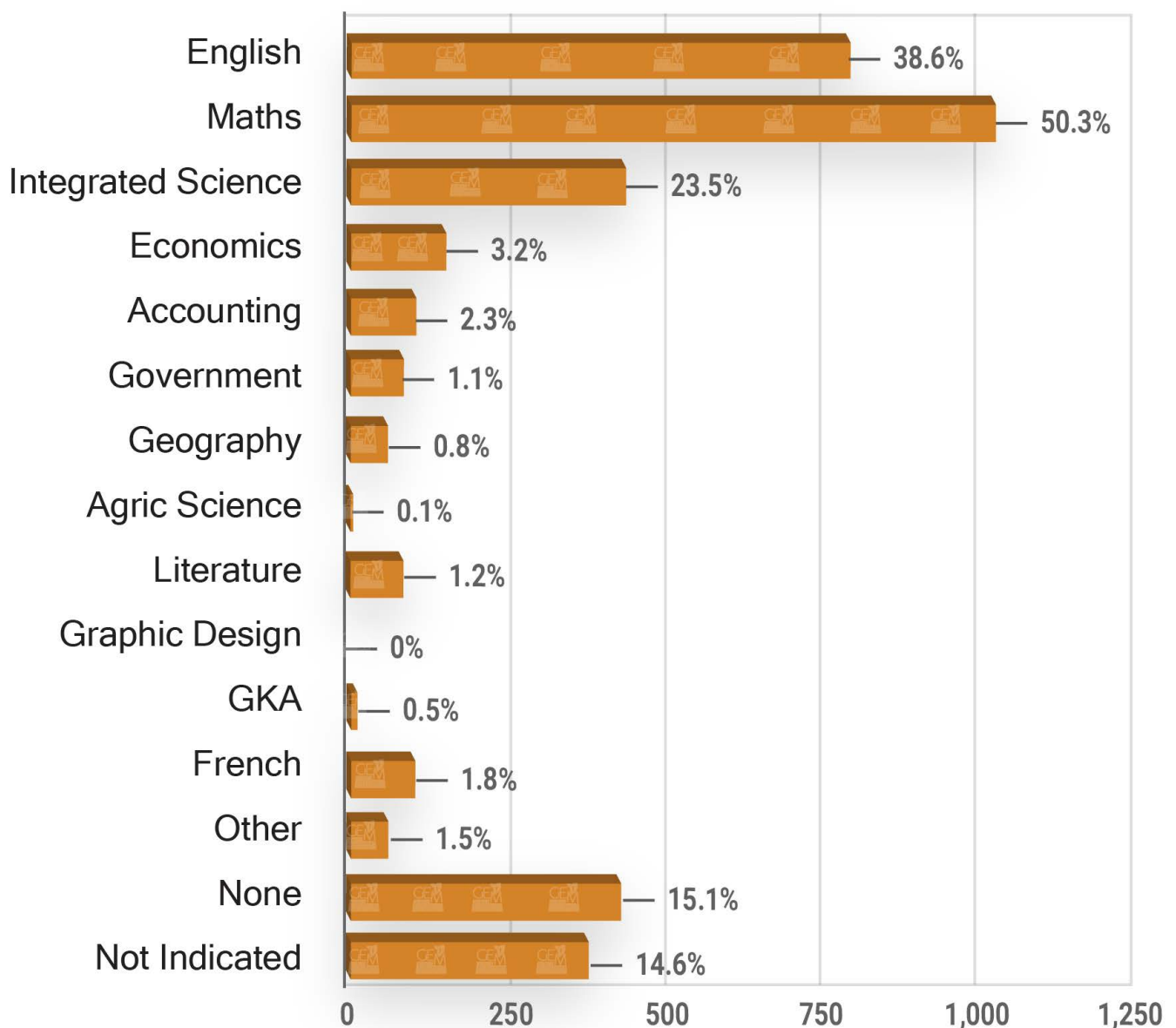


Girl, 20

"I don't have things to use for practicals in school because of my financial background. I end up calling people for help and a man said I should come to his house but he raped me but didn't give me the money for practicals. I feel guilty for myself"

When asked what specific subject poses a challenge to them, 50.3% of the girls reported, Mathematics as their greatest subject challenge. These responses affirmed an open secret. But should this be left to persist?

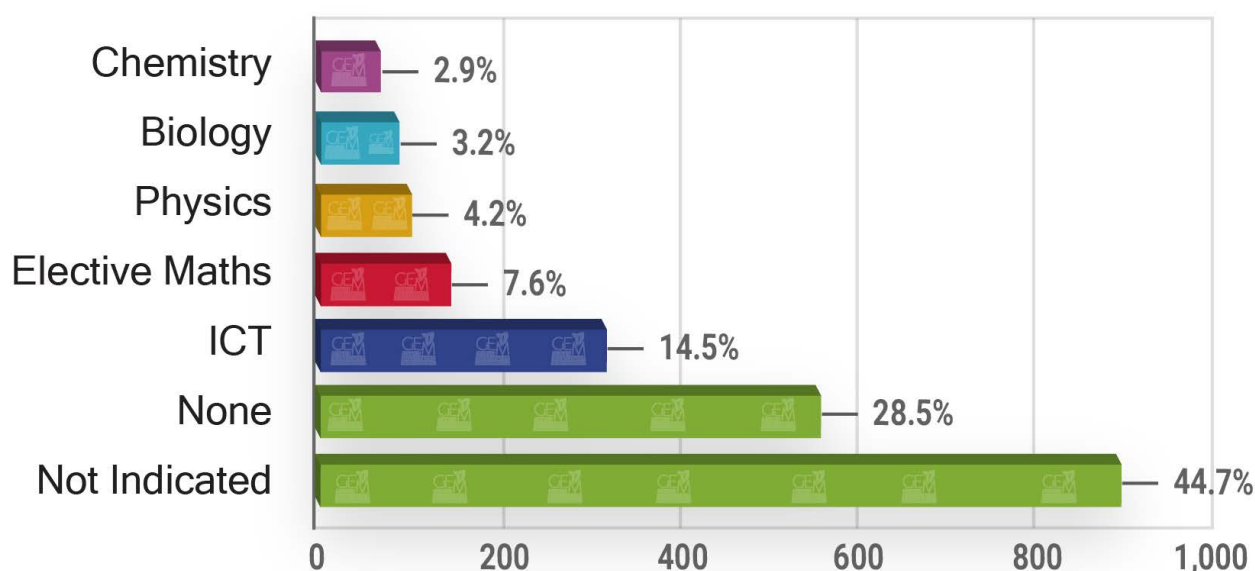
**Figure 9(a): Specific Subject Challenges**





When asked what their specific STEM subjects are, most girls did not give a response. But those who did, indicated ICT and Elective Maths as their greatest challenge.

**Figure 9(b): Specific STEM Subject Challenges**



Girl, 16

"I always feel scared of Maths. The moment the teacher enters the class then, oh my God, I am dead again. I know now that I have to overcome my fears and learn the maths."



Girl, 19

"Accademically, Maths is my great challenge. I am not good in maths"



Girl, 16

"I find it difficult to study maths and when it is exams, I do forget the formular"





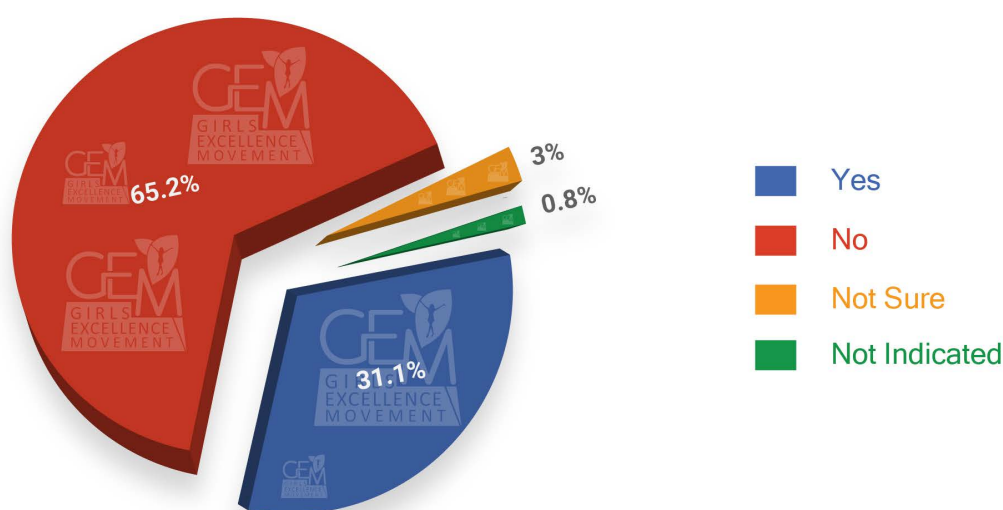
## UNTOLD ABUSE STORIES



Most girls have untold abuse stories. Experiences they haven't shared with any responsible adult. The effect of dealing with those experiences on their own affects their academic performance. This revelation inspired the title for this report, "SHELTERED YET EXPOSED" Most girls are shielded and sheltered in a way, by parents and guardians with the good intent of protecting them from abuse. Unfortunately, most of these girls are sheltered yet exposed to the abusers within. To further understand the girls, we probed and the responses are represented in the charts below.

Figure 10 indicates 31.1% are indeed in relationships. This revelation is a call to action.

**Figure 10: Pie Chart showing responses to the question, "Are You In A Relationship?"**



From figure 10 above, nearly 1 out of 4 girls are in a relationship. This should be a reason to take a second look at sex education. As a nation we need to build consensus on a home-grown approach to provide relevant information on sex to enable teaming youth make informed choices. A significant number of them are already indulging. Let's help them make good decisions.



Girl, 16

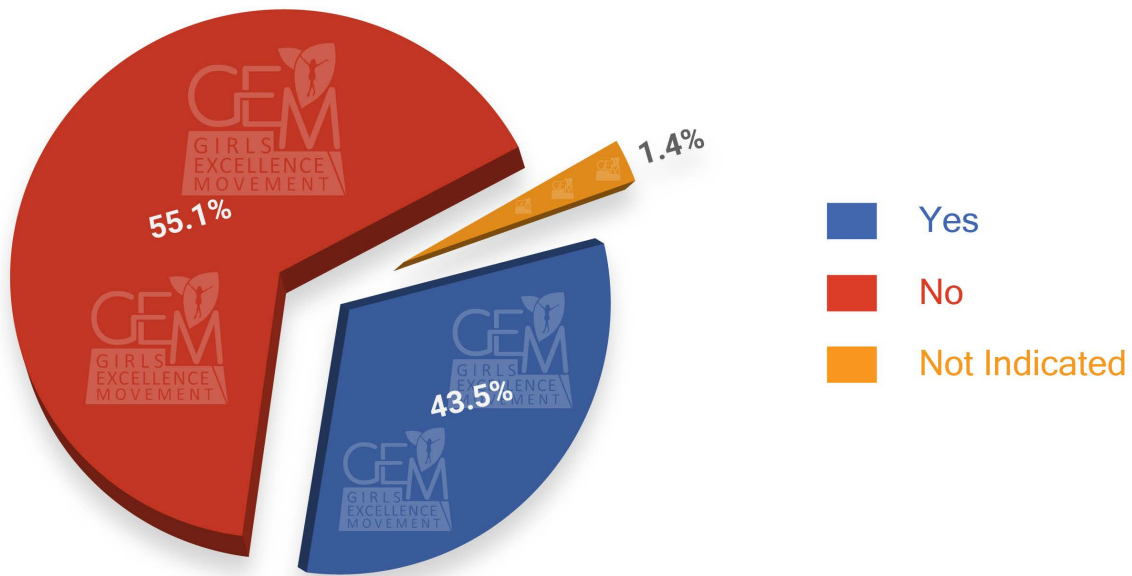
"My personal problem is about relationships. When I decide to shun the idea of having a relationship, friends tell me the benefits of having a boyfriend. I just find it difficult rejecting them and later on when I stop, I get embarrassed"



Girl, 16

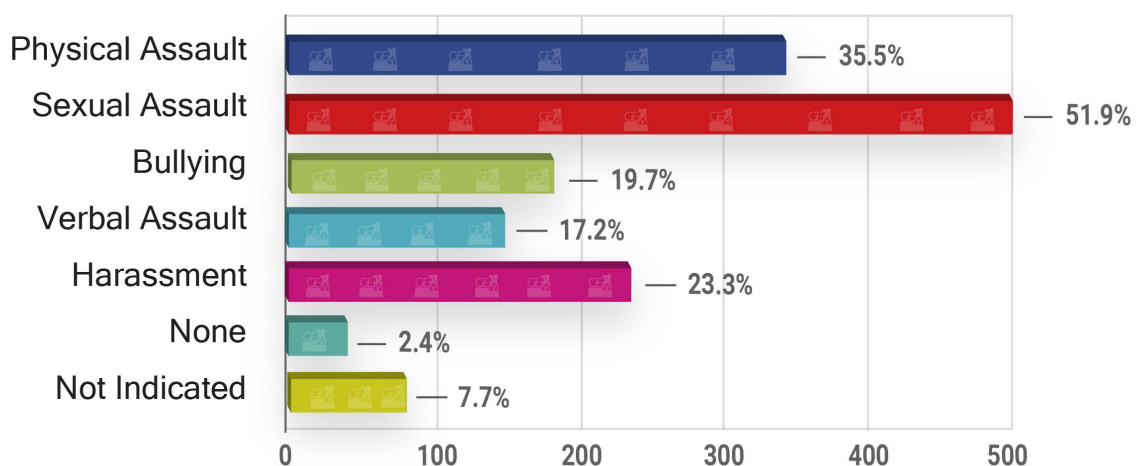
"I want GEM to talk more about Peer Pressure and sex education and Consent. Because my friends talk about their boyfriends and I also wanted to try it and that led me into the hands of this boy who raped me."

Figure 11: Responses To The Question “Have You Ever Experienced Any Form of Abuse/Assault?”



Close to 44% of the girls have experienced abuse in one form or the other. This represents a whopping 2 in 4 girls.

Figure 12: Forms of Abuse Experienced



The results from Figure 12 indicates an alarming 2 out of 4 girls have been sexually abused.





*Girl, 18*

"I went to fetch water. That is when the man saw me on the way, he saw that nobody was there and he raped me. I was screaming but he put his hands to cover my mouth so nobody hear me".



*Girl, 16*

"I cannot tell you everything because it is my father. He sleeps with me before giving me what I need for school every time. I let him have his way because I cannot fight him anymore"



*Girl, 17*

"He promised to help me and my mother was happy because we don't have. When I went to his place he wanted to have sex. when I refused, he forced me and slept with me by force. After that, he didn't give me the help he promised"



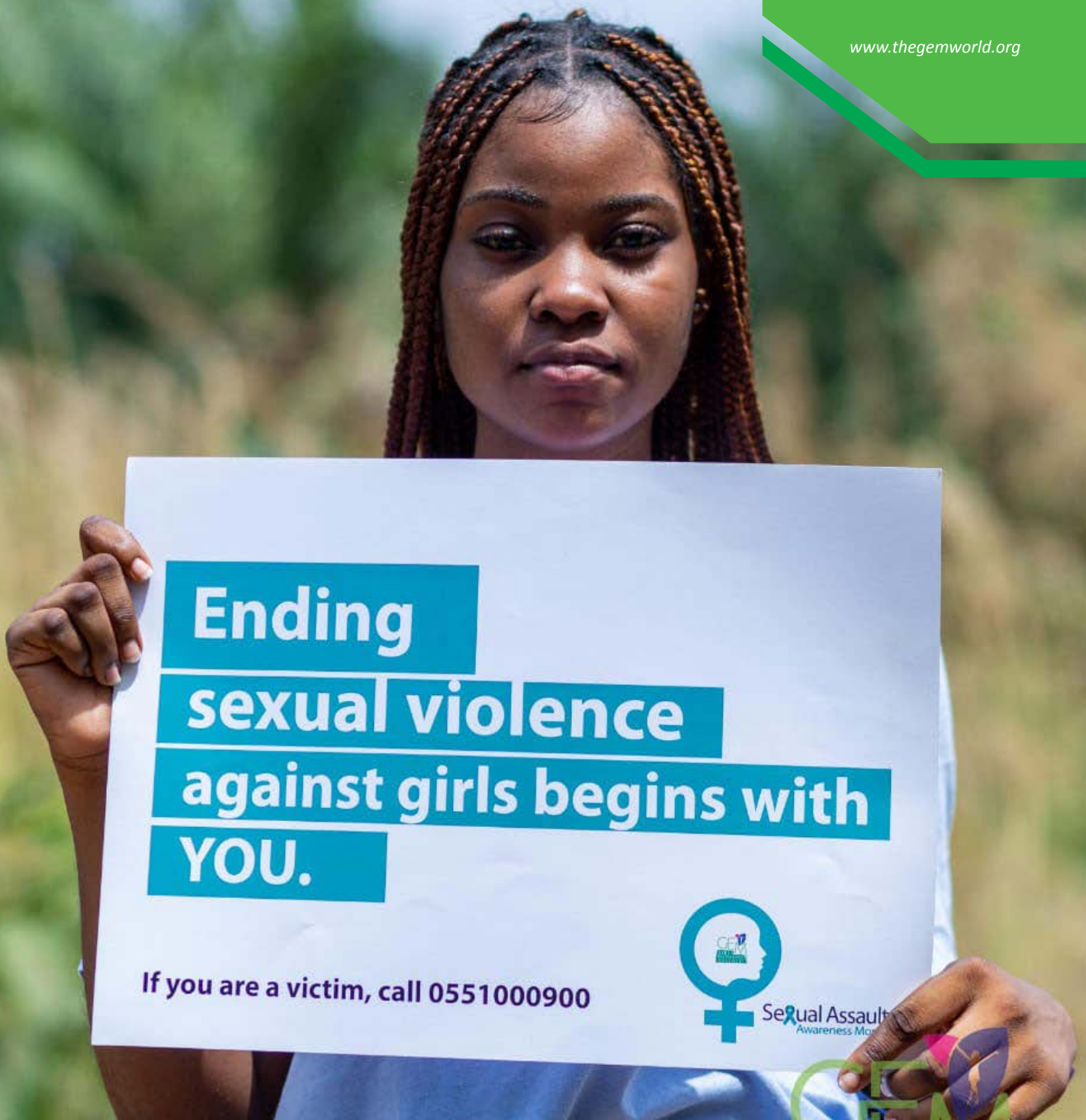
*Girl, 18*

"My cousin who was staying with us raped me when I was 16. I have not told anyone because I am afraid of what my mother would do to him"



*Girl, 19*

"I have come across so many attempted rape by people but the most painful one was when I went to my Uncle in Kumasi that he beat me up because I refuse to have sex with him so I gave in and he had his way several times before vacation ended"



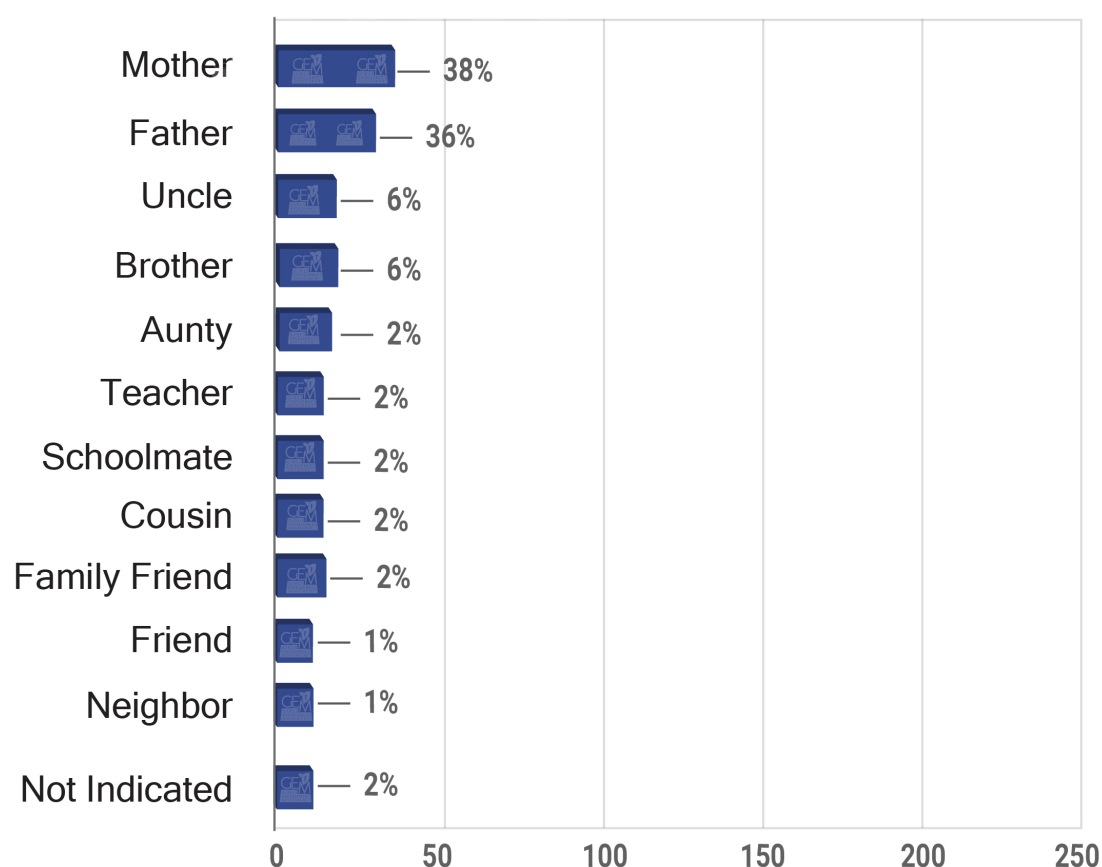
## PERPETRATORS OF ABUSE

Are you curious to find out who are the perpetrators of all these forms of assault on the girls? Who are those lurking in the dark damaging the mental, physical, and psychological wellbeing of the girls? Figure 13 presents the summary of the responses.



Mothers top the chart for committing physical assault. Could this explain why most girls cannot comfortably tell their mothers about their abuse experiences? Something to ponder on.

**Figure 13: Reported Physical Assault Perpetrators**



*Girl, 16*

"I was with my friends when my mum called me. She asked me to scrub the bathroom and I was not well so I wasn't able to do it. She intentionally used spatula at my back and any time I do any hard work, I do feel the pains."

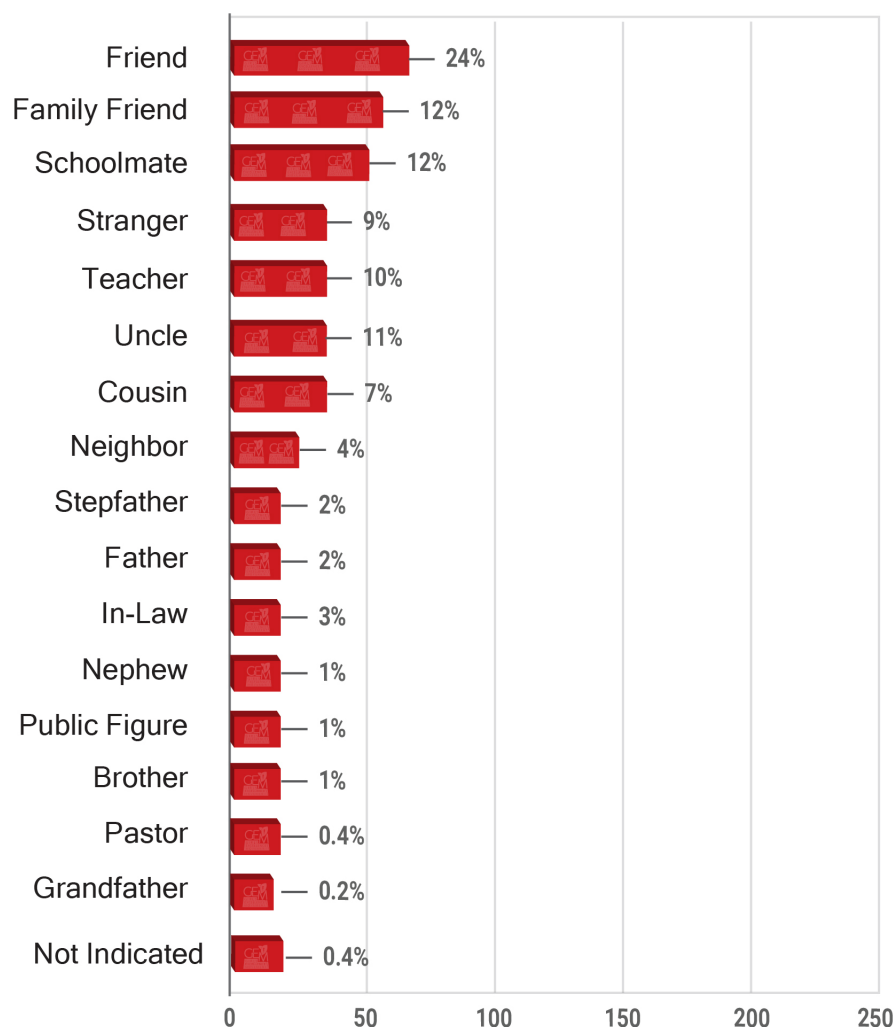


*Girl, 16*

"I have been physically abused by my father. He heard that I had gone to visit my boyfriend, so he made me kneel down and he slapped me left and right several times. This is why I run away from home. I still have headaches till today."

When asked who committed the sexual assault they have unfortunately experienced, 250 girls responded. The result indicated that the perpetrators are mostly people known to the victims.

**Figure 14: Reported Sexual Assault Perpetrators**



*Girl, 14*

"I have been sexually abused before. It was a family member who forced me to be his girlfriend. He puts his penis in my mouth and makes me watch porno movies and practice what the women are doing. I don't like it. I know it is wrong because I am not at that stage yet, but he won't stop, and it is affecting my input at school. He buys me textbooks because my parents don't have money to afford it."



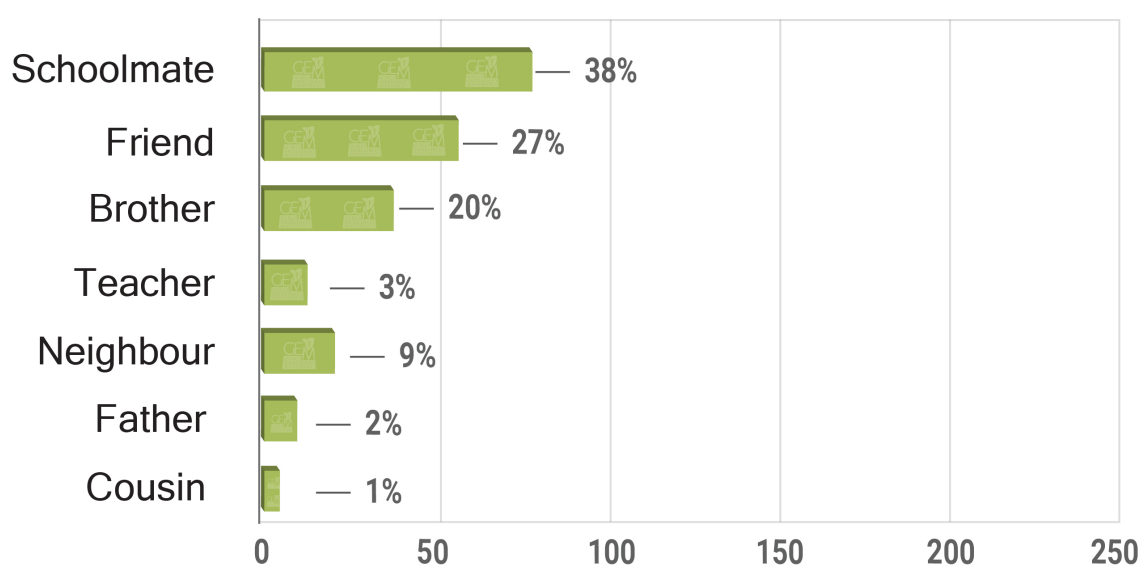
*Girl, 16*

"I am always sad and cannot sleep without seeing the boy who raped me. Unfortunately, I was a virgin when I was laid down by him and now, I have lost my dignity and I really don't have any confidence. Please help me out."



When asked who was responsible for the bullying they have reportedly endured, 250 girls responded. School mates top the list of reported bullies. 38% of the bullying experienced by the girls were at the hands of their schoolmates. This provides an insight into why girls who have financial difficulties resulting in their inability to afford sanitary pad, either stay out of school during their menses; use unhealthy materials or compromise themselves by exchanging sex for money to buy sanitary pad. Some of these girls are raped by their benefactors. All these to avoid bullying at the hands of their mates in school.

**Figure 15: Reported Perpetrators of Bullying**



*Girl, 16*

"I am girl with this reddish hair, and I'm mostly stigmatized by my classmates and friends. My saddest experience was when we were learning about genetics and my friends said I am not a normal human"



*Girl, 16*

"I am always being teased by my school mates because my uniform is torn, and my parents are dead."



*Girl, 15*

"I got my menses when I was 13 and my aunty, I was staying with at Kasoa told me to use the amonsi. When I went to school, the pointed part was showing in my uniform, and everyone started laughing at me that I have a tail. I didn't go to school again for 3 days until the blood stopped flowing but they still call me the tail girl"

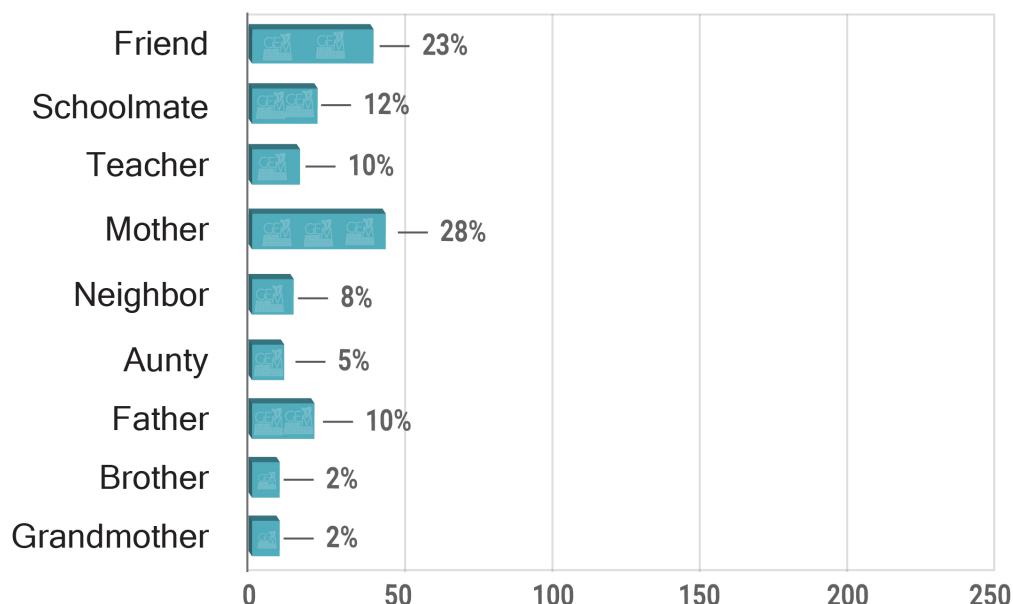


*Girl, 16*

"A teacher who always discourage me and always threaten me that she will make sure they dismiss me and also looks for problems for me in school."

When asked who committed the verbal assault, they have reportedly experienced, 250 girls responded and indicated their Mothers and friends verbally assault them the most.

**Figure 16: Reported Perpetrators of Verbal Assault**



*Girl, 14*

"My mother always say that she don't know why she gave birth to me. She is always comparing me with younger sister. She beats me with a stick sometimes."



*Girl, 17*

"My Aunt who am staying with, she always complains and insult me in front of her little kids even if what I did was right."



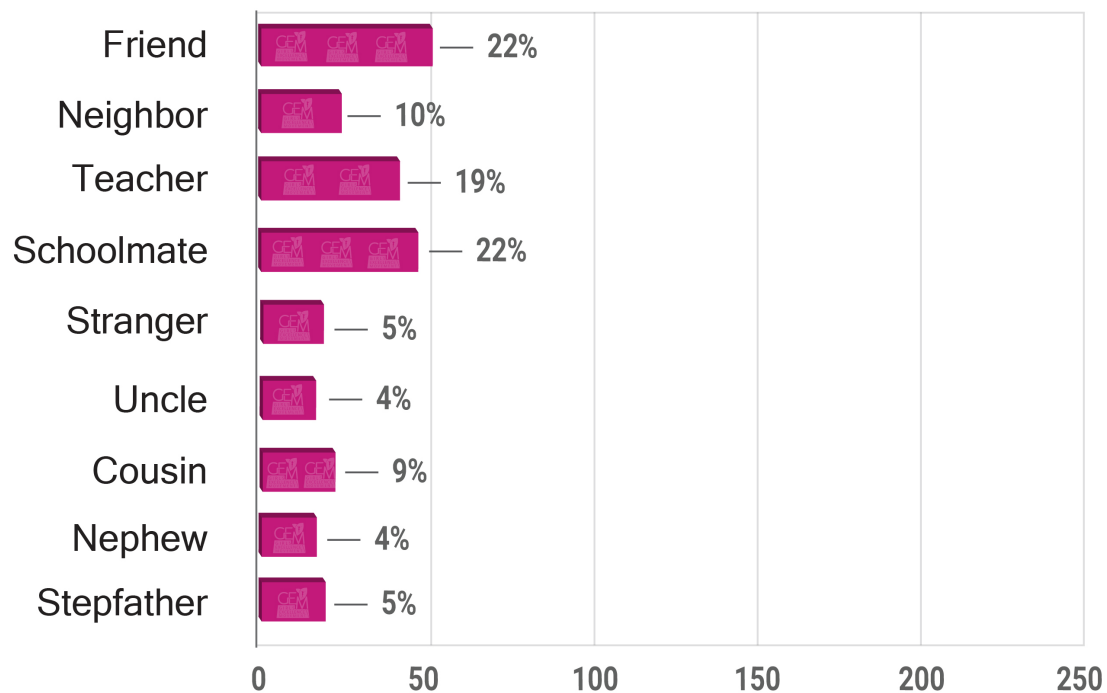
*Girl, 15*

"Our school prefect, she say harsh words to me and start lashing my legs. I was sad but kept it to myself."



When asked who committed the harassment they have reportedly experienced, 250 girls responded and indicated their school mates and friends harassed them the most. Interestingly, a significant number of them have also been harrassed by their teachers.

**Figure 17: Reported Perpetrators of Harassment**



*Girl, 15*

"There is a boy at my house who is worrying me to accept his proposal and I keep on telling him no but he still follows me anywhere I go and tells my friends and his friends that I am his girlfriend."



*Girl, 16*

"My brother's friend keep on touching me and I didn't want to disgrace him by reporting until my parents caught me not because I liked it."

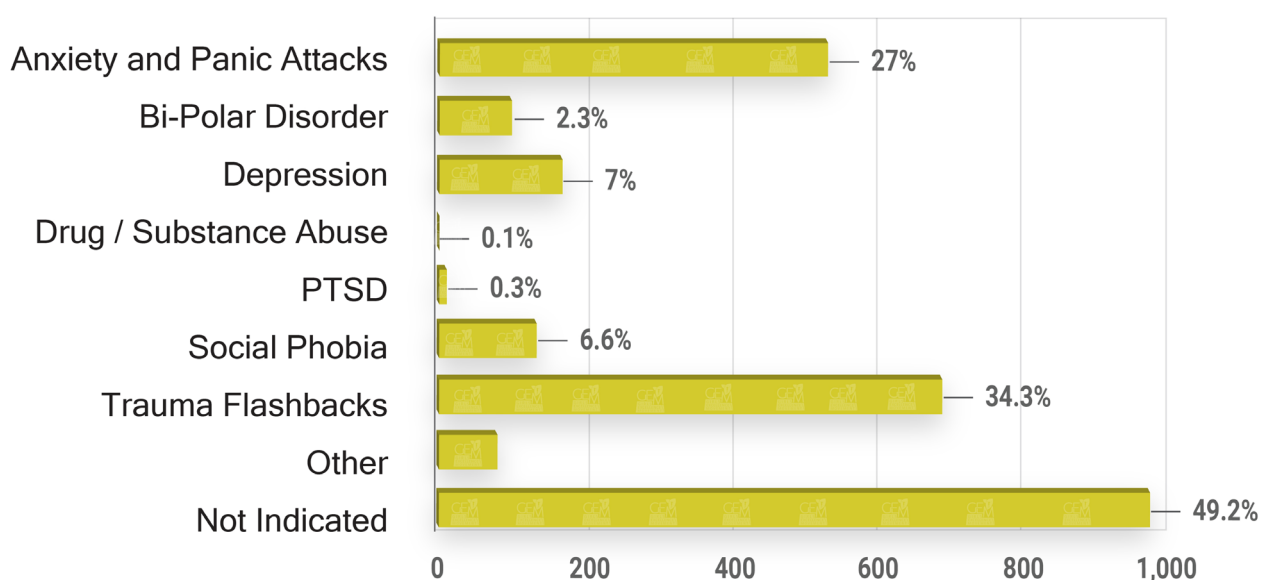


*Girl, 16*

"A group of boys pounced on me and harassed me when I mistakenly lost my way to the market."

When asked if they had any psychological or mental challenges, 34.3% of the girls revealed having trauma flashbacks among others. Most of them seem to be dealing with the issues by themselves.

**Figure 18: Reported Psychological / Mental Health Challenges**



*Girl, 15*

"Sometimes I feel as if I am depressed. A grey cloud in my mind and it causes my mood to change drastically realizing I start to think too much about everything going on in my life"



*Girl, 16*

"I have flashes all the time and cannot trust male figures, because I was raped. It was the headmaster of my nursery school from when I was 6 years till I left the school at 8 years"



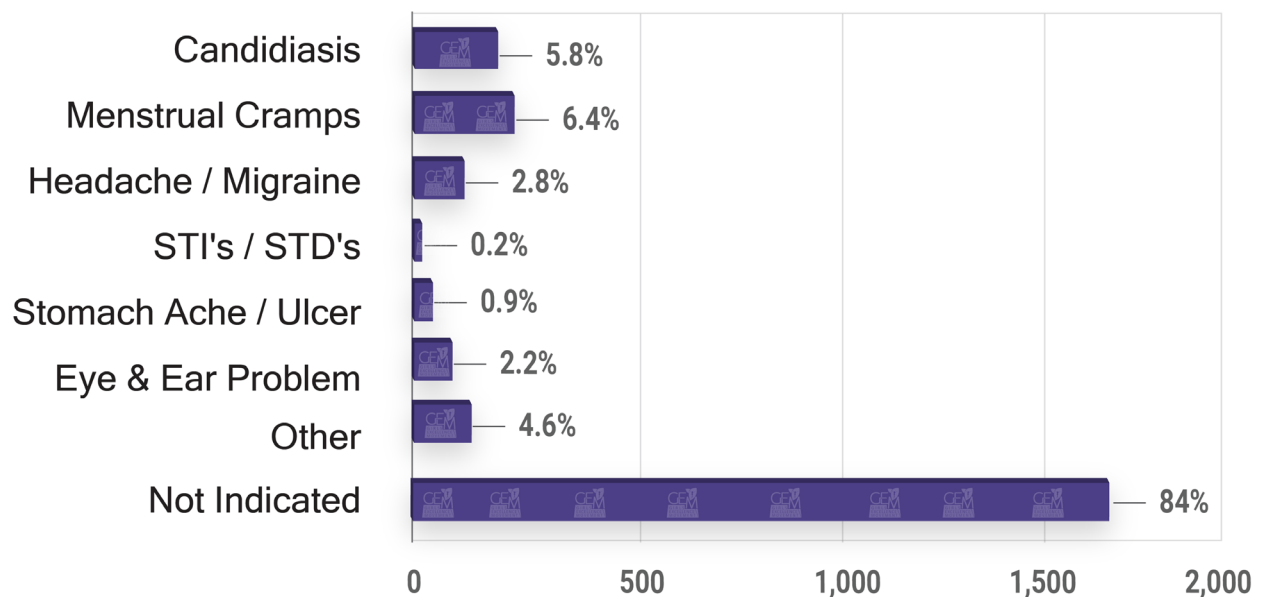
*Girl, 18*

"I have low self-esteem and cannot really identify who I am"



When asked if they had any medical challenges, the data revealed Menstrual cramps and candidiasis as their greatest challenge.

**Figure 19: Reported Medical Challenges**



**Girl, 16**

"I am a lady who started menstruating at the age of ten. It got to sometime my cycle stopped. It comes in five months' time even with that I don't flow frequently. It is really affecting me and I need a helper."



**Girl, 17**

"I am suffering from white and vision problem also chest problem. Sometimes I don't understand what is taught in class "



**Girl, 17**

"Having chronic headache anytime I want to learn. I feel my head very heavy which prevents me to learn further."

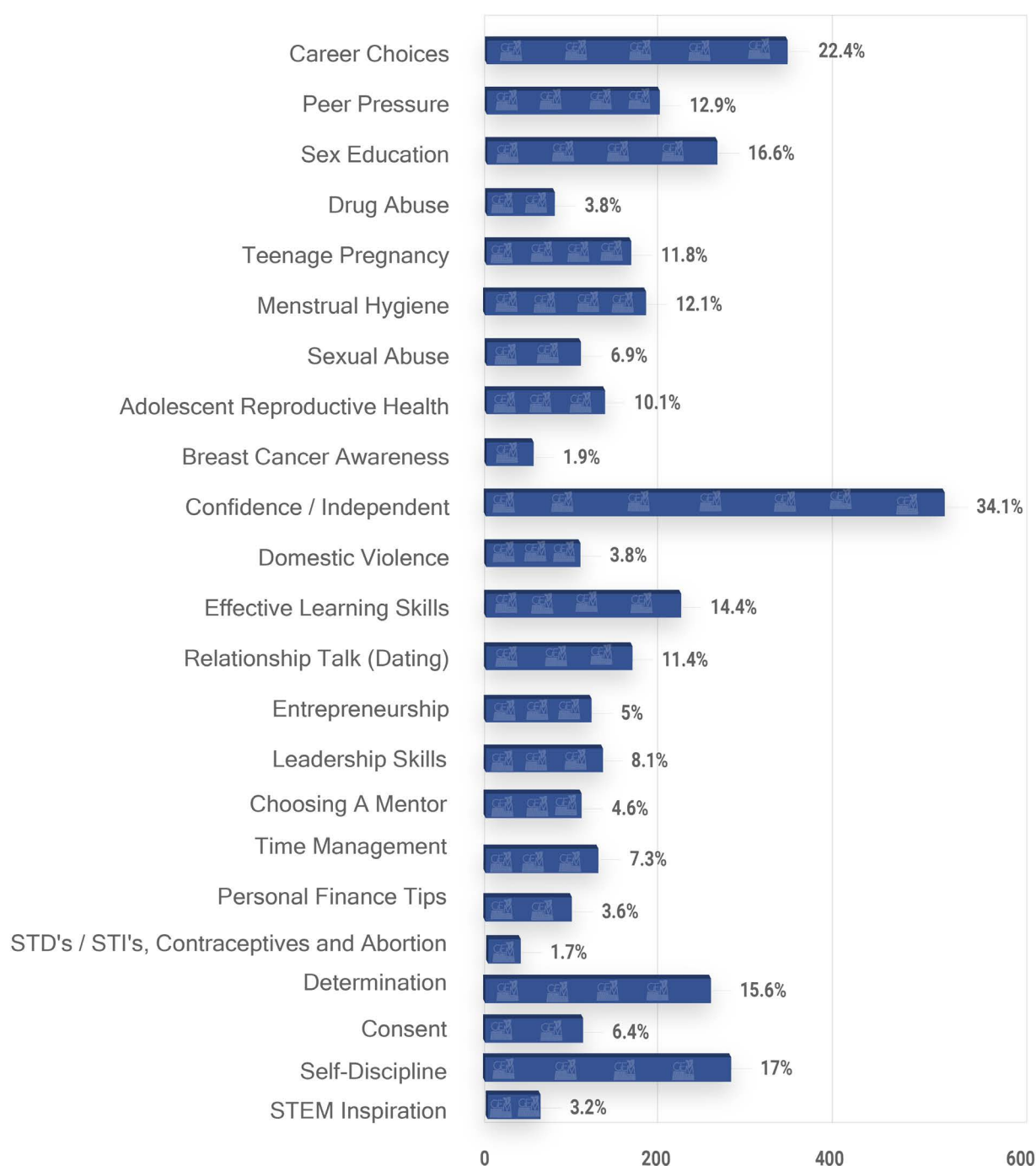


## CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND ROLE MODELS



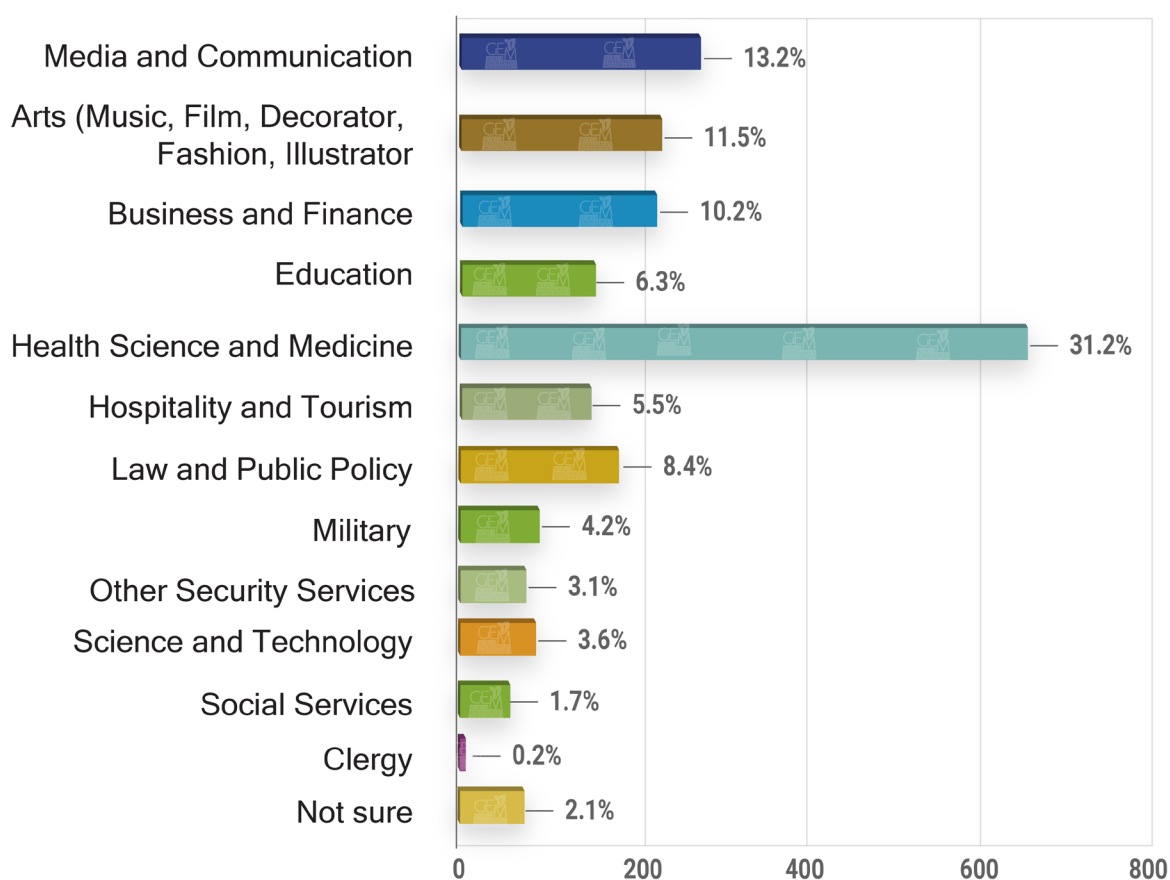
From Figure 20, the girls share the topics they would want to be taught and specific skills they would want to improve and the result shows nearly 1 in 4 girls want to develop CONFIDENCE.

**Figure 20: Responses to The Question “What Topic Would You Want GEM To Teach Next Time?”**



This chart in Figure 21 indicates an interesting twist in comparison to the charts on subject challenges and course of study. 50.3% of the girls find Mathematics difficult and 23.5% find Integrated Science difficult yet, majority of them are aspiring to careers in Health, Science and Medicine. Food for thought!

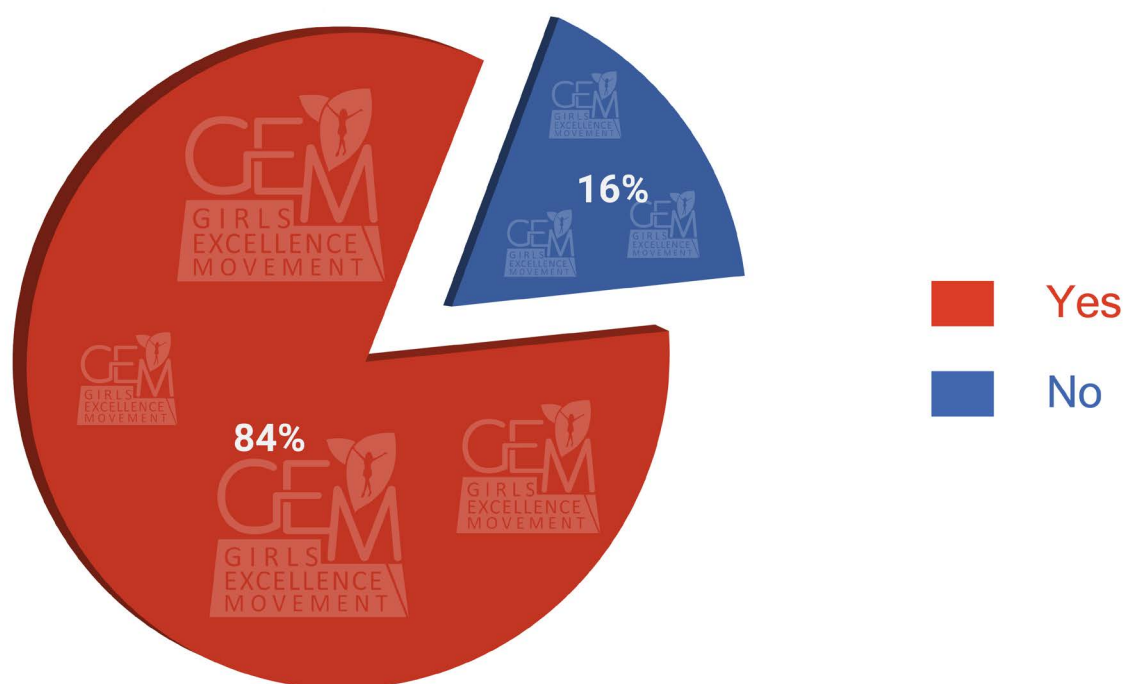
**Figure 21: Responses Indicating Preferred Career Path**





The responses from Figure 7 above indicate that nearly 1 in 2 girls live with both parents whilst 1 in 4 girls are being raised by single mothers. This result gets more interesting when we asked the girls if they had role models/mentors and 4 out of 5 girls responded in the affirmative and indicated family as their greatest point of influence as indicated in 22 below.

**Figure 22: Responses To The Question “Do You Have a Mentor/Role Model?”**



*Girl, 15*

**“My sister is my role model. She leaves the life well, do I want to be like her when I grow up.”**



*Girl, 14*

**“My uncle is a police man, because of how he wears the uniform and everybody respect him, so I want to become like him. He is my role model”**

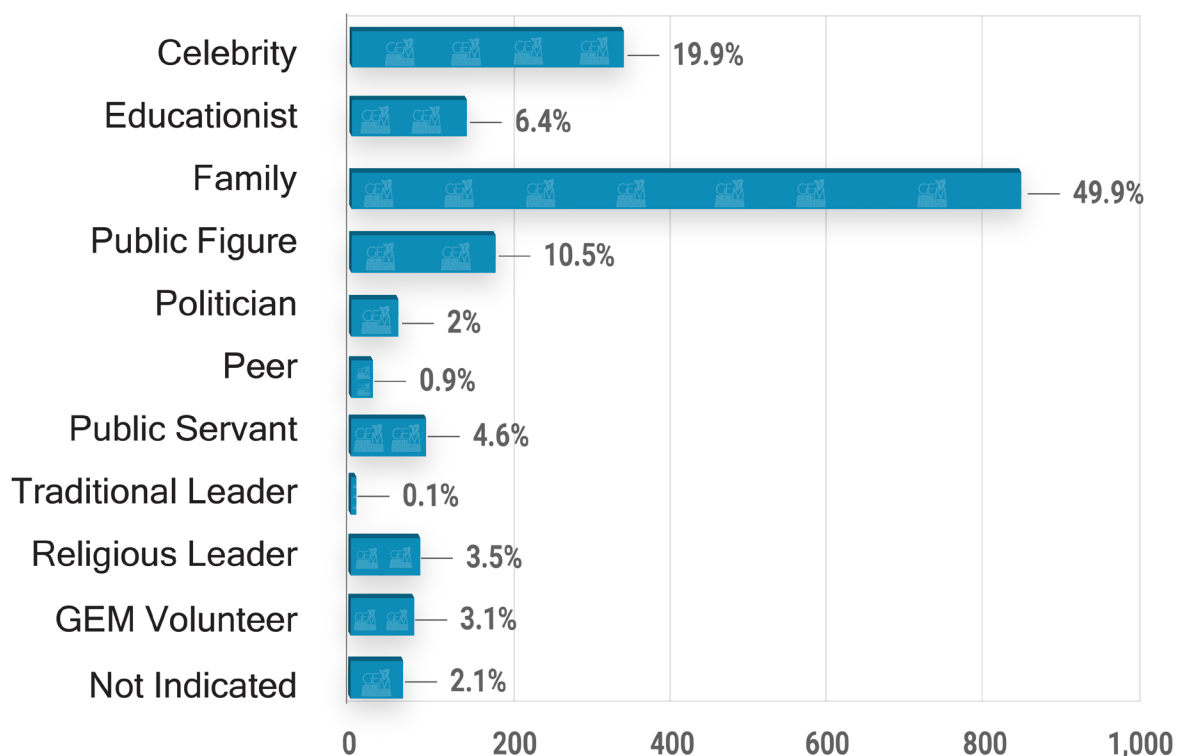


*Girl, 20*

**“My mum is the only one who takes care if everybody. She works hard, that is why I want to be like her. She inspires me to be hardworking”**

Interestingly, as indicated in figure 23 below, close to 50% of the girls are influenced by family, a percentage that is way above the percentage of girls looking up to celebrities. 1 out of 2 girls are influenced by their families as compared to 1 out of 5 girls who is influenced by celebrities. This finding debunks the generally held view in Ghana that celebrities are the greatest influence in the lives of girls.

**Figure 23: Reported Mentor/Role Model Category**







## CONCLUSION

Basic education is expected to provide citizens with necessary literacy and numeracy skills. However for education to be wholistic, portable skills such as critical thinking, self-confidence, managing peer influence, communication, and leadership skills are critical.

These skills equip them to aspire to a specific goal, sustain their interest over time and work to attain the highest standards in careers in all disciplines.

Unfortunately, the findings of the survey reveal the following as some of the fundamental issues preventing some girls from taking advantage of the full spectrum of opportunities education has to offer them.

- School-related gender-based violence
- Financial difficulties
- Personality-development factors such as the lack of confidence and self- worth
- Stereotypical fears towards STEM subjects
- Lack of clarity on career path choices
- Sexual abuse and related medical and mental health factors
- Family influence, the desire for it or the lack thereof

These issues affecting girls' education suggest a critical need to design programmes to help girls overcome these challenges to excel and progress from the Senior High School level to tertiary education. There is also a serious need for the provision of a safe environment for girls to grow, learn and flourish to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 towards Agenda 2030.

As Napoleon Bonaparte once said, *“give me educated mothers and I shall promise you the birth of a civilized, educated nation”*.

Globally, it has taken deliberate policies and collectively consistent efforts of all stakeholders to achieve enrollment parity. The same commitment is required to raise resourceful girls who excel at their academic goals and grow into powerful and leaders.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings discussed so far, we wish to make the following recommendations:



Government of Ghana in its efforts has so far established and implemented some deliberate policies like the ‘send your girl child to school’ campaign and the “Free SHS Policy” which is yielding desired results in the area of enrollment albeit the associated implementation challenges. We recommend similar policy initiatives to ensure “retention and quality outcomes” as Dinah Adiko, a Gender and Inclusion Specialists aptly puts it.

We further recommend the eradication of the 20% tax on sanitary pad. This tax makes this essential commodity expensive and unaffordable for girls in deprived communities. From the findings, 62.5% of the girls reported having financial difficulties, a situation that reveals their inability to afford basic necessities including sanitary pads. This inequality further exposes Girls to various forms of exploitation.

Some of these girls avoid school totally during their menses, missing out on vital lessons; some use unhealthy materials to hold the blood, exposing themselves to infections; while others pay a high price of rape, just to secure sanitary pads and other menstrual hygiene materials. Waiving all taxes will make the commodity affordable and in effect lessen the burden on the shoulders of these young girls and their guardians. Countries like Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and India have successfully waived all taxes on sanitary pads.

We humbly urge the government of Ghana to do same as an interim policy while taking steps to advance local production capacity to ensure long term results.

Additionally, we wish to suggest the employment and training of extra gender-responsive counselors and trained therapists for the schools. We suggest the allocation of a minimum of four trained counselors per school. This is because, the counselors in some schools are overwhelmed with the numbers.



In some cases, the girls do not open up to these guidance and counseling professionals “due to issues of confidentiality and counselor to student ratios”.

From the findings, over 50% of girls have been sexually abused, in view of this finding, we wish to propose a review of Chapter Six of the Criminal Offenses Act, 1960 (ACT 29) to include provisions aimed at prevention, victim protection, retribution, and awareness creation to eliminate sexual assault against not only girls but boys as well. Countries like South Korea have succeeded at reducing sexual assault to the barest minimum as a result of implementing deliberate legislations, and we believe Ghana is capable of same.

**Also, we are appealing to government to make the acquisition of medical reports free for victims of gender-based violence, especially rape victims to facilitate the justice delivery process.**

The current situation of paying for medical reports makes it difficult, if not impossible for victims from under-privileged backgrounds to get needed help. We suggest this service could be included in the National Health Insurance Scheme for a wider coverage and impact.

**It is also recommended that GES and the Ministry of Education approves more textbooks that reflect the achievement of more women.**

When women’s contribution to the development of Ghana’s political, economic, and social evolution is highlighted in the textbooks, girls would be encouraged to aspire to similar feat, especially in STEM, while boys get informed to view girls as their equals.

- **EXTRA PARENTAL GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITY**

From the data, it is crystal clear that girls are mostly influenced in the home, hence government policies alone cannot address the myriad of challenges exposed by the survey. This places a huge responsibility on parents and guardians to put in extra effort in the interest of their wards.

In this regard, it is recommended that parents build friendships with their girls. Within that friendship, parents and guardians are urged to listen to the girls with open minds to create enabling environment for the sharing of fears, aspirations, challenges, and hurts because girls usually retreat into the comfort of their walls of defense, the moment they sense judgment.

When the girls share stories about abuse, parents are encouraged to believe them, seek medical and psychological help for them, investigate the alleged crime and seek justice in the end.

- **BEHAVIORAL CHANGE AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY**

As the old adage says, “it takes a village to raise a child” this indicates that government and parents’ efforts alone will be inadequate to build all round independent and powerful girls.

And as a community of religious and traditional people, it is imperative that the religious and traditional leaders get involved and prioritize the welfare of girls in their daily sermons and traditional affirmations.

It is against this background that religious leaders across the religious spectrum are urged to lend their powerful voices to the advocacy against sexual and all forms of gender-based violence.



*This can be done through the preaching of messages against gender-based violence on the pulpits and at the mosques and shrines.*

*We further recommend a sensitization program designed for religious and traditional leaders creating awareness about these critical issues affecting the development of girls.*

- **GEM STEM-INSPIRATION-ON-WHEELS**

To solve part of the problems identified in the area of stereotypical fears for the STEM subjects, GEM is committed to implement a project that will take STEM educational inspiration to girls in their schools. To achieve this, GEM is raising funds and writing grants to procure 50 laptops, a bus, simple science experiment materials etc.

With these resources 25 volunteer resource persons will travel in a bus to teach 50 girls coding, simple programming, and experiments for three hours per outreach. We will appreciate support from the International Community to successfully fund this project.



## TESTIMONIALS





*Girl, 15*

"I would like to say a very big thank you to GEM for organizing this program in our school. I wish you would come to our community someday. I want you to build Girls Education Centre to train many girls. For example, our sisters who are not in school so they can learn how to be self-aware from you."



*Girl, 16*

I hope that their movement would reach every single girl child so that they would change their mindset and thought.



*Girl, 18*

"Thanks for advising me to be bold in doing things or talking in class, in my class if we learn I will understand but when am asked question, I always feel shy to share, But now that GEM has come to talk about being bold, will not feel shy in class again."



*Girl, 15*

"Thank you so much GEM. You have really impacted something new into my life. I hope you continue to do this, and I hope GEM will grow bigger and better all around the globe. Thank you"



*Girl, 16*

"I want to say thank you to GEM for choosing my school to inspire us to excel and allowing us to express our views on topics and contributed in their decision making. My prayer is that the Lord who provides should bless them so that next time my school will get the second chance to meet them again."



*Girl, 16*

"I am really excited to have this opportunity today to learn a lot about life experiences. I thought I can never make it but through this exercise with the GEM people I have really learned that I can make it. I just have to be myself and keep the focus. Thank you GEM. Long live Ghana, Long live Tsito, and long live GEM"



*Girl, 16*

Thank you very much for this wonderful organization you have established. I pray God gives you all the strength and resources you would need to continue your good work and I hope and assure you that I would be a GEM one day.



*Girl, 16*

I would like to thank GEM for coming to my school today to teach us the essence of studying hard and other topics. I would also like to thank them for the gifts they brought us. May God continue to bless them and help them to excel in anything they do.



*Girl, 16*

"I would like to tell them to keep doing Ghanaian girls good and also they should keep up their work in supporting girls in knowing their worth and aim, giving girls reason why they should never give up."



*Girl, 16*

"GEM is the group that has inspired me the most so far. I always feel sad anytime I remember what I want to be and remember my parents are poor, but you have really inspired me a lot that I can make it no matter what my background is, my future will be bright. God bless you for teaching me all the things. Now I feel confident"



*Girl, 15*

"You are indeed a great and a life changing group for life. Hope you will never give up and continue to work hard to change the lives of girls as you have done today for me. More wins and good luck to you all."



*Girl, 15*

GEM has been a very beneficial institution to me and other as well. They have really encouraged us in all matters including our education, our sexual status or life and how we should carry ourselves.



*Girl, 15*

"GEM talks about everything a female girl wishes to know. I love them. GEM does a very good job in educating young girls. For me it has taught me a lot in a lot of ways. I would like to say a very big thank you to all the members of GEM. I will like to join you one day"



*Girl, 15*

I like GEM because they are kind and also lovely. They share their experience with us. They also like to tell people about how to go about their life in future.



*Girl, 18*

Thank you for sharing this message to us, as their sister. And I also encourage them to continue teaching other girls. How to protect their self and build self confidence within them.



*Girl, 15*

Thank you GEM for all that you have done. I hope you can help those who don't have anything like me with support. I like the opportunity they gave me to share my problems and also learn a lot of things that they don't teach me in school. Now I know a lot because GEM came to my school. Please they should go to all other schools



*Girl, 16*

I hope that their movement would reach every single girl child so that they would change their mindset and thought.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## SPECIAL APPRECIATION

We appreciate Dr. Eugene Owusu, SDGs Advisor to the President of the Republic of Ghana, for inspiring and providing valuable counsel for the production of this report.

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To our ever reliable, committed and enthusiastic GEM Volunteers whose time, skills and other resources have made all projects impactful, we appreciate you.

Your collective contributions have real impact.

YOU ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!!

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*Partners & sponsors who were with GEM during the period of this report (2018-2021)*

- Sunda International (Softcare Sanitary Pad)
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Mr. Hope Abba, what can we say to you. Your generosity is incredible. Thanks for always being available to support our founder in bailing GEM out of budget deficits.

To all the outgoing members of the first GEM Board and to all the incoming members of the GEM Global Board which will be outdoored soon, we say, Ayekoo.

Your collective Commitment, made this happen. Cheers to the next chapter of the Girls Excellence Movement-GEM under your collective guidance!

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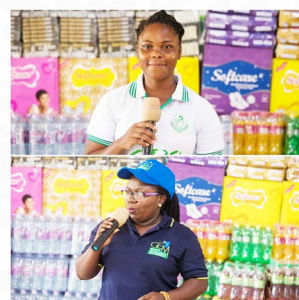
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*We Inspire Girls To Excel!*





































*To our dearly departed Board Chair,*

## **MAJOR GENERAL CONSTANCE ADJEANI-AFENU**

*“The Flame you lit shall forever light the path of many girls.”*

*We collected data for this report between 2018 and 2021 under her guide.”*

This Report is dedicated to the inspirational memory of our brave pioneer and pathfinder who has now transitioned into the camp of our worthy ancestors. Major General Constance Ama Emefa Adjeani-Afenu - THE GEM LIGHT BEARING PILLAR!

Aunty Constance, as we called her, chaired the GEM Board from 2019 till her demise in Jan 2022. She lit the ‘Flame of Excellence’ to ground the Vision of the Girls Excellence Movement-GEM in 2019 saying “let us not shrink in our little corner, we are capable, everyone needs someone to empower and inspire her, hence the need to believe in GEM and what it stood for” It is in the spirit of these words that we share with you, details of the work done during her tenure with GEM.

She embodied the GEM Vision in its entirety – having worked hard to become the first female Brigadier General in Ghana’s Armed Forces and later the first female Deputy Force Commander in the UN mission to the West Sahara. That’s not all, she became the first female to attain the rank of Major General posthumously. Her life is template of what is possible for all girls and an inspiration for them to be fearless, competent leaders across disciplines.





# GIRLS EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT

## WHO WE ARE:

GEM is a registered, volunteer-driven non-profit organisation that inspires, educates, mentors and informs to transform girls into great women of excellence and transformational leaders.



Our Programs Impact the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We are Generation Equality champions!!!



### Capacity Building

We teach girls valuable soft skills for achieving Excellence through our Inspiration-On-Wheels program.



### Mentoring

We inspire girls through story sharing to aspire to Leadership in all spheres of life.



### Advocacy

We engage in menstrual hygiene and Gender Equality Advocacy. And distribution of sanitary pads.



### Activism

We run programs to create awareness against sexual assault, gender based violence, period poverty, sexism, objectification of Girls etc .



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Girls Excellence Movement



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