

Excerpt from 'Protecting Education from Attack: A State-of-the-Art Review', UNESCO (2010) (applying to all levels of education but including types, motives and impacts of attacks on higher ed)

2.1 Education under attack: The problem

Attacks on education are a grave and rising concern. They include violations of multiple provisions of international humanitarian and human rights law, including the rights to life and liberty, the right to education, the protection of civilians and civilian objects during conflict, and the rights to freedom of expression and association, among others. Attacks on education occur most often in conflict-affected areas and involve use or threat of force in ways that disrupt and deter provision of good quality education and are actively harmful to well-being. Worldwide over 40 million children are missing out on primary school in conflict-affected fragile states, many due to direct attacks on their learning spaces, their teachers or even on themselves as learners.¹ Many more academics, older learners, trade unionists, ministry of education staff and humanitarian personnel are also directly or indirectly affected by these abhorrent actions. Attacks on education also occur widely outside of situations of armed conflict, in countries experiencing political instability, insecurity and repression.

In 2007, UNESCO commissioned *Education under Attack*, the first global study of targeted political and military violence against students, teachers, academics, education workers and facilities.² UNESCO is now issuing a second volume, *Education under Attack 2010*.³ The initial findings of this second study were presented at the seminar and are summarised in Chapter 3. They suggest forcefully that attacks constitute a major international problem for local communities, national governments, international donors, policymakers and all those concerned with promoting educational opportunities.⁴

Seminar presentations and ensuing discussions illustrated the wide range of targets and the types of attacks – see Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1. Targets of attacks on education

- All types of schools, colleges and other educational institutions
- Educational buildings and facilities (public and private)
- Students at all levels of education
- Teachers at all levels of education, including those fully-accredited and those not
- Academics of varied disciplines in higher education
- Education officials, administrators and support staff of all types
- Education trade union members
- Education aid workers

1 Save the Children, *Last in Line, Last in School* (London: International Save the Children Alliance, 2009).

2 Brendan O'Malley, *Education under Attack* (2007).

3 Brendan O'Malley, *Education under Attack 2010: A Global Study on Targeted Political and Military Violence Against Education Staff, Students, Teachers, Union and Government Officials and Aid Workers* (Paris: UNESCO, 2010).

4 See also Save the Children Alliance, *Policy Brief: Preventing Attacks on Schools* (London: 2009); Education International, *Schools Shall be Safe Sanctuaries: A Guide to the Declaration by Education International* (Brussels: 2009).

Table 2. Types of attacks on education

- Multiple and targeted killings/injury
- Disappearance
- Abduction
- Kidnapping
- Imprisonment
- Torture
- Harassment (including surveillance, arbitrary denial of access or permissions, confiscation of notes and computer files, professional or personal slander or defamation, physical or sexual intimidations)
- Silencing and/or denial of academic freedom
- Arbitrary dismissal threatening economic survival
- Exile (internal and external)
- Arrest on false charges
- Trial and imprisonment, and detention without trial
- Attacks on the life or liberty of family members and friends
- Sexual violence/rape by armed groups, troops and security forces
- Unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict
- Destruction/damage of buildings, resources, materials and facilities
- Assault on vehicles in which students, educators or aid workers are travelling
- Use of educational buildings as military/security bases, outposts or areas from which to launch attacks
- Politicization of educational institutions
- Occupation of or attacks on university campuses by armed groups

The following additional types of attacks are documented in *Education under Attack 2010* as compared to the 2007 volume:

- Direct targeting of school children for multiple killings or maiming
- Abduction of children for use as child suicide bombers
- Kidnappings for ransom by armed groups
- Occupation of education facilities by drug cartels and forces fighting drug cartels
- Targeting of education aid workers
- Attacks on examinations
- Threats of violence if parents do not send children to school

There has been no systematic global reporting of attacks on education. Even in individual contexts, data on the frequency of attacks and number of people and buildings targeted is often incomplete. Caution is therefore required before drawing conclusions about the scale of attacks or recent trends. Apparent reductions in reported numbers of attacks on teachers, for example, may not reflect so much a decrease in violence but a shrinking of the educational space and

reduction of activity within it. Furthermore, reported reductions in attacks may also be due to gaps in data collection. Similarly, reported increases in attacks on education may reflect enhanced data collection as opposed to a real increase in the number of attacks. Nevertheless, it is clear that attacks on schools have increased in some locations during recent years, e.g. in Afghanistan (670 attacks recorded in 2008 compared with 241 in 2006).

Attacks on individual academics and professionals in higher education were highlighted in the seminar. The Executive Director of the Scholars at Risk Network presented an overview of the problems reported by endangered scholars applying for support from the Scholar Rescue Fund, from 2002 to 2007.⁵ He noted the large numbers at risk in terms of life and liberty in countries experiencing open conflict – in the case of Iraq, totalling hundreds of scholars killed and thousands exiled or displaced, as well as severe degradation of university infrastructure. He reported also that targeted attacks occur in as many as 115 countries not experiencing armed conflict.

Another dimension of the problem highlighted in the seminar was the issue of attacks on education aid workers, which gained prominence with attacks on international staff in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2008 and 2009 respectively. In recent years, the distinctive ‘humanitarian space’ characterized by its neutrality, impartiality and immunity from attack has shrunk, especially in areas of conflict. The convergence of military, humanitarian and development spheres can blur the boundaries between them, thereby intensifying the risks of humanitarian work. The number of incidents of attacks on humanitarian workers in general and the number of victims have increased since 1997 with as many as 80 per cent of the victims of these attacks reported to be national staff.⁶ As education becomes more prominent in this blurred humanitarian space, it becomes more vulnerable.

Motives and context of attacks

Participants emphasised the politically charged perception of education within society. Schooling plays a key role in identity formation and for this reason may become a target for attack, through attacks on infrastructure, teachers or students. This is especially true when the content of education is disputed between factions or because the provision of education is associated with the state. Depending on the context there are many different motivations for attacking education, and these must be understood correctly in order to develop appropriate preventive and protective measures.⁷

Participants in the seminar identified some of the motives of those attacking education (see Table 3).

5 See Chapter 6 and also Henry Jarecki and Daniela Kaisth, *Scholar Rescue in the Modern World* (New York: Institute of International Education, 2009).

6 See Chapter 5.

7 For a discussion of motivation for attacks on schools, see Chapter 3 and Brendan O’Malley (2010, *op. cit.*).

Table 3. Common motivations for attacks

- To oppose the government, where education might be perceived as a symbol of the state
- To create instability
- To prevent the education of girls
- To resist education imposed by force
- To resist the perceived imposition of alien or different culture, language, religion, ideology, or political framework
- To access a free supply of labour or sexual services, including unlawful recruitment of children for armed conflict
- To obtain money via ransom and extortion, perhaps to fund armed groups
- To silence opposing groups or to exact revenge
- To react against or snuff out intellectualism

Academics and higher education leaders are often vulnerable to harassment, sometimes building over prolonged periods, prior to violent attack. This may offer opportunities for protective intervention. Academics unable to speak the major world languages may be more easily isolated from international monitoring, making them even more vulnerable to attack. General public anti-intellectualism may also be used to isolate higher education staff or the sector generally, reducing social and political costs of later attacks. Specifically, targeted attacks on senior academics and university personnel indicate a degree of knowledge of the educational system on the part of the attackers, and send broadly chilling messages throughout the sector. Higher education professionals may also be squeezed between opposing sides in international and national conflicts and attacked by each side – demonstrating combatants' desires to either 'capture' the university space for their purpose or to deny it to their opponents. Academics constitute important human and intellectual resources for their country, representing decades of academic and professional training and experience. Unfortunately, this often makes them more prominent in society and therefore more attractive targets.⁸

It was suggested that researchers might analyse the motives for attacks on educators and infrastructure using a decision-making framework, whereby the capacity of the perpetrator and calculations of opportunity are also taken into consideration. Some questions to consider include: What is the target and why is it selected? What is to be gained? What is the capacity of the perpetrator to strike? Under what circumstances is an attack on a preferred target within the attackers' capacity to complete successfully? Understanding this decision-making system would help inform risk management protocols and design of prevention and response efforts.

8 For the range of political, ethnic, religious and other motives underlying persecution of academics and violation of the neutrality of the 'academic space', see Chapter 6, and Jarecki and Kaisth, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-45.

Impact of attacks

Seminar participants reviewed the short-term consequences (see Table 4) and longer-term systemic effects (see Table 5) of attacks. Generally, attacks on education impact the right to good quality education for all and profoundly affect the well-being of individuals and communities. The psychosocial impact of attacks on students and teachers⁹ and the longer-term impact on state fragility¹⁰ were among the issues raised.

Table 4. Immediate impacts of attacks on education

- Loss of life and injury
- Damage to property, facilities, and resources
- Closure of sets of schools and universities and parts of or whole local education systems
- Minor and major psychosocial impact on students, staff, and local communities
- Hindrance to students' learning or enrolment and attendance, due to inaccessibility of facilities, and/or distraction and de-motivation
- Adverse effects on teaching, including teacher absenteeism and attrition, and other degradation of quality
- Limitations to the building of and sharing of knowledge, including the suppression of research and publications
- Disruption of examinations, sometimes affecting only particular groups, thereby furthering marginalization
- Disruption of flows of resources, supplies and support from central education authorities to local educational facilities
- Isolation of schools and colleges from support and supervision, and isolation of academics from professional communities
- Suspension of aid programmes
- Increased vulnerability of children and young people to unlawful or voluntary recruitment into armed groups

9 See Chapter 4.

10 Reference was made to the work of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies' Working Group on Education and Fragility, represented at the seminar, with the suggestion that the Group might benefit from and contribute to research on the impact of attacks and preventive action.

Table 5. Long-term systemic impacts of attacks on education

- Involuntary brain drain and loss of academic expertise through the flight of teachers, academics, and education officials
- Teacher recruitment difficulties due to insecurity, rural-urban migration, etc.
- Degradation of teacher training institutions and processes
- Exacerbation of state fragility (fragility can also lead to or facilitate attacks)
- Disruption in education/employment cycles, contributing to creation of a generation of undereducated and frustrated young people with limited access to employment opportunities
- Degradation in socio-economic investments via dilution of the value of present investments and the halting of new investment resources
- Silencing of teachers' voices by attacks on trade unionists, which may in turn negatively affect quality
- Degradation of the quality and relevance of higher education and curtailing of the research, invention, and innovation, resulting from reductions of academic freedom
- Ideological, cultural, social effects of banning or restricting education, notably for girls and marginalized groups, creating social, political and economic isolation and insecurity
- Disruptions of the development of new cohorts of graduates and educated citizens, future academics, and human resources for development

Attacks on academics in higher education including higher education system leaders were seen as having a special impact because of academics' distinct role in society. Higher education – in the ideal – provides a neutral space within society for debate and disagreement; 'neutral' in the sense that violence and force are rejected as the basis for deciding outcomes, in favour of quality, reason and understanding. This quality-promoting function allows the higher education sector to serve as an engine for development, knowledge-production and public good. Attacks squander the investment in the capacity of these individuals and institutions to the detriment of the entire society.

Needs going forward

The knowledge base regarding attacks was seen as lacking in two dimensions – better information on what is happening at country level and globally, and depth of understanding of the phenomenon. In terms of enhanced information flows, there was widespread support for the idea of a system of global surveillance. This would comprise information and globally-recognised indicators on incidence of attacks, prevalence, coverage and quality of programming. This data would be generated through improved systems of monitoring and reporting, as discussed in the next section, as well as through specially commissioned studies.¹¹

Regarding depth of understanding, there were calls for research into the underlying causes, motives, nature and impact of attacks, applicable national and international law, and accountability. A shared strategic research agenda is needed, linked to but going beyond the

11 Data on the adequacy of education provision in humanitarian crises will also be generated through the ongoing activities of the recently established UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Education Cluster.