Reviewer’s report

Title: The Good Schools Study: A cluster-randomised controlled trial of a program to prevent violence against children in Ugandan primary schools

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Reviewer: Kathryn Brookmeyer

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A content-related issue problematic throughout this proposal is what form of violence the researchers are aiming to prevent and who they are surmising the perpetrators are. Despite the introduction, it would appear that the toolkit is focused on teacher corporal punishment of students within the classroom. However, bullying of students and sexual violence (also perpetrated by students and dating partners) is also mentioned. At minimum, the authors need to strengthen their rationale for their focus on corporal punishment and also address directly the social norms which exist in both schools and families that allow for the pervasive use of physical violence (see WHO VAW studies, CDC/UNICEF VAC studies).

In addition, it is unclear whether the Good Schools Toolkit is evidence-based and to what extent it has been adapted from other violence prevention intervention initiatives. What are the key indicators of its success? Has initial qualitative work been done with its measures among this age and population by the authors? Is there any data thus far that would indicate that this study intervention could be successful, and, if so, among which groups? There is a lack of formative work and evidence, at least evinced in this manuscript.

Additional detail should also be provided as to the sampling strategy and stratification of schools, if any. As well, there is no mention of incentives given or IRB approval. There is mention that “students deemed unable to understand the study content and procedures (and unable to given informed consent) will be excluded.” The authors need to elaborate on this statement and explain if not understanding the study content could result in a student selection bias.

Inadequate information is also given regarding the assessment periods. Will the intervention still be ongoing when the first assessment is given? How many follow-ups will there be and how much time will be between each follow-up assessment? Given that this is being written as a study proposal, authors need to provide much more detailed information here, as well as their rationale for their assessment period decisions.

Last, how will the authors be sure that a difference in assessment can be attributable to the toolkit itself? Although a challenge with all interventions, authors need to address this point.