

PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST SCHOOL CHILDREN IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Violence against school children is a pervasive problem that requires greater attention from educators, policy makers and researchers. This study examined prevalence of violence against school children in Imo State, Nigeria. Four research questions based on the following variables: types and prevalence of violence, prevalence of forms of violence, prevalence of violence according to sex and level of school and perpetrators of violence against school children in Imo State were raised and tested. The study employed descriptive survey research design and the population comprised pupils in upper primary schools (4-6), students in Junior Secondary School (JSS 1-3) and teachers in primary and junior secondary schools in Imo State. Multistage sampling technique was used to select randomly a sample of 420 out of total population of 26,715 pupils, students and teachers in primary 4-6 and JSS1-3 in Imo State. Two sub-sectioned self-developed and validated questionnaire was used for data collection. Reliability co-efficient index of 0.79 and 0.81 was obtained for the two instruments using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages was used to answer the research questions. The results revealed that physical and psychological violence were more prevalent than other types of violence. Also, the result showed that sexual and gender-based violence were fairly prevalent in schools. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that promotion of social skills and development of socially supportive learning environment should be encouraged.

Key words: *Violence, Children, School, Imo State.*

Introduction

Violence against children and young people is a matter of great concern and a major threat to global development as well as the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Around the world, children are regarded as precious gift. They are in fact means of perpetuating a particular society. Also, in traditional African societies, children are to be protected, supported and assisted to reach their full potential. This is probably not the case in our present day societies, as children are often the most vulnerable and resilient. The new International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary (2014) defined violence as unjust exercise of power, injury; outrage; desecration; profanation. It is a physical force unlawfully exercised; an act tending to intimidate or by causing

apprehension of bodily injury. World Health Organization (WHO) (2012) defined violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.

Furlong and Morrison (2000) conceptualized school violence as a multifaceted construct that involves both criminal acts and aggression in schools, which inhibit development and learning, as well as harm the school climate. School violence includes gang activity, locker theft, bullying, intimidation and gun use. Children experience violence in their homes, schools, on the streets and from other children. Often times, children are subjected to violence in the family in the guise of discipline.

Federal Ministry of Education/UNICEF (2017) reported that various cases of violence against school children such as torture, kidnapping, ritual killings, shootings, sexual harassment, rape, corporal punishment, fights or physical attacks and so on, which began to increase slowly throughout 1990's have shown exponential growth throughout the present decade. A global in-depth study of violence against school children by WHO (2002) showed that 53,000 children were murdered worldwide. A survey from many countries revealed that between 20 to 65 percent of school aged children have been bullied verbally or physically. Furthermore, WHO (2002) estimated that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years were sexually abused. About 100 to 140 million girls in the world underwent some forms of female genital mutilation (FGM) or the other. International Labour Organization (2001) report indicated that globally 218 million school children involved in various forms of child labour, and 126 million of these children were involved in dangerous work. Also, 1.8 million children worked in prostitution and pornography outfit and 1.2 million children were victims of child trafficking.

In Imo State, according to Ibhafidon, Onuzulike & Ewuzie (2015), hundreds of school children are kidnapped every year. Sexual violence and rape of children appears to increase rapidly. The authors also noted that sexual abuse of children often take place behind closed doors and is unreported and undetected. Furthermore, there are lots of children living with their parents or guardians in the city of Owerri and other urban towns who were neglected, abandoned and exposed to so many hazards and threats. Another critical violence against school children is physical abuse, which include hitting, biting, slapping, punching, pulling hair, burning, cutting, laceration, strangling, scratching, bullying, verbal threats, name-calling, threatening with weapons, and sexual assault. Also, psychological violence experienced by school children includes emotional and verbal bully. Others are teasing, gossiping, rejecting, taunting,

humiliation, intimidation, harassment, blackmail, constant belittling, constant blaming, verbal abuse, shouting, insults, neglect and lack of basic needs (Chege, 2001).

According to United Nations (2012), the consequences of violence include brain injuries, bruises, and fractures, poor interpersonal relationship and communication, learning problems, emotional/psychological problems like anxiety, depression, aggression or attempted suicide, use of drugs, sexual indulgence and health problems such as HIV/AIDs and sexually transmitted infections. However, the impacts can result in early death while those who survive live with physical and emotional scars. Also, Federal Ministry of Education/UNICEF (2017) noted that violence can have severe implications for children's development. It can affect children's health, their ability to learn or even their willingness to go to school. It can cause children to run away from home therapy exposing them to further danger. Violence also destroys children's self-confidence and esteem and undermines their ability to grow into well adjusted adults.

Chege (2001) observed that children subjected to violence are prone to depression and suicide in later life. In most cases, violence can lead to injury or death. Yogan and Stuart (2009) stated that violence against school children takes many forms, all of which involve harm, but not all of those harmed necessarily realize they have been victimized. The authors noted that the harmful effects of violent practices are obscure, and may take a long time to appear. Lawrence (2008) argued that overtime this practice operates as a crime of repression, limiting the intellectual, social and moral development of those subject to it. However, today there is increasing spate of violence against school children globally, Imo State inclusive with its attendant consequences, therefore there is an urgent need for prevention and mitigation of the effects in order to secure the future of school children.

The main purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of violence against school children in Imo State. Specifically, the objectives were to establish types and prevalence of violence against school children, forms of violence in schools, violence according to sex and level of school, as well as perpetrators of violence against children in schools in Imo State.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. According to Frankfort-Nachmias (2006) descriptive survey design is a research design used most predominantly in survey research because it facilitates the gathering of information about a larger population by collecting information from a segment of that very population from where generalization can be inferred. The population for the study comprised pupils in upper primary schools (primary 4-6), students

in junior secondary schools (JSS1-3), and teachers in primary (4-6) and junior secondary schools in Imo State. A sample size of 420 respondents representing 192 primary 4-6, 192 students in JSS 1-3, 24 teachers and 12 head teachers) in the selected schools was used for the study, employing multistage sampling technique. Two self-structured close ended questionnaire (learners' questionnaire and teacher's questionnaire) was the main instrument for the study. It was structured in line with the variables of the study. The first instrument with a reliability coefficient of 0.79 Cronbach's alpha was a closed-ended self structured questionnaire for learners. While the second instrument with a reliability coefficient of 0.81 Cronbach's alpha was also a closed-ended self-structured questionnaire designed for teachers. The instrument was given to three experts for proper guidance and necessary vetting with respect to relevance, suitability, repetition, set objectives, use of language, ambiguity vis-à-vis content validity. Thereafter, necessary modifications were made. The research instruments were tested using 20 school children and 10 teachers who were not part of the sample drawn for the study. The instrument was deemed reliable for the study. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researchers with the help of two trained research assistants. Guidelines concerning the completion of the questionnaire were explained. Each respondent complete the questionnaire form and were collected on the spot. A total of 420 copies of the questionnaire were duly completed and returned. The responses were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the types and prevalence of violence against school children in Imo State?

Table 1: Responses on types and prevalence of violence against school children in schools

Types and prevalence of violence	Primary	JSS
Physical violence	125 (80.7)	139 (72.4)
Psychological violence	136 (70.8)	125 (65.1)
Sexual violence	75 (39.1)	83 (43.2)
Gender-based violence	28 (13.5)	31 (16.1)

Table 1 describes types and prevalence of violence that were present in schools in Imo State. Physical violence 80.7% and 72.4% accounting for primary and junior secondary school respectively; psychological violence 70.8% for primary and

65.1% junior secondary schools. Types of violence reported among learners in schools in Imo State included sexual violence 39.1% primary and 54.1% to junior secondary, and gender-based-violence 13.5% and 16.1% primary and junior secondary respectively.

Research Question 2: What is the prevalence of forms of violence in schools in Imo State?

Table 2: Responses on prevalence of forms of violence according to senatorial districts

Prevalence of Violence	Orlu	Owerri	Okigwe
Physical violence	125 (31.25)	124 (32.3)	115 (29.9)
Psychological violence	105 (27.3)	120 (31.25)	100 (26.0)
Sexual violence	27 (7.0)	35 (.9.1)	19 (4.9)
Gender-based violence	11 (2.9)	8 (2.1)	5 (1.3)

Data in table 2 shows the prevalence of forms of violence against children according to senatorial districts in Imo State. The percentages of physical violence are: Orlu 31.25%, Owerri 32.3% and Okigwe 29.9%, psychological violence Orlu 27.3%, Owerri 31.25% and Okigwe 26%; sexual violence Orlu 7%, Owerri 9.1% and Okigwe 4.9%, and gender-based- violence Orlu 2.9%, Owerri 2.1% and Okigwe 1.3% accounted for the least of violence against children in schools in Imo State.

Research Question 3: What is the prevalence of violence in schools according to sex and level of school.

Table 3:

Prevalence of Violence	Sex %		Level of School %	
	Male	Female	Pri.	JSS
Physical violence	48.7	44.8	32.3	49.5
Psychological violence	31.25	30.5	44.3	48.4
Sexual violence	4.0	8.3	5.1	7.2
Gender-based-violence	3.1	3.4	3.9	5.4

Data in table 3 also shows prevalence of violence in schools according to sex and level of school in Imo State. As is depicted by table 3, 48.7% and 44.8% of male and female, and 32.3% and 49.5% of primary and junior secondary school

learners respectively, had experienced physical violence. Similarly, 31.25% male, 30.5% female, 44.3% primary and 48.4% junior secondary school learners had experienced psychological violence. While 4% male, 8.3% female, 5.1% primary and 7.2% junior secondary school learners had experienced sexual violence. The remaining 3.1% male, 3.4% female, 3.9% primary and 5.4% junior secondary school learners had experienced gender-based-violence.

Research Question 4: Who are the perpetrators of violence against children in schools in Imo State?

Table 4: Responses on person that perpetrate violence against school children in Imo State

Types of violence	Head teacher %	School teacher %	JSS students %	Prim. Pupils %
Physical	19.4	21.0	27.8	23.3
Psychological	13.8	9.5	1.6	1.3
Sexual	0	0	1.3	0
Gender-based-violence	0	0	0	0

Table 4 describes persons who perpetrate violence against children in schools in Imo State. The data showed that head teacher (19.4%), school teacher (21%), JSS students (27.8%) and primary pupils (23.3%) were implicated in physical violence. Further analysis revealed that head teacher (13.8%), school teacher (9.5%), JSS students (6.4%) and primary pupils (4.3%) were identified as psychological violence perpetrators while sexual violence and gender-based violence recorded no response except junior secondary school students that documented 0.3%.

Discussion

The study revealed that forms of violence described in table 1 were present in schools in Imo State. Other types of violence reported among learners in schools in Imo State included sexual violence primary 39.1% and JSS 43.2%, and gender-based violence primary 13.5% and JSS 16.1%. These developments have negative effects on the learners and school climate. A study by Jimerson (2012) pointed out that violence is more likely to compromise learning because it increases fear, anxiety, and absenteeism as well as dropping out of school.

The findings on the prevalence of the different types of violence against learners according to senatorial district revealed that all forms of violence

occurred in Owerri than in Orlu and Okigwe districts as revealed in table 2. This finding is in consonance with that of Currie (2004) who reported that violence against children are more prevalent in urban than rural areas. The result further showed low incidence of gender-based violence and this might be related to the gender parity in educational system.

The finding in table 3 revealed that physical and psychological violence were also evenly distributed among males and female learners at school level in Imo State. This finding is contrary to Chege (2006) who stated that there are different levels and types of violence meted out by teachers on learner based on their gender. However sexual violence was higher in the junior secondary school (7.2%) than in primary (5.1%). About 8.3% of the females were victimized. This finding supported the study of National Household Education Survey (2003). This is expected considering the fact that puberty, growth and development of secondary characteristics are pronounced at the junior secondary school stage. It is the stage at which sexual consciousness is experienced. Therefore, sexual violence might be more prevalent at this stage. This might also be the reason why gender-based violence was also more prevalent at the junior secondary schools (5.4%) than at the primary (3.9%).

The finding in table 4 revealed that junior secondary school students and primary pupils were mainly responsible for physical violence in school, which varied significantly according to grade level, while teachers and head teachers were responsible for inflicting psychological violence against learners in schools in Imo State. Although, junior secondary school students (1.6%) and primary pupils (1.3%) were implicated in psychological violence, only JSS students (0.3%) were identified as sexual violence perpetrators. This finding confirms that of Field (2003) who maintained that though some bullying teachers exist, but most teachers are hardworking individuals who dedicates their lives to educating the next generation. Hence, the problem of perpetrating violence in school most often lies with the management. According to Field (2003) any anti-bullying policy which fails to mention accountability for the act (bullying) for the teacher and children is likely to meet with limited success. The 0.3% of junior secondary school students might be related to the fact that female learners at this stage are mostly victims of violence (sexual violence) in schools.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that violence against children occur in schools in Imo State. Specially, physical and psychological violence are more prevalent than other types of violence. The study also noted that sexual and gender-based violence was fairly prevalent in schools in Imo State.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to address violence against children in schools in Imo State.

1. Formulation of guideline for violence free policy at the basic level of education level in Nigeria. The policy will facilitate the establishment of enabling environment for the prevention and mitigation of the impact of violence at the educational level.
2. There should be promotion of life skills to prevent violence against children in schools. Appropriate, co-curricular activities in schools, clubs focusing on violence prevention should be encouraged.
3. Physical violence should be drastically reduced in schools; through the effective administration by the appropriate authority.
4. Sex education should be incorporated into the school curriculum so as to reduce sexual violence among students.
5. Promotion of social skills and development of socially supportive learning environment should be encouraged.

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