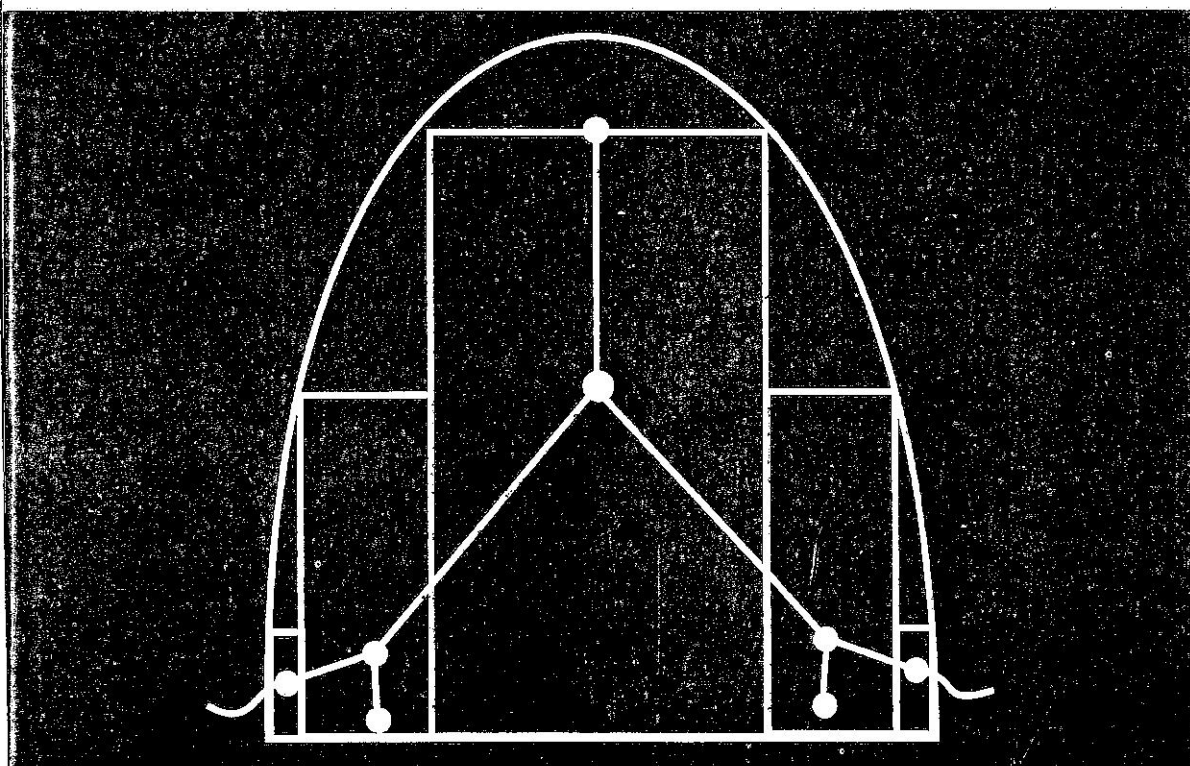


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Opinion of Teachers on the Forms, Factors and Prevention of Violence against Girls in Secondary Schools in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Across the globe, school is regarded as a safe place for children. This is an important aspect that is put into consideration when parents entrust their children to teachers. However, schools are not entirely a safe haven for children. On this basis, this study examined the opinion of teachers on the forms factors and prevention strategies of violence against girls in Lagos schools, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey method and employed multi-stages sampling technique to select 384 teachers from 128 senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. Mean rating was used for the three research questions raised in this study. A researchers'-designed questionnaire was used as the instrument and tagged Violence against School Girls' Forms, Factors and Prevention (VASGFFP) with a content and face validity and reliability index of 0.78. Findings revealed that sexual assault, obligatory chores for teachers, rape, verbal abuse and corporal punishment are the major forms of violence against girls. It also revealed that lack of parental attention as a result of broken home, poverty, school rules that permit the use of corporal punishment are the major factors of violence against girls in schools. Findings also revealed that symposium against the use of violence against girls, introduction of curriculum content on violence against girls and involvement of Parents Teachers Association are the major prevention strategies identified by teachers. On the basis of the findings, the study recommended that periodic symposium should be organized to keep learners, teachers, school administrators and parents informed on the consequences of violence against girls in school in order to mitigate its occurrence.

Keywords: Girls, school-based violence, Secondary Schools, prevention strategies, Nigeria.

Introduction

Schools are agents of social change. Schools are one of the subsystems in the society that have been internalized with the traditions and values of the society. Across the globe, schools have several essential functions which include socialization, social placement and social integration. This is by far a distant variation from the meaning and concept of school in earlier times. The ancient Greek language lay claim to the etymology of school which was derived from the word, *skhole*, meaning leisure. In this vein, school was seen several centuries ago as a form of passing of leisure time in a systematic way.

Presently, schools are regarded as secured learning environments with trusted adults who assist in creating an atmosphere where all learners can thrive and protect the promotion of their mental and emotional well-being (UNICEF, 2010). The secured ambience of school prompts parents to release their children in the care of teachers for long hours of the day. At all levels of education, schools are entrusted with the protection of children. But this is hardly the case, as schools have also been observed to be sites of violence (Jeffthas & Artz, 2007). The American Association of University Women (AAUW) Educational Foundation (2001) also suggested that schools can be hostile hallways where learners, especially girls are often targets for violence.

Violence, according to the conceptualization of the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria (2007), is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Violence can take variety of forms and is driven by a wide range of factors, from the personal characteristics of the victim and perpetrator to their cultural and physical environments, including but not limited to sexual violence, intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect, bullying, teen dating violence, trafficking and elder abuse (UNGEI-UNESCO, 2013).

Girls have been identified as primary victims of violence in the school. In Togo, in a study that covered a group of 750 school girls, 88% reported the experience of physical violence at school, 52% reported threatening behavior or psychological violence at school, even sexual behavior was reported by the girls with a 4.1%, (Plan Togo, 2006). According to UNGEI-UNESCO (2013), violence against school girls relate to the acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence inflicted on students in and around schools because of stereotyped roles or norms attributed to or expected of females because of their sex or gendered identity. It is also described as a global phenomenon which manifests itself differently in various cultural and geographical contexts and refers to the differences between male and female students' vulnerabilities to violence. Pinheiro (2005) observed that the prevalence of violence against

school girls is so high that the United Nations referred to it as an 'everyday violence' which violates children's human rights and causes them to suffer, and has been acknowledged as a threat to national development and an impediment to the achievement of sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO (2010) classified violence against school girls into three elements of:

- i. Degrading and corporal punishment
- ii. Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation
- iii. Other forms of violence are, expressions of physical violence, psychological violence or bullying

As noted by UNICEF (2010), these three elements of violence against school girls can be simplified into various forms which include the following:

- i. Bullying, including verbal and/or physical harassment;
- ii. Sexual harassment, also referred to as 'teasing' or insinuation;
- iii. Sexual acts in exchange for good grades or for the paying of school fees;
- iv. Non-consensual touching or sexual assault;
- v. Seduction or sexual harassment of learners by a teacher; and other males in the school;
- vi. Encouragement of male dominance or aggression within the school environment.

According to UNGEI-UNESCO (2013), violence against school-girls can occur in various locations in and around the school, such as road to school, classroom, dormitories, areas close to the school, school toilets, teachers' staff room and residence, and so on. There are an estimated 246 million students who suffer from violence within the school walls on the basis of the number of children affected by verbal bullying (Education For All, 2015). Leach, Dunne and Salvi (2014) revealed that millions of students suffer physical violence at school in the name of corporal punishment as the perpetrators claim it is a form of discipline. These perpetrators are shielded by lack of legal protection against corporal punishment as Education For All (2015) pointed out that over one-half of all children worldwide live in countries where they have no legal protection from corporal punishment.

School girls continue to face many obstacles. Safety within the school is a significant predictor of girls participation in basic education in Nigeria and across the globe. As studies have shown, violence toward girls in schools is pervasive and worldwide (Leach, Dunne, & Salvi, 2014). One of the several reasons girls drop-out of school has been attributed to school violence (Actionaid, 2012). Violence against school girls is quite rife in Nigeria and UNICEF (2010) asserted that it is important to recognize that all forms of

violence are linked and that school girls are often exposed to successive or concurrent forms of violence throughout their schooling period. In a report of the British Council (2012), one in three of all girls aged 15 – 24 has been a victim of violence while women who have never married are more likely to have been attacked than married women.

A school girl of Kadara Junior Grammar School, Ebute-Metta, Lagos, was the victim of corporal punishment when the principal personally administered 43 strokes of cane on her inflicting her with serious body harm (Akintola, 2013). Also in Lagos, a teacher was arrested by the Gowon Estate Police Division, Lagos for allegedly victimizing a 14year old school girl and banning her from attending his classes (Oseghale, 2013). In 2014, Oyo State police arrested a teacher in Ibadan for allegedly raping three school girls, including two orphans (Bellanaija, 2014). Olley (2007) added that 55% of schools girls in Ibadan reported the incidence of sexual abuse. The nationwide report of the Federal Ministry of Education on school violence revealed that physical and psychological violence accounted for 85% and 50% respectively of the bulk of violence against school-going children (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007).

The aforementioned statistics was corroborated with the UN Human Rights Office report that girls in at least 70 countries including Nigeria are facing increasing threats and violence for trying to attend school (AlJazeera, 2015). The report added that many girls are the target of sexual violence, intimidation, harassment and abduction which has resulted in low attendance rates of girls at school. In addition, an estimated 50% of sexual assaults worldwide are committed against girls under the age of 16 (Olanrewaju, 2013). Violence against school girls has become a global phenomenon which knows no boundaries and does not discriminate on the basis of geography, culture, ethnicity, or economy, and is often tolerated and sustained by many social institutions (UNGEI-UNESCO, 2013).

Over the years, scholars often ignore this area of research, thereby strengthening the school as a haven of violence against girls. Though, this has improved in the last decade with studies on violence in the schools against children, girls and teachers. It is on this basis that this study examined the opinion of teachers on the types, causes and prevention of violence against school girls.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been raised to guide this study:

- i. What are the forms of violence against school-girls prevalent in Lagos?
- ii. What are the factors responsible for violence against school girls in Lagos?
- iii. How can violence against school girls be prevented in Lagos?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey method. The population for this study covered all senior secondary schools in Lagos State. Multistage sampling technique was employed for this study. Lagos State was stratified into 3 senatorial districts. Proportional sampling technique was used to select 128 senior secondary schools based on the number of schools in each Senatorial district. Three teachers were randomly selected from each of the 128 sampled Senior Secondary Schools, for a sample of 384 respondents. A researchers'-designed questionnaire was used as the instrument and tagged Violence against School Girls' Forms, Factors and Prevention (VASGFFP). The instrument was subjected to both face and content validity through experts in the field of social sciences education. The reliability of the instrument was determined through test retest method and Pearson Moment Correlation was used to test the two scores, with an index score of 0.78. The three research questions were answered using mean rating.

Results

Research Question 1: *What are the forms of violence against school girls prevalent in Lagos State?*

The responses to items in the Section B of the questionnaire was used to answer research question one and the result was shown on Table 1.

Table 1

Ranking order on forms of Violence against School Girls

S/N	Forms of Violence against School Girls	Frequency	Mean	Rank
1	Corporal Punishment	384	3.62	1 st
2	Sexual Assault/Rape	384	3.24	2 nd
3	Verbal abuse	384	3.10	3 rd
4	Obligatory chores for teachers	384	3.00	4 th
5	Teachers' refusal to check homework	384	3.00	4 th
6	Snubbing	384	2.90	6 th
7	Bullying	384	2.82	7 th
8	Deliberate downgrading of score	384	2.56	8 th
9	Denial of access to classroom	384	2.56	8 th
10	Withdrawal of affection	384	2.56	8 th

Table 1 shows that 384 respondents participated in this study. Ten forms of violence against school girls were prevalent. Corporal punishment with a mean score 3.62 (1st), sexual assault/rape with a mean score of 3.24 (2nd), verbal abuse with a mean score of 3.32 (3rd) were ranked as common forms of violence against school girls. The 1st three ranked forms are in the opinion of teachers to be most prevalent forms of violence against school girls.

Research Question 2: What are the factors responsible for violence against school girls in Lagos, Nigeria?

The responses to items in Section C of the instrument was used to answer research question two. The output of the mean rating analysis was shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Ranking Order of the Factors responsible for Violence against School Girls

S/N	Factors	Frequency	Mean	Rank
1	Exposure to domestic violence	384	3.26	1 st
2	School rules and regulations that permit the use of corporal punishment	384	3.14	2 nd
3	Victimisation of girls who report to intimidate other victims of violence	384	3.00	3 rd
4	Lack of parental presence due to broken home	384	2.92	4 th
5	Poor school management to check excesses of teachers	384	2.90	5 th
6	Curriculum contents that perpetuate gender stereotypes	384	2.74	6 th
7	Gender norms that make girls inferior to boys	384	2.60	7 th
8	Teachers with poor classroom management skill who are prone to use force	384	2.54	8 th
9	Lack of appropriate information on sex education	384	2.32	9 th
10	Parental economic status	384	2.32	9 th

Table 2 indicates that 10 factors were highlighted by the 384 respondents to be responsible for violence against school girls. Exposure to domestic violence with a mean score of 3.26 was ranked 1st, school rules and regulations that permit the use of corporal punishment with a mean score of 3.14 was ranked 2nd, and victimization of girls who report with a mean score of 3.00 was ranked 3rd.

Research Question 3: *How can violence against school girls be prevented in Lagos?*

The responses to items in Section D of the questionnaire were analysed with mean rating and used to answer research question 3. The result of the analysis was presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Ranking Order of Violence against School Girls Prevention

S/N	Prevention of Violence	Frequency	Mean	Rank
1	Proper reprimand of perpetrators to deter other offenders of violence against school girls	384	3.61	1 st
2	Counseling of teachers and students on violence against girls	384	3.48	2 nd
3	Protection of girls who report violence to encourage other victims to speak out	384	3.36	3 rd
4	Workshop/Seminar/Talk Shows against the use of violence and its prevention	384	3.20	4 th
5	Involvement of Parents Teachers' Association	384	2.95	5 th
6	Policy formulation and legislation on the rights of school girls	384	2.82	6 th
7	Effective school management and supervision	384	2.80	7 th
8	Use of learning materials that reflect gender equality	384	2.72	8 th
9	Sex education for all students	384	2.72	8 th
10	Effective skills of professional teachers in handling students	384	2.69	10 th

As illustrated in Table 3, 384 respondents participated in this study. Out of the 10 preventive approaches identified, proper reprimand of perpetrators to deter other possible offenders of violence against school girls with a mean score of 3.61 was ranked 1st, counseling of teachers and students on violence against girls with a mean score of 3.48 was ranked 2nd, and protection of girls who report violence to encourage other victims to speak out with a mean score of 3.36 was ranked 3rd. This implies that the three top ranked approach are in the opinion of teachers to be viable prevention approach to violence against school girls.

Summary of the Findings

Based on the data collected, analyzed and interpreted, the major findings obtained from this study are:

1. Corporal punishment, sexual assault and verbal abuse are prevalent forms of violence against school girls.
2. Exposure to domestic violence, school rules and regulations that permit the use of corporal punishment and victimization of girls who report to intimidate other victims of violence are major factors responsible for violence against school girls.
3. Proper reprimand of perpetrators to deter other possible offenders of violence against school girls, counseling of teachers and students on violence against

school girls and protection of girls who report violence to encourage other victims to speak out are seen as viable prevention approach to violence against school girls.

Discussion of the Findings

The finding revealed that corporal punishment, sexual assault and verbal abuse are prevalent forms of violence against school girls. This finding is in line with reports of Akintola (2013) and Leach et al (2014) of the increasing incidence of corporal punishment against school girls in the name of discipline. It also corroborates Olley (2007), Olanrewaju (2013), Bellanaija (2014) that sexual assault against school girls is pervasive. It further buttressed Leach et al (2014) that violence against school girls is pervasive and a worldwide phenomenon.

Another finding of this study revealed that exposure to domestic violence, school rules and regulations that permit the use of corporal punishment and victimization of girls who report to intimidate other victims of violence are major factors responsible for violence against school girls. This finding supports Moore, Elkins, McNulty, Kivisto and Handsel (2011) and Mullu, Gizachew, Amare, Alebel, Wagnaw, Tiruneh, Worku, Kediri, Tamiru, and Demsie (2015) who observed that family background influence the actions of individuals, particularly, those who witness domestic violence on a regular basis. It is also in line with ActionAid (2012) who attributed sparse of research on violence against school girls to lack of reports because those who report are usually victimized and intimidated.

Lastly, finding of this study reveals that proper reprimand of perpetrators to deter other possible offenders of violence against school girls, counseling of teachers and students on violence against school girls and protection of girls who report violence to encourage other victims to speak out are seen as viable prevention approach to violence against school girls. This finding is in consonance with Education For All (2015) who suggested that lack of legal protection against the use corporal punishment in schools is a factor responsible for the violence against school girls. This implies that if there exists effective laws and efficient implementation against the use of violence, it will reduce the incidence of violence against school girls.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that violence against school girls is pervasive. It also identified forms, factors and prevention of violence against school girls. By so doing, the findings of this study have provided valuable resources for all stakeholders in the education sector and gain insight into preventive measures to be taken to reduce the incidence of violence against school girls. On the basis of the findings, it can be recommended that:

1. Perpetrators should be identified and reprimanded.
2. The use of corporal punishment in schools should be discouraged.
3. Establishment of counseling unit in all schools should be a matter of necessity.
4. Girls who report issue of violence should be protected and management should handle such issue without bias.
5. School management should not pay lip service to excesses of its teachers.

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