

Managing Gender-Based Violence among Students in Public Secondary Schools in Imo State

Okonkwo, Bernadette. N
Faculty of Education
Imo State University, Owerri
Nigeria
zikaokonkwo@gmail.com

Nwankwo, Sebastine. N
Faculty of Education
Imo State University, Owerri
Nigeria
sirbastinenwankwo@gmail.com

Oputa, Rosemary, E
Faculty of Education
Imo State University, Owerri
Nigeria
oputaannie@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

The study on managing gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo State stems from the researchers' concern about bitter complaints from female students on the issues of bullying, rape, cultism, assault and use of weapons perpetuated by male students in public secondary schools in Imo State. It aimed at identifying gender based violent acts prevalent in secondary schools, ascertaining the remote factors that necessitate violent actions exhibited by students, finding out which gender suffers the violent act more, who perpetrates the violence as well as strategies employed to prevent gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo State. The study was guided by five research questions. Survey research design was employed. The population of the study was three hundred and seven (307) Principals, six thousand, one hundred and forty-four teachers (6,144) and one hundred and fifty-seven thousand, three hundred and six (157,306) students. Sample size of three hundred and seventy three (373) comprising thirty-one (31) principals, one hundred and two teachers and two hundred and forty (240) students was drawn from the six education zones of Imo State using clustered random sampling technique. Data was collected using rating scale and was analyzed with frequency tables and mean score. The study found out that gender based violence is prevalent in Imo State Secondary School System, remote actors necessitate gender-based violent acts, male and female students and teachers also perpetrate violent acts and also principals should employ strategies like provision of guidance and counselling services, seminars/ trainings etc to prevent gender-based violent acts in schools. Based on the findings, recommendations were made.

Introduction

Secondary education is very fundamental in a child's life because it provides opportunity for him or her to acquire additional knowledge, skills, and traits beyond the primary level so as to become a useful member of the society where he or she belongs. Implicitly, a child needs a serene and conducive environment for knowledge to be imparted. As noted by Management Systems International (2008), all children deserve a school environment that is safe and nurturing – one that will allow them to grow, thrive, and maximize their full potential. Invariably, secondary school system should be violent free for effective teaching and learning and for students realization of their full potentials.

Unfortunately, in many Nigerian secondary schools the serenity of the environment are distorted by gender based violence exhibited in the forms of threats, rape, bullying, stealing, verbal and physical attacks, vandalism, extortion, and killing. Violence in schools, not only makes teaching-learning difficult, it also creates fear in the students and as well, mars the achievement of educational objective of the students. Dworjan, (2015) observed that obvious effect of school violence is that many students end up feeling fearful of other students or of going to school and teachers are forced to be on the lookout for troubled students, rather than focusing on teaching alone. This affects the child's academics. Management Systems International (2008) further noted that physical, psychological and sexual violence experienced by students in and around the school, compromises their ability to fully realize the benefits of education and also impacts on their ability to concentrate and learn. More importantly, violence in secondary schools promote insecurity, truancy and gradual decline in the quality of education

Consequently therefore, the management of gender- based violence by school administrators to ensure that educational goals are attained is an issue that must be given priority attention, because realistically, if violence is not properly check-matted and managed in secondary schools, it will not only ruin the school atmosphere by disturbing the smooth running of studies and other school activities, but also distract students from concentrating on their studies, this can be a threat to the realization of a child's academic dream and detrimental to his or her career.

Concept and Management of gender based violence

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in secondary schools can mar the willingness of children to go to school and participate in school academic activities. Ndungu cited in Uwameiye and Iserameiya (2013) noted that the GBV covers those incidents in which one sex asserts power by using sexual or similar acts to achieve submissiveness and fear in another person and in the process commit an offence against the dignity or privacy of that person. In the same vein, Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNICEF (2007) stated that gender based violence refers to injustices and all forms of unequal treatment as a result of either being a male or female. According to Animasaun, and Animasaun, (2013) only women are vulnerable to gender based violence as they are perceived to be victims of infertility, incest, prostitution, psychological abuse and some traditional practices that are harmful. As a result of this, women are seen to be objects of abuse. In secondary schools, girls are generally believed to be the weaker sex and this belief presumably must have given the boys the audacity to overpower and maltreat them.

Ajuwon cited in Dworjan, (2015) lamented that female adolescent students had been victims of at least one sexually coercive behaviour, the most common being unwanted kiss and

touch of the breast, rape which was perpetrated mainly by boyfriends and other persons well known to the victims. He further stated that a review of the incidents of rape from police records in a Nigerian city shows that within a year, a total of 124 cases were officially reported and that all the victims were females. In agreement to this assertion, Obikeze, (2009) findings revealed that male students are involved in violent acts such as fighting, bullying, pushing damaging school property, gangsterism, physical assault, and aggression more than their female counterparts. On the other hand, the findings of CERT and DevTech cited in Management Systems International (2008) revealed that boys in Malawi reported that females made unwanted sexual advances toward them, including peeping at their private parts when they visited the toilets or physically touching them. A few groups of both boys and girls also noted that girls did, on occasion, proposition boys and attempted to force them into a sexual relationship. This implies that females equally perpetrate gender based violence in the school setting. Management Systems International (2008) in this regard further stated that gender based violence can be perpetuated by all school component groups including the students, teachers, school personnel as well as community members. This brings to fore the lamentation of Badri (2014), that the school administrators in many countries are not aware about the extent and the consequences of this problem and its implications on the health and education standard of the students.

Undoubtedly, gender based violence cannot exist without a cause. In view of this, Management Systems International (2008) noted that gender inequality, specific cultural beliefs and also, poverty contributes to gender-based violence. They maintain that, certain behaviors and attitudes exhibited by young girls and boys have cultural inclination. These traditional concepts of male and female and belief in their characteristics empower the males to be domineering and exert authority over their female counterparts. This exertion of authority manifests in either verbal abuse or physical abuse, and is an expression of gender violence. However, Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNICEF (2007) identified provision of guidance counselling services, conduct of seminars on violence, engagement of parents and distribution of publications on peace building and conflict management as strategies for addressing violence in schools

Gender-based violence creates tension in the school system and threatens the realization of the educational objectives. Violence has a huge impact on the smooth running of a school and students' learning ability, and is capable of ruining a child's future if it is not properly managed. In secondary schools administration therefore, the principal whose responsibility it is to plan, organize, direct, coordinate and control human and material resources for the realization of educational objectives and goals, has to ensure a serene environment for effective teaching and learning. The extent to which the principal is able to do this, would determine the level to which students go to school to learn and achieve their academic goals.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school is ideally a place of learning and social interaction for male and female students, cultural and social background notwithstanding. Nevertheless cases of gender based violence have been alleged to be prevalent in Nigerian secondary schools to the extent that the school environment can no longer be adjudged to be conducive for learning (World Bank, 2007). Implicitly, bitter complaints from female students on the issue of bullying, rape, cultism, assault and use of weapons perpetuated by male students' poses a serious challenge to the success of the secondary school system. On this note, Chukwu (2003) asserted that physical pain, emotional stress and, severe psychological effects are associated with gender based violence and could

translate to poor academic performance on the part of the victims. In some cases injuries sustained could lead to hospitalization or even the death of the victim in extreme cases.

Could it be that school administrators are not aware of the dangers associated with gender based violence or cannot manage the situation to avert such? The need for proper management of gender based violence by principals' in public secondary schools in Imo State to ensure healthy environment for teaching and learning inspired the researchers to carry out the study.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study was to examine the management of gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo State. Specifically, it sets out to:

1. Identify gender based violent acts prevalent in public secondary schools in Imo state
2. Ascertain the remote factors that necessitate violent actions exhibited by students,
3. Find out which gender suffers the violent act more,
4. Find out who perpetrates gender based violence acts in secondary schools
5. Ascertain the strategies to be employed to prevent gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo State.

Research question

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. Which gender based violent acts are prevalent in public secondary schools in Imo state?
2. What are the remote factors that necessitate violent actions exhibited by students?
3. Which of the gender suffers the violent act more?
4. Who perpetrates gender based violence acts in secondary schools in Imo State?
5. What are the strategies to be employed to prevent gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo State?

Methodology

The study employed a survey design. Researchers' made rating scale of 50 items with four response options were used for data collection. Five research questions guided the study. The instrument was subjected to face validity while the reliability was established using split half and Cronbach Alfa to determine the correlation between the two set of scores.

The population of the study was three hundred and seven (307) Principals and one hundred and fifty-seven thousand, three hundred and six (157,306) students in three hundred and seven (307) secondary schools in Imo state. Sample size of two hundred and seventy one (271) respondents comprising thirty-one (31) principals and two hundred and forty (240) students was drawn from the six education zones of Imo State using clustered random sampling technique. Data was collected using check-list and rating scale and analyzed with percentages, frequency tables and mean score.

Results

After collection and collation, the data were presented in frequency tables to address the research questions.

Research question 1: Which gender based violent acts are prevalent in public secondary schools in Imo state?

Table 1: Check-list of principals and students on gender based violent acts prevalent in public secondary schools in Imo state

S/N	Gender-based violent acts frequently practiced in school	Teachers' Response	Students Response
1	Use of sexually explicit language/comment by teachers and students.		√
2	Unwanted touching or rape.		
3	Unwanted sexual attention such as teasing or taunting about dressing or appearance by opposite sex.	√	√
4	Watching of pornography		
5	Physical contacts/sexual advances from opposite sex	√	√
6	Physical violence/abuse such as hitting, smacking, slapping, kicking or punching etc among students/teachers	√	√
7	Forcing students to stay in uncomfortable positions/situation eg in the sun, in the rain or cold.		
8	Preventing students from using school facilities like conveniences		√
9	Use of statements of threats by students and teachers.	√	√
10	Use of belittling statements on students.	√	√
11	Bullying by senior students and opposite sex	√	√
12	Intimidating and creating fear in students' e.g making students watch physical punishments on others.		√
13	Assignment of school chores to students as punishments such as fetching water and working in the school garden etc.	√	√
14	Administering corporal punishment on students by teachers, and or senior students	√	√

Table 1 shows a list of gender based violent acts prevalent in public secondary schools, and indicates that except item nos 2,4 and 7 (unwanted touching and rape, watching pornography and forcing students to stay in uncomfortable position/situations eg in the sun, in the rain or cold), all other items are prevalent in secondary schools in Imo State. The table reveals consensus between teachers and students on the prevalence of item nos 3,5,6,9,10,11,13 and 14, that is, unwanted sexual attention such as teaching or taunting about dressing or appearance of opposite sex, physical contacts/sexual advances from opposite sex, physical violence/abuse such as hitting smacking, slapping, kicking or punching etc among students/teachers, use of statements of threats by students and teacher, use of belittling statements on students, bullying on students, assignment of school chores to students as punishment, such as fetching water and working in the school garden and corporal punishment on students by teachers and senior students. However, both respondents disagree on item nos 1, 8 and 12. While students agree that use of sexually explicit language/comments by teachers and students, preventing students from using

school facilities like conveniences and intimidating and creating fear in student are prevalent, teachers hold contrary views.

Research question 2: What are the remote factors that necessitate gender-based violent actions exhibited by students

Table 2: Rating scores of principals and students on remote factors that necessitate violent actions in public secondary schools in Imo state.

S/N		principals Response		Students Response	
		X	Decision	X	Decision
	factors responsible for violence in secondary schools				
15	Gender inequality between boys and girls	2.69	Agree	2.71	Agree
16	Cultural beliefs about male and female gender	2.52	Agree	2.82	Agree
17	Attitudes about gender		Agree	2.65	Agree
18	Poverty	3.00	Agree	2.94	Agree
19	Absence of control measures against violence acts	2.47	Disagree	2.39	Disagree
20	Improper orientation of students	2.50	Agree	2.48	Disagree
21	Poor school management	2.11	Disagree	2.81	Agree
22	Government insensitivity to violent actions among students	2.46	Disagree	2.67	Agree
	Pooled mean	2.54		2.68	

The data on item nos 15, 16, 17 and 18 on remote factors that necessitate gender based violent actions exhibited by students recorded high mean scores of 2.69, 2.71; 2.52, 2.82; 2.61, 2.65 and 3.00, 2.94 for principals and students respectively, indicating a consensus by both respondents that gender inequality between male and female students, cultural beliefs about male/female gender, attitude about gender and poverty are remote factors responsible for gender based violence in schools. Both respondents disagree that the absence of control measures against violent acts is a factor. This is shown by mean scores of 2.47 and 2.39 for principals and students.

However, respondents hold different views on item nos 20, 21 and 22. While principals agree that gender based violence are necessitated by improper orientation of students, students disagree. Mean scores of 2.50 and 2.48 for principals and students explain this. On the other hand, students are of the opinion that poor school management and government insensitivity to violence among students are responsible for gender based violence in schools, contrary to the principals' opinion. Mean scores of 2.11, 2.81 and 2.46, 2.67 on item nos 21 and 22 indicate disagreement.

Research question 3: Which of the gender suffers the violent acts more?

Table 3: Rating Scale of principals and students on gender that suffers the violent acts more

S/N	Item statement	principals Response		Students Response	
		Male	Female	Male	Female

23	Use of sexually explicit language/comment by teachers and students.	20%	80%	18%	82%
24	Unwanted sexual attention such as teasing or taunting about dressing or appearance by opposite sex	10%	90%	23%	77%
25	Physical contacts/sexual advances from opposite sex	30%	70%	34%	66%
26	Physical violence/abuse such as hitting, smacking, slapping, kicking or punching etc among students/teachers	85%	15%	76%	24%
27	Preventing students from using school facilities like conveniences	60%	40%	58%	42%
28	Use of statements of threats by students and teachers.	64%	36%	61%	39%
29	Use of belittling statements on students.	61%	39%	60%	40%
30	Bullying by senior students and opposite sex	82%	18%	79%	21%
31	Intimidating and creating fear in students' e.g making students watch physical punishments on others.	31%	69%	41%	59%
32	Assignment of school chores to students as punishments such as fetching water and working in the school garden etc.	42%	58%	28%	72%
33	Administering corporal punishment on students by teachers, and or senior students	78%	22%	81%	19%

Table 3 contains data on percentage ratings of principals and students on gender that suffers gender-based violence more. Principals agree that female students are victims to item nos 23,24,25,31,32 and 33. This is authenticated by percentage scores of 80%,90%,70%,69% and 58% on those items. Also, principals agree that male students suffer more of physical violence/abuse, exclusion from the use of school facilities, use of statements of threat, use of belittling statements and bullying. Percentage scores of 85%,60%,64%,61%,82% and 78% on item nos 26, 27,28,29,30 and 33 stand as proof. Equally students agree that female students suffer more of item nos 23,24,25,31 32 and 33, while male students are victims of item nos 26, 27,28,29,30 and 33. The table thus discloses a consensus of both respondents that while female students suffer more of use of sexually explicit language/comments, unwanted sexual attention, physical contact/sexual advances intimidation and created fear, as well as assignment of school chores; the males suffer more of physical violence/abuse, exclusion from use of school facilities, use of statement of threats, use of belittling statements, bullying and corporal punishment.

Research question 4

What are the strategies to be employed to prevent gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo state?

Table 4: Rating scores of principals and students on strategies for the prevention of gender based violence in secondary schools.

S/N	Item statement	Students Response			Teacher Response		
		Male	Female	Teachers	Male	Female	Teacher
34	Use of sexually explicit language/comment by teachers and students.	52%	12%	36%	63%	8%	29%
35	Unwanted sexual attention such as teasing or taunting about dressing or appearance by opposite sex	33%	22%	45%	44%	25%	31%
36	Physical contacts/sexual advances from opposite sex	51%	18%	31%	58%	20%	22%
37	Physical violence/abuse such as hitting, smacking, slapping, kicking or punching etc among students/teachers	80%	8%	12%	91%	2%	7%
38	Preventing students from using school facilities like conveniences	16%	6%	78%	27%	15%	58%
39	Use of statements of threats by students and teachers.	32%	6%	62%	31%	10%	59%
40	Use of belittling statements on students.	28%	8%	64%	28%	20%	52%
41	Bullying by senior students and opposite sex	70%	22%	8%	81%	13%	6%
42	Intimidating and creating fear in students' e.g making students watch physical punishments on others.	27%	6%	67%	29%	8%	63%
43	Assignment of school chores to students as punishments such as fetching water and working in the school garden etc.	12%	10%	78%	18%	7%	75%
44	Administering corporal punishment on students by teachers, and or senior students	28%	7%	65%	27%	5%	68%

A cursory look at data on table 4 shows that male students perpetrate item nos 34,36, 37 and 41 while teachers perpetrate item nos 38,39,40,42,43 and 44. Specifically, the table reveals that male students perpetrate violent acts of use of sexually explicit language/comment, physical contacts/sexual advances, physical violence/abuse and bullying while teachers perpetrate exclusion of students from use of school facilities, use of statement of threats, use of belittling statement, intimidation and creating fear in students, assignment of school chores and corporal punishment. Both teachers and students perpetrate unwanted sexual attention while females are involved in all gender based violence but manually.

Research question 5

What are the strategies to be employed to prevent gender based violence among students in public secondary schools in Imo state?

Table 5: Rating scores of principals and students on strategies for the prevention of gender based violence in secondary schools.

S/N		principals Response		Students Response	
	Strategies principals could adopt to prevent gender based violence in secondary schools	X	Decision	X	Decision
45	Provision of guidance and counseling services.	3.10	Agree	2.89	Agree
46	Involving parents /guardians in the crusade against gender based violence.	2.55	Agree	2.67	Agree
47	Seminar/training for students on violence.	3.20	Agree	3.08	Agree
48	Introduction of violence free policies in public secondary schools.	2.73	Agree	2.53	Agree
49	Massive awareness campaign/distribution of publications on peace building/education.	2.91	Agree	2.61	Agree
50	Collective enforcement of prevention strategies.	3.18	Agree	2.94	Agree
	Pooled Mean	2.95		2.79	

The data analysis in table 5 revealed that the respondents (both principals and teachers) agreed with all the items as strategies that could be adopted by principals to prevent gender based violence in secondary schools. This is exemplified by mean scores above 2.50 recorded in all the items.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicated that gender based violence is prevalent in Imo State Secondary School System. This authentication World Bank (2007) claim that cases of gender based violence have been alleged to be prevalent in Nigeria secondary schools to the extent that the school environment can no longer be adjudged to be conducive for learning; and hands credence to Dworjan (2015) observation that obvious effect of school violence is that many students end up feeling fearful of other students or going to school, while teachers are forced to be on the lookout for troubled students, rather than focusing on teaching alone. School administrators therefore have the extra border of maintaining serenity in the school setting to permit effective teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the study revealed the remote factors that necessitate gender based violence exhibited by students to include gender inequality between males and females, cultural beliefs about male/female gender, attitudes about gender and poverty. This agrees with Management System international (2008) opinion that gender inequality, specific cultural belief and also poverty contribute to gender based violence. Poverty reduction and gender equality are thus brought to the five as factors in social development and education planning that should be given attention.

The study also showed that both male and female students as well as teachers perpetrate gender based violence in schools. However, while the females suffer more of emotional violence, the males are victims of physical violence. It is worthy of note that teachers who should custody the students trusted to his care. Turn out to be the greater abuser and violator. No wonder Ajuwon cited in Dworjan (2015) lamented that female adolescent students had been victims of at least are sexually coercive behaviour which was perpetrated mainly by boyfriends and other persons well known to the victims. In this case, male school males and teachers are all well-known perpetrators. Also, the findings of CERT and Devtech cited in Management System International (MSI) (2008) revealed that boys in Malawi reported that females made unwanted sexual advances towards them. This implies that females equally perpetrate gender based violence within the setting. The ascertain of MSI (2008) that gender based violence can be perpetrated by all school component groups including the students, teachers, school personnel as well as community members justifies this stance.

The study has also revealed that in the opinion of both principals and teachers, provision of guidance and counseling services, involvement of parents, seminar/training, massive awareness campaign and collective enforcement of prevention strategies would go a long way to controlling gender based violence in schools, thus conforming UNICEF (2007) identified strategies for addressing violence in schools.

Conclusion

Gender based violence is prevalent in secondary schools in Imo State and it is equally a distraction to effective teaching and learning activities in the secondary school setting and thus, a stumbling block to the achievement of educational objectives.

Therefore, every effort should be made by secondary school administrators to control the menace if the purpose of secondary education is to be achieved.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

- (1) Guidance and counseling services should be provided and made a permanent feature in secondary school administration in Imo State.
- (2) Seminars and training workshops should be organized by principals and the Ministry of Education (MOE) for students on gender based violence.
- (3) Massive awareness campaign and distribution of publications on peace building and peace education should be mounted by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB) for the benefit of the secondary Education system in Imo State.

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