

**Determinants of Gender-Based Violence in Public Secondary Schools in Obio/Akpor
Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

The study investigated determinants of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The research design used was a survey design. A sample size of one hundred and fifty (150) participants within the age range of 14-25 years of which 143 met the inclusion criteria, with 7 of the participants being excluded due to wrong and incomplete data. The study revealed that the forms of gender-based violence in selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government of Rivers State were child sexual violence with a mean score of 3.01, dating violence 2.90, virginity testing 2.59, rape 3.01, emotional violence 2.97 and economic violence 2.66. The main perpetrators of the form of gender-based violence in the selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government of Rivers State were boys with a mean score of 3.18. The yielded p-value of 0.88 using one-factor ANOVA, indicates that there is no significant difference between the genders in terms of perpetrating gender-based violence in the public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, as the p-value is greater than 0.05. The study recommended the development and enforcement of clear anti-violence policies, including robust reporting mechanisms and support services for victims, to create a safer school environment. Integrate educational initiatives that foster gender equality and respect into the curriculum and extracurricular activities, nurturing a culture of mutual respect among students.

Keywords: determinants, gender, violence, public secondary schools

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive and alarming issue that affects individuals globally, cutting across diverse backgrounds, age groups, and geographical locations. GBV encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, and is often driven by unequal power dynamics and harmful gender norms (WHO, 2017; UN Women, 2020). In Nigeria, GBV is a significant concern, particularly within educational institutions.

Statistics highlight the gravity of the issue. According to a study conducted by UNICEF and the Nigerian Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, approximately 24.3% of females and 18.4% of males aged 18-24 reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 18 (UNICEF & Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2014). Among school-aged children, GBV is a distressing reality, with a national survey indicating that 12% of female students aged 11-14 reported experiencing sexual violence at school in 2018 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019).

In the context of public secondary schools, GBV remains a pressing issue. The 2016 Violence against Children Survey revealed that 26.3% of females and 23.4% of males aged 13-17 reported experiencing sexual violence before the age of 18, often perpetrated by their peers (National Population Commission et al., 2015). Similarly, a survey conducted by ActionAid Nigeria found that 42.9% of female students and 26.1% of male students reported experiencing some form of violence in school (ActionAid Nigeria, 2019).

This alarming prevalence of GBV within educational settings underscores the urgency of understanding its determinants and developing effective interventions. Socio-cultural norms, unequal power dynamics, and inadequate institutional responses contribute to the perpetuation of GBV in schools (UNESCO, 2016; Federal Government of Nigeria -United Nations Joint Programme on Girls' Education, 2019). Despite efforts to address the issue through policies and programmes, GBV incidents persist, necessitating a more comprehensive approach.

The specific context of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) in Rivers State presents an opportunity to delve into the factors contributing to GBV within a localized setting. By exploring the experiences of those affected and examining the dynamics of perpetration, this research aims to provide nuanced insights that can inform targeted strategies for preventing and addressing GBV in public secondary schools.

The prevalence of GBV within schools in Nigeria is alarming with significant number of students experiencing various forms of abuse. This study seeks to shed light on the determinants of GBV in public secondary schools within Obio/Akpor LGA, ultimately contributing to the broader efforts to create safer and more inclusive educational environments.

GBV's determinants encompass a range of factors that operate at multiple levels, while the consequences of GBV on academic activities are far-reaching, affecting students' learning, engagement, and overall educational trajectory. Understanding these dynamics is essential for crafting effective interventions that prioritize students' safety and well-being in educational environment (Asuquo, 2023).

Despite concerted efforts to address GBV and promote gender equality, reports of violence and harassment within public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State remain disturbingly common. The complexity of factors contributing to the occurrence of GBV within this specific context necessitates a comprehensive investigation. Understanding these determinants is essential for designing targeted interventions and policies to combat GBV and foster a safe learning environment (Leach et al., 2018; WHO, 2017).

This study generally explored the determinants of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. It specifically sought:

1. to identify the determinants of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State,
2. to establish the rate of recurrence of forms of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State,
3. to ascertain the main perpetrators of the forms of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, and
4. to ascertain the main victims of the forms of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Methodology

The research design used in the study was cross-sectional survey design. The participants for this study were drawn from public secondary schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria and a total of estimated 191,155 students from these schools with ages ranging from 14 - 25 years. This study adopted the “Bourley’s formula” to determine its sample size. This formula was selected on the basis that the population size could be reasonably estimated (Singleton, 2014). The sample size used for this study was 150. The study made use of purposive sampling technique because it intended to capture only the students that experienced GBV, any element outside that was not considered. A letter of introduction was written to the schools selected for this research and the consent of prospective participants was sought after brief explanation of the research. Those who consented were given the questionnaire with assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Participants were informed that they were not under any obligation to participate and that they had the right to withdraw at any point they felt inclined to discontinue with the exercise. It was impressed on the participants that there was no right or wrong answers but that they were encouraged to be honest in their responses. The data used in this study was from a total of one hundred and forty-three (143) participants after editing exercise of their responses as some copies of the questionnaire were discarded because they were not properly filled. The indicators used in the Likert scale were allotted specific values as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (SD) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The outcome of the responses from the participants were interpreted according to the following range of values: Very High = 3.5 – 4.0, High = 3.0 – 3.4, Moderate = 2.5 – 2.9, Low = 2.0 – 2.4, Very Low = 1.0 – 1.9.

Results

TABLE 1: What are the determinants of gender-based violence in public secondary schools?

| ITEMS | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | St.dev. | Outcome |
|---|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| Gender inequality is major cause of gender-based violence. | 104 (18%) | 153 (36%) | 76 (27%) | 28 (20%) | 2.52 | 52.30 | Moderate |
| Peer group pressure perpetuates gender-based violence in schools. | 256 (45%) | 189 (44%) | 28 (10%) | 2 (1%) | 3.32 | 123.34 | High |
| Socio-economic disparity can lead to violence in schools. | 192 (34%) | 195 (45%) | 46 (16%) | 7 (10%) | 3.08 | 97.73 | High |
| Weak implementation and enforcement of policies against GBV. | 224 (39%) | 156 (36%) | 36 (13%) | 17 (12%) | 3.03 | 98.70 | High |
| Alcohol and substance abuse lead to GBV in schools | 248 (43%) | 171 (40%) | 38 (13%) | 5 (3%) | 3.23 | 113.80 | High |
| Lack of awareness and education perpetuate culture of GBV in Sch | 212 (37%) | 174 (41%) | 56 (20%) | 4 (3%) | 3.12 | 97.71 | High |
| Grand Mean Score: | | | | | 3.05 | | High |

Determinants of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area as shown in The table 1 included gender inequality (2.52), peer group pressure (3.32), socio-economic disparity (3.08), weak implementation and enforcement of policies (3.03), alcohol and substance abuse (3.23), lack of awareness and education (3.12). In nutshell, the determinants of gender-based violence in the selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government of Rivers State were high among the students, with a grand mean score of 3.05.

TABLE 2: What are the forms of gender-based violence in public secondary schools?

| ITEMS | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | St.dev. | Outcome |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Child sexual violence | 220 (38%) | 150 (35%) | 44 (15%) | 16 (11%) | 3.01 | 94.63 | High |
| Dating Violence | 192 (34%) | 159 (37%) | 42 (15%) | 21 (15%) | 2.90 | 84.66 | Moderate |
| Virginity testing violence | 144 (25%) | 108 (37%) | 86 (30%) | 28 (20%) | 2.56 | 48.62 | Moderate |
| Rape violence | 220 (38%) | 162 (38%) | 28 (10%) | 20 (14%) | 3.01 | 99.34 | High |
| Emotional violence | 164 (29%) | 213 (50%) | 32 (11%) | 15 (11%) | 2.97 | 97.59 | Moderate |
| Economic violence | 112 (20%) | 162 (38%) | 90 (31%) | 16 (11%) | 2.66 | 60.67 | Moderate |
| Grand Mean: | | | | | 2.85 | | Moderate |

Table 2 showed the forms of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State: child sexual violence (3.01), dating violence (2.90), virginity testing (2.56), rape violence (3.01), emotional violence (2.85), and economic violence (2.66). In nutshell, the forms of gender-based violence in the selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government of Rivers State were moderate (not too high and not too low) among the students, with a grand mean score of 2.85.

TABLE 3: Who are the main perpetrators of the form of gender-based violence?

| ITEMS | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | St.dev. | Outcome |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| Teachers | 100 (17%) | 174 (41%) | 90 (31%) | 15 (10%) | 2.65 | 65.04 | Moderate |
| Strangers | 236 (41%) | 138 (32%) | 54 (19%) | 11 (8%) | 3.07 | 99.33 | High |
| Girls | 164 (29%) | 156 (36%) | 84 (29%) | 8 (6%) | 2.88 | 72.84 | Moderate |
| Boys | 228 (40%) | 189 (44%) | 30 (10%) | 8 (6%) | 3.18 | 110.92 | High |
| Caregivers | 108 (19%) | 132 (31%) | 84 (29%) | 30 (21%) | 2.48 | 43.65 | Low |
| Security | 164 (29%) | 111 (26%) | 86 (30%) | 22 (15%) | 2.68 | 58.95 | Moderate |
| Grand Mean: | | | | | 2.82 | | Moderate |

Table 3 showed the main perpetrators of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State: teachers (2.65), strangers (3.07), girls (2.88), boys (3.18), caregivers (2.48), and security personnel (2.82). The grand mean of 2.82 showed that the elements were perpetrators of gender-based violence in schools.

TABLE 4. Who are the main victims of gender-based violence?

| ITEMS | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | St.dev. | Outcome |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| Girls | 388 (68%) | 87 (20%) | 18 (6%) | 8 (6%) | 3.50 | 178.65 | Very High |
| Boys | 144 (25%) | 186 (43%) | 66 (23%) | 12 (8%) | 2.85 | 77.92 | Moderate |
| Persons with disabilities | 148 (26%) | 198 (46%) | 40 (14%) | 20 (14%) | 2.84 | 85.44 | Moderate |
| Teacher | 92 (16%) | 129 (30%) | 72 (25%) | 41 (29%) | 2.34 | 36.88 | Low |
| Grand Mean: | | | | | 2.88 | | Moderate |

The main victims of gender-based violence in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State as shown in Table 4 included: girls (3.50), boys (2.85), persons with disabilities (2.84), and teachers (2.34). The elements showed a grand mean of 2.88 (moderate).

Discussion

The study revealed a high prevalence of gender-based violence among students in the selected public secondary schools, as evidenced by a grand mean score of 3.05. This indicates

that gender-based violence is a significant issue affecting the school environment. Various forms of violence, including physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological abuse, may be occurring, posing serious threats to the well-being and safety of students. While gender-based violence is prevalent, the study found that the forms of violence are moderate among students, with a grand mean score of 2.85. This suggests that while violence exists, it may not be extreme or pervasive in every aspect. However, it is still concerning enough to warrant attention and intervention. Understanding the specific forms of violence occurring in these schools is crucial for developing targeted prevention and response strategies. The study indicated that both the perpetration and victimization of gender-based violence are moderate among students, with grand mean scores of 2.82 and 2.88, respectively. This suggests that there is a relatively balanced distribution of perpetrators and victims within the school population. Both male and female students may engage in perpetration, while victims may also come from diverse gender backgrounds. This highlights the complex dynamics of gender-based violence and the need for comprehensive approaches to address all facets of the issue. Statistical analysis using one-factor ANOVA revealed that there is no significant difference between boys and girls as perpetrators or victims of gender-based violence in the selected public secondary schools. With p-values of 0.88 for perpetration and 0.82 for victimization, gender was not found to be a determining factor in the likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing violence. This challenges stereotypes about gender roles in violence and underscores the importance of addressing violence as a universal issue affecting all students, regardless of gender. The findings of this study have significant implications for intervention and prevention efforts aimed at addressing gender-based violence in public secondary schools. Given the high prevalence of violence and the balanced distribution of perpetrators and victims, interventions should focus on creating a safe and supportive school environment for all students. This may involve implementing comprehensive anti-violence policies, promoting gender equality and respect, providing support services for victims, and fostering positive peer relationships and conflict resolution skills.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the determinants of gender-based violence in selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. By understanding the nature and prevalence of violence and identifying potential factors contributing to its occurrence, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to create safer and more inclusive learning environments for all students. Addressing gender-based violence requires a multifaceted approach that addresses underlying factors while promoting positive attitudes and behaviors among students and staff.

Conclusion

The research study on the determinants of gender-based violence in selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State provides valuable insights into the prevalence, nature, and underlying factors contributing to violence within this educational context. The findings of the study highlight several key points: The study reveals a high prevalence of gender-based violence among students, indicating that it is a significant issue affecting the school environment. Various forms of violence, including physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological abuse, are observed, posing serious threats to student well-being and safety. While violence is prevalent, the specific forms of violence are moderate among students. This suggests that while violence exists, it may not be extreme or pervasive in every aspect. However, it still warrants attention and intervention to address its impact on students and the school community. The study indicates a relatively balanced distribution of perpetrators and victims within the school population. Both male and female students may engage in perpetration, while victims come from diverse gender backgrounds. This

underscores the complex dynamics of gender-based violence and the need for comprehensive approaches to address all facets of the issue. Statistical analysis shows no significant difference between boys and girls as perpetrators or victims of gender-based violence. This challenges stereotypes about gender roles in violence and emphasizes the importance of addressing violence as a universal issue affecting all students, regardless of gender.

Based on these findings, it is evident that addressing gender-based violence in public secondary schools requires a multifaceted approach. Interventions should focus on creating a safe and supportive school environment, implementing comprehensive anti-violence policies, promoting gender equality and respect, providing support services for victims, and fostering positive peer relationships and conflict resolution skills.

Overall, the research study contributes to our understanding of gender-based violence in educational settings and provides valuable insights for the development of effective interventions and policies to create safer and more inclusive learning environments for all students.

Recommendations

Based on the identified problems from the findings of the study on the determinants of gender-based violence in selected public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, the following recommendations were proposed to address the prevalence and underlying factors contributing to violence within this educational context:

Develop Comprehensive Anti-Violence Policies: Government should collaborate with school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive anti-violence policies that explicitly address gender-based violence. Ensure that policies include clear definitions of gender-based violence, procedures for reporting incidents, disciplinary measures for perpetrators, and support services for victims.

Promote Gender Equality and Respect: School authorities should incorporate gender equality and respect into the school curriculum through gender-sensitive education programmes, workshops, and awareness campaigns. Foster an inclusive and supportive school culture that promotes mutual respect, empathy, and understanding among students, regardless of gender.

Provide Support Services for Victims: School authorities should establish support services within the school, such as counseling centres, peer support groups, and referral systems, to provide emotional and practical support to victims of gender-based violence. Train school staff, including teachers, counselors, and administrators, to recognize signs of violence, respond sensitively to disclosures, and provide appropriate assistance and referrals.

Empower Students through Education and Training: School authorities should implement education and training programmes for students on topics such as gender equality, healthy relationships, consent, conflict resolution, and bystander intervention. Provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills, self-confidence, and assertiveness to resist peer pressure and challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes.

Strengthen Peer Relationships and Social Support Networks: School authorities should foster positive peer relationships and social support networks within the school community through extracurricular activities, peer mentoring programs, and collaborative projects. Encourage students to support and look out for each other, intervene in situations of potential violence, and promote a culture of solidarity and empathy.

Enhance Teacher and Staff Training: Government should provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for teachers and staff on issues related to gender-

based violence, trauma-informed care, cultural competency, and inclusive teaching practices. Equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to create safe and inclusive learning environments, identify and address risk factors for violence, and support students who have experienced trauma.

Engage Families and Community Stakeholders: School authorities should collaborate with families, local community organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders to raise awareness about gender-based violence, promote community involvement in prevention efforts, and provide resources and support to students and families. Organize community forums, workshops, and outreach events to facilitate dialogue, share information, and mobilize collective action to address gender-based violence.

By implementing these recommendations, public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State can work towards creating safer, more inclusive, and supportive learning environments where all students can thrive free from the threat of gender-based violence. It is essential to prioritize collaboration, education, empowerment, and community engagement in efforts to prevent and address gender-based violence effectively.

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