Violence in Secondary Schools in Anambra State Nigeria: School Teachers Perceptions.

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SUMMARY

Objective: Violence is increasingly becoming a public health problem of great concern. This formative study was designed to assess school teachers perceptions of violence in secondary schools in Anambra State Nigeria.

Method: Perceptions of violence in secondary schools were ascertained from all the ninety-six principals and guidance counsellor in public secondary schools in Nnewi educational zone, Anambra state, using self-administered semi structured questionnaires and in depth interview.

Results: Ninety-five percent of teachers indicated that there is wide spread violence in schools. Major types of violence were verbal violence (89.6%), Bullying (75.0%) and gender based violence (12.5%). Seventy-eight percent observed weapons use. Major weapons were foot wears, waist belt, chairs, stones and broken bottles but no fire arms were observed. Risk factors for violent behaviours were home violence, media influence, examinations and sex-related issues. There were no existing violence prevention programmes in schools.

Conclusions: Violence is wide spread in secondary schools in Anambra Nigeria. This underlines the need for violence prevention programmes in Anambra Secondary Schools. *Niger Med J, Vol. 46, No. 2, April – June, 2005: 43 – 47.*

KEY WORDS: *Violence, schools, teachers, perceptions, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

School Teachers Perceptions of Violence in Secondary Schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Violence is becoming increasingly a global public health problem. This is because violence undermines the health, social and economic well being of people of all races[1].

Globally, wars, armed conflicts, political and ethnic violence and other modes of force in violation of basic human rights and the attendant consequences of injuries, deaths, family displacement and refugee problems have become common experience. In Nigeria, reports of violence dominate the headlines of daily newspapers[2].

In most cases, young people in schools are often involved

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and affected as they are exposed to violence as witnesses, victims and even perpetrators in all settings of their everyday life.

This has serious public health and development implications because school children needs to be healthy, and live and study in fear-free atmosphere for them to achieve their potentials.

Because violence affects the well-being and learning potentials of these millions of school youths, and since violence is learned and therefore capable of being unlearned, the schools offer an efficient and effective practical and timely means to prevent and reduce violence. This is by reaching the children in their early stages of developing attitudes, values and communication patterns[3,4].

The World Health Organisation has also listed violence prevention as an important element of a Health Promoting school[4]. Evaluation of school based violence prevention programmes has shown promising results[3,4,5].

School children and teachers perceptions of violence in schools are crucial factors in advocating, designing and implementing violence prevention programmes for schools. Because school heads in particular are important gate keepers, who receive and arbitrate in most school violence cases, their perception is considered very reliable.

In spite of the enormous problem posed by violence in schools, from available literature, not much work seem to have been reported on the perspectives of violence in schools in Nigeria.

This formative research assesses school head teacher's perceptions of violence in secondary schools in Anambra state as a step towards developing violence prevention programmes in schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study was done in Nnewi Education Zone, one of the four education zones in Anambra state, Southeast Nigeria. The zone comprises urban Nnewi North and Ihiala Local governments, and rural Nnewi south and Ekwusigo Local Governments. The zone was chosen because it has urban and rural schools and was therefore considered likely to give a fair representation of violence in both urban and rural schools in the state.

Study Population: Ninety-six participants comprising all the forty eight (48) principals and forty-eight guidance counsellors from all the forty-eight public secondary schools in the zone were chosen because they were considered key gatekeepers in secondary schools. To enable participants have a uniform definition of violence, violence was described as the intentional

use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against one-self, another person, or against a group or community that either resulted in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation[3].

A semi-structured questionnaire adapted from a WHO document on violence prevention in schools[3] was administered to all the Principals and Guidance counsellors in all the forty-eight public secondary schools in the education zone. The questionnaire elicited information on types of violence; episodes of violence, use of weapons, and perceived risk factors for violence.

Twelve in-depth interviews were held with twelve randomly selected principals and counsellors to elucidate further their perceptions of violence in schools. The contents of the interviews were recorded in writing and audiotapes and finally transcribed and analyzed.

RESULT

All the ninety principals and guidance counsellors returned their completed questionnaires giving a response rate of 100%.

Over 93.8% of the teachers felt there was violence in schools, while 91.7% had observed or received reports of violence in their school in the last one term (Table 1).

The median number of episodes of violence observed within a term of 3 months was 6 – 10 seen by 50% of participants. Types and pattern of violence were verbal, physical, gender

Table 2: Characteristics of violence as perceived by school heads.

	No	%
Thinks there is violence in school	90	93.5
Received report or observed violence in the last one term	88	91.8
Numbers of episodes of violence reported or observed in the last one term		
1 – 5	30	31.2
6 – 10	48	50.0
More than 10	10	9.4
Types of violence observed		
Personal/self inflicted	3.0	3.1
Interpersonal violence		
Verbal	86	98.6
Physical (Bullying/Fighting)	72	75.0
Sexual (Gender Based)	12	12.5
Organised violence		
Class or group	12	12.5
Ethnic or clan	2	2.1
Religious	5	5.2
Mob	4	4.2

Table 1: Characteristics of study schools.

Type of School	No	%
All male	10	20.8
All female	15	31.3
Co-educational	23	47.9
Location of school		
Rural	40	83.3
Urban	8	16.7
Residential Status		
Residential	4	8.3
Non Residential	20	41.7
Part Residential	24	50.0

Table 3: Use of weapons (observed or reported in the last one term).

Types of weapon	No 75	% 78.1
Chairs	28	29.2
Knives	10	10.4
Broken bottles	15	15.6
Gun (fire arms)	0	0
Sticks	38	39.6
Waist belt	42	43.8
Lighted Candle	12	12.5
Iron rod	6	6.3
Foot wear	60	62.5
Stones or pebbles	62	64.6

based violence, class and religious violence.

Weapon use was recorded by 78.1% of the participants, stones, foot wears, and waists belt being the most common. Firearms were not witnessed or reported (Table 3).

Major identified risk factors for violent behaviour were Home violence (90%), media influence e.g. home video (85.5%), Examination mal-practice related (85.4%), gang gossip (75%), Gender based issues (66.4%) and community violence (54.2%). Other risk factors were sports (33.3%), drugs (18.8%)

and cult (12.5%) (Table 4).

Over eighty percent of participants felt that violence was affecting the well being and school performance of pupils. Over 72% considered school compound safe, though 54.2% admitted that outsiders could enter school and threaten students or teachers. Students could also access alcohol and narcotics close to school premises. Almost all the teachers (97.9%) felt there is need for violence prevention education for staff and students in the schools.

Table 4: Perceived risk factor for violence.

	No	%
Drugs	18	18.8
Cult	12	12.5
Sports	32	33.3
School parties	38	39.6
Examinations	82	85.4
Media influence	85	88.5
Home violence	86	90.0
Gang gossip	72	75.0
Community violence	52	54.2
Gender/sex related	58	60.4

An analysis of the in-depth interview revealed that most of the teachers perceived that there was widespread violence in secondary schools, and that there had been an upsurge of violence in schools since after the civil war and military rule. This they attributed to the effect of glamorisation of violence by military and paramilitary out fits and vigilante groups.

The commonest type of violence was bullying or "Senioring", where older students obtain domestic services, material and money from their juniors by coercion.

Community violence as witnessed in land and boundary disputes, domestic violence among parents, and child abuse were identified as major contributors.

The Media, especially home video, which forms the commonest means of entertainment for school youths also, glamourise violence.

The teachers mentioned specifically the notorious extra-judiciary vigilante group nicknamed "bakasi" boys who were used by the state government to contain crime, and who ostensibly glamorised violence and exhibited horrifying public killings and bonfire with dismembered human bodies.

The participants also identified disruption in academic calendars by strikes, non-residency facilities for students and poor learning facilities in schools, which affect the state of

Table 5: Perceptions of safety in school.

	N = 96	%
Thinks school compound is safe	72	75
Outsiders can enter school easily and threaten students or teachers	52	54.4
Students can access alcohol very close to school surrounding	85	88.5
Students can access narcotics very close to school surrounding	38	39.6
Teachers can give corporal punishment	96	100.0

examination preparedness among students, and fuel tendencies towards examination malpractices and associated violence. The teachers observed that although there were no school or parents teachers standing committee for handling conflicts or violence, the Principal and staff have powers to handle cases of violence and enforce discipline through corporal punishment, suspension, expulsion and counselling.

The teachers admitted that there are no violence prevention and conflict resolution provisions in the school curriculum.

DISCUSSION

The study demonstrated the presence of violence is secondary schools in Anambra state. This is comparable with observations elsewhere that violence is widespread in secondary schools[3,4,5,6,7].

The use of weapons by school children as observed in this study had been widely reported in other parts of the world[7]. The use of sharp objects and other listed instruments may be because they were easily accessible. The non-use of firearms contrasts with studies in some developed countries where 11% of 30 day handgun carrying prevalence had been reported[7]. The non-use of firearms may be because of unaffordability and inaccessibility at secondary school level. Use of handguns had however been observed in tertiary institutions and in urban centres in the country. The use of lighted candles to cause burns on victims while they are sleeping poses the additional danger of arson and school fire out-break.

The risk factors identified in this study had been corrobated by the Nigerian Common Country Assessment 2001[8] and by other studies[9,10,11]. Causal link between exposure of children to violent images on television and subsequent violent behaviour has been established[9].

Nigerian media and home video are flooded with violent acts and these unfortunately form the most important source of entertainment in most homes. This suggests the need to censor films in Nigeria, and provide alternative safer means of entertainment and relaxation for young people[12].

The poor quality of education and learning achievement as a result of poor physical environment shortage of teaching infrastructures and incessant strikes and poor motivation of teaching staff leave students ill-prepared for examinations and make them resort to examination malpractice and violence in order to pass. This point has been observed in a survey of schools in Nigeria[8]. Government should strive to create favourable conditions for learning, and improve government labour relations to minimize strikes and improve school performance, and build confidence. When students are confident and well prepared for examinations, they are likely to resist examination related violence.

The association of drugs with violence is widely reported as found in this study. The Nigeria Common Country Assessment put life time cannabis abuse in Nigeria Secondary Schools at 7.4%[8]. Teachers admitted that alcohol and other drugs can be accessed very close to the school vicinity.

Students should therefore be encouraged to form and join drug free clubs, and be advocates of a drug free school environment. School authority should also work with the Parents

Teachers Association and the community to safeguard the school environs from alcohol and drugs sale.

Gender-based violence and sex-related violence as observed is not surprising since secondary schools contain the largest segment of adolescents. This observation emphasizes the need for gender-based violence prevention and adolescent health programmes at the secondary school level. Gender based violence in form of coerced sex may result in unintended teenage pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases, which in turn affect both the health and educational attainment of affected pupils[13].

Bullying and coercing the services of students in junior classes by their seniors should be discouraged through school policies that outlaw "fagging" or "toadying" (as they are called) as they transgress the fundamental rights of victims and also perpetuate the violence cycle, as each class wants to replicate the same action when they become seniors. The positive feelings of teachers of the need for violence prevention programmes in schools reflects a genuine concern and this should be exploited by imparting teachers with the requisite skills. In spite of these expressed need, there were no violence prevention programmes in schools. The school curriculum had no provision for teaching skills to prevent violence and resolve conflicts. The school approach to violence was corporal punishment and expulsion of perpetrators. These are no more current means of addressing violence in schools, as they are also considered to be violent and likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence-revenge-violence. In addition, they create another social problem of school drop-outs.

This underlines the need to evolve violence prevention skills in schools, which should build and develop a culture of peace based on non-violence, dialogue, mutual respect, empathy and social justice.

This is in line with the Paris Declaration and Integration framework of Action-on Education for Peace, Human rights and Democracy passed by the World Ministers of Education in 1995, and the Universal Declaration of Human rights[3]. These documents expressed the resolve to pay special attention to improving curricula, the content of textbooks, and other educational materials with a view to educating caring and responsible citizens committed to peace and human rights, and able to prevent conflicts or resolve them by non-violent means.

In conclusion, the study demonstrated the presence of violence in secondary schools as perceived by school teachers.

It is recommended that violence prevention be included in the school curriculum both for training of staff and students, and that all stakeholders, government, parents, teachers and religious groups, advocate and work for the elimination of violence in secondary schools and in the society.

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