



Unraveling the Narrative of Gender-Based Violence in Nigerian Schools through a Thorough Literature Review

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Abstract

In the context of Gender and Development in the 21st Century and in alignment with SDG 16 and SDG 4, this article explores gender-based violence, (GBV) which is rooted in power dynamics driven by gender disparities. It explores the widespread but underreported issue of school related gender based violence (SRGBV). This specific emphasis on educational settings, which predominantly targets girls. This article adopts a qualitative approach and draws on reliable sources to show the complex nature of GBV. This includes violence that leaves victims with permanent scars, such as verbal, physical, and psychological abuse. According to figures from around the world, 30% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence. This statistic highlights the pervasiveness of GBV worldwide, which is a serious issue in the 21st Century. While the prevalence of SRGBV in Nigeria lacks comprehensive documentation. Findings from selected states within the country reveal a startling average of 47.1 percent of students reporting such experiences, underscoring its significance, particularly for female students who bear the brunt of this violence. Underlying the urgency of this exploration is the imperative to comprehend the profound repercussions of GBV on the educational, psychological well-being, and prospects of young girls.



This article unravels the intricacies of GBV and also explores the societal attitudes and power structures that enable its persistence, reflecting the themes of Gender and Development in the 21st Century. Integral to the analysis is an exploration of the societal attitudes and power structures that facilitate the perpetuation of such violence, thereby reinforcing cycles of bias and exclusion. By examining case studies across various cultural contexts, it highlights how the gender issue intersects with factors like race, socioeconomic status, patriarchy, and geographic location, aligning with the inclusivity objectives of SDG 4. The article emphasizes the urgent need to eradicate SRGBV from educational institutions in Nigeria. Finally, the paper embraces the cooperation of policy makers, gender experts, security personnel, and educational stakeholders to establish a secure, welcoming learning environment. Additionally, the adoption of gender-responsive physical fitness skill in Nigerian schools will lessen the vulnerability of female students.

Keywords: Gender and Development, Gender Based Violence, School-Related-Gender-Based Violence, Inclusivity, Educational Institutions, SDG 4

Introduction

Due to difficult issues, varying definitions, and disclosure concerns, it is difficult to assess the global incidence of sexual violence in schools (UNESCO, 2023; UNGEI, 2019; Rammbuda 2023). According to statistics from the World Health Organization, over 30% of women globally have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence. This is mostly due to intimate partner violence, which affects about 27% of women aged 15-49 who have previously been in intimacy and involves a variety of maltreatment.

The United Nations defines violence against women which includes female students as any gender-based act causing physical, sexual, or mental harm, representing a public health issue and a human rights violation (UN, 1993; WHO, 2021). Similarly, all forms of school-related violence infringe upon students' rights to education and well-being, hindering the goal of equitable, inclusive education (UNESCO, 2019).

Global surveys show that one in three female students experiences physical, bullying, or psychological violence in and around schools (UNESCO, 2019). Also, gender-based violence (GBV) affects female students by hindering their rights and development (Lubanze et al., 2022). Academic performance is hampered by GBV, which greatly have impact on females and occurs in schools. To tackle issues such as violence, discrimination, gender stereotypes, and abuse of

students, the government and donors have a financial obligation to make firm financial promises. (WHO, 2021, 2014; Ishaq & Bakwai, 2016; Alemu et al., 2022; Leon & Aizpirua, 2023; Singh & Chataut, 2022; UNGEI, 2009). GBV in schools often negatively affects females, which hinders academic performance and contributes to gender disparity in education (Ishaq & Bakwai, 2016; Alemu et al., 2022). School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), characterized by violence based on gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity and driven by stereotypes, affects students worldwide and has adverse effects on academic achievement, causing absenteeism, dropout rates, and increased illiteracy (Alemu et al., 2022). This issue impedes progress towards gender equality in education by perpetuating harmful gender norms and norms governing violence (Alemu et al., 2022).

Gender-based violence against girls is a grave and pervasive issue, drawing significant attention from various organizations and campaigns aimed at raising public awareness about its destructive impact on society. Despite global efforts to combat such abuses and advancements in understanding how to address them, levels of violence against women and girls remain unacceptably high, with severe physical and mental health consequences for victims, particularly in conflict and humanitarian crisis situations (WHO, 2014). Nigeria, too, grapples with this problem, as reported by IGC (2020), revealing that 30% of women and girls aged 15-49 in the country have experienced sexual abuse. Inadequate coordination among stakeholders, poor implementation of legal frameworks, and deeply ingrained gender discriminatory norms have hindered efforts to address GBV in Nigeria. This led to the nationwide protests and a state of emergency declaration in June 2020 (WHO, 2020). Using information from reliable sources and the use of a qualitative approach, this study clarifies the intricate nature of these detrimental activities.

Statement of the Problem

This paper addresses the critical problem of school-related violence, encompassing physical, psychological, and sexual violence, which significantly infringes upon the rights of girls to education and overall well-being. Global data indicates that one in three students experiences physical violence, bullying, or psychological violence, with sexual violence being more challenging to capture due to sensitivity and inconsistent definitions (UNESCO, 2019; UNESCO, 2023; UNGEI, 2019; Rammuda 2023). While the prevalence of SRGBV in Nigeria is not extensively documented, findings from selected states reveal an average of 47.1 percent of students reporting such experiences, emphasizing its significance, with gender disparities

indicating that both male and female pupils are affected (Ekine, 2020). This pressing issue underscores the need for comprehensive interventions to establish violence-free learning environments, ensuring that children and adolescents can fully exercise their rights to education and well-being.

Research questions

The following questions form the basis of the study:

1. How does GBV affect girls' education and their experiences in schools generally in Nigeria?
2. What are the contributing variables to the high incidence and persistence of GBV in Nigerian schools?
3. What practical methods or strategies are there for dealing with GBV in schools, with an emphasis on enhancing the lot of girls in Nigeria?

Research objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. Understand how GBV affects girls' (under 18 years old) learning and school experiences, in Nigeria.
2. Explore the reasons behind GBV in Nigerian schools?
3. Propose ideas to stop GBV in schools, especially for the girls in Nigeria.

Focus of the study

This study delves into the educational institutions in Nigeria, encompassing Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary institutions across the entire nation, consisting of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Nigeria's diverse educational landscape provides a comprehensive backdrop for this research.

Conceptual Discourse

Gender

As a construct that is learned through socialization procedures and has significant societal influence, "gender" refers to the socially constructed qualities, roles, and opportunities that come with being male or female.



Gender inequality

Gender Inequality is a major concern within gender construct because it frequently results in the depreciation and prejudice against women and girls while creating an entitlement mentality among men and boys, strengthening traditional gender norms and dynamics of power.

Gender Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence inflicted or suffered by girls on the basis of gender differences. It is an experience of violence that prevents young girls from developing and fully exercising their rights (Lubanze et al, 2022)

Gender Sensitive Learning Environment

A gender-sensitive learning environment is a critical element of an inclusive and equitable educational system, designed to accommodate the diverse needs of all students, regardless of their gender identity or expression. By integrating gender sensitivity into educational settings, it reinforces the mandate of SDG 4 to leave no one behind, actively addressing the unique challenges faced by students with diverse gender identities. This approach not only advances educational goals but also aligns with the broader objectives of gender equality and empowerment, as outlined in SDG 5. Additionally, addressing SRGBV, which disrupts the education of many young individuals and is associated with lower academic achievement, is crucial. Education is key to the global integrated framework of sustainable development goals. Education is at the heart of our efforts both to adapt to change and to transform the world within which we live (UNESCO, 2015). UNESCO (2016) emphasizes that SRGBV serves as a significant barrier to achieving global education and specific SDGs, such as ending all forms of violence against children (SDG 16) and providing safe, inclusive, and gender-sensitive learning environments (SDG 4).

Gender Responsive Physical Fitness Skill

These are strategies that students can use to lessen gender-based violence in schools. They involve certain physical actions or activities.



Equity and Sustainable Development

Promoting equity within the context of sustainable development is intricately linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Achieving equitable access to quality education for all, irrespective of gender or background, is a fundamental aspect of SDG 4. It not only empowers individuals with knowledge and skills but also fosters social inclusion, reduces inequalities, and promotes sustainable development. Furthermore, SDG 5 underscores the importance of gender equality, emphasizing that gender disparities must be eliminated across all spheres, including education. By ensuring equitable educational opportunities for girls and boys and addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), we can advance not only SDG 4 but also the broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development, creating a more just and inclusive world for future generations. This interconnectedness between equity, quality education, and gender equality underscores the holistic nature of sustainable development and the pivotal role of education in achieving these objectives.

Theoretical Discourse

Social Learning Theory

According to Albert Bandura's 1977 Social Learning Theory (SLT), people pick up knowledge from one another through imitation, modeling, and observation (Bandura, 1977). Fundamentally, SLT proposes that individuals learn new behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs through seeing the deeds and results of others in their surroundings (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). This process of observational learning involves encoding the observed information, which subsequently serves as a guide to their own actions and decision-making. SLT is often regarded as a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories, as it encompasses factors such as attention, memory, and motivation (Bandura, 1986).

One fundamental concept within SLT is reciprocal determinism, which asserts that a person's behaviour and their environment continually influence each other in an ongoing, dynamic interplay (Bandura, 1986). This perspective diverges from strict behaviourism, which primarily suggests that an individual's environment exclusively determines their behaviour. According to Bandura's theory, an individual's surroundings, behavior, and psychological processes—



including their capacity for language and cognitive imagery—interact to form their personality (Bandura, 1973). Social learning theory, which emphasizes the critical role that social relationships and observational learning play in forming behavior and cognition, has generally made an important contribution to our knowledge of how people learn and develop (Bandura, 1977).

Literature Review

Unraveling SRGBV: Insights into a Persistent Issue

School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) is defined as acts of sexual, physical, or psychological violence in and around schools, perpetuated by gender norms, stereotypes and enforced through unequal power dynamics. (UNESCO & UNGEI, 2015). While global concern about SRGBV is growing, limitations persist in addressing this issue, with incidents reported in every region but data remaining limited (UNESCO & UNWOMEN, 2016). In Nigeria, SRGBV is prevalent, affecting children, families, and communities (Onoyase, 2019). SRGBV has significant adverse effects, particularly on academic performance, attendance, and premature school leaving, contributing to higher illiteracy rates (Alemu et al., 2022). It infringes upon children's human rights and perpetuates gender discrimination, jeopardizing their well-being and cognitive growth (UNESCO & UNWOMEN, 2016). Girls are more vulnerable to psychological bullying, cyberbullying, sexual violence, harassment, and other forms of violence in learning environments (UNESCO & UNGEI, 2015). SRGBV can extend beyond school premises, facilitated by modern technologies, leading to cyber-bullying and online abuse (UNESCO & UNWOMEN, 2016).

Forms of School-Related-Gender-Based Violence

Research corroborates that School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is intricate and multi-dimensional. Its underlying origins are not confined to any specific culture, tradition, or institution. It stems from broader structural problems, societal norms, entrenched beliefs, behaviours that influence gender dynamics and power structures (UNESCO & UNWOMEN, 2016; UNGEI, 2019; UNICEF, 2023). School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) holds significance as a widespread form of violence within educational settings. Gender plays a pivotal role in propelling various types of violence, and adopting a gender perspective can be valuable in crafting effective prevention and response strategies (UNESCO & UNWOMEN, 2016; UNGEI, 2019).

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1. Physical violence is defined as a deliberate use of force that has the potential to result in harm, injury, death, or incapacity. Since tangible evidence usually correlates with physical violence, physical violence is the most easily recognized type of violence (Lubanze et al., 2022).
 2. Sexual violence encompasses acts of unlawful sexual behavior involving the use of physical force as well as behaviors involving people who are incapable of comprehending or refusing to participate (UNICEF, 2023). This term also covers attempted or actualized sexual actions involving an individual who is unable to refuse participation, understand the nature of the act, or express their unwillingness. Because sexual abuse is so complex, it can be difficult to identify.
 3. Psychological abuse entails harassment or exploitation with the intent to degrade or demoralize someone on the basis of his/her sex. Girls experience psychological violence and abuse from both peers and teachers through verbal harassment, bullying, teasing, or degrading and cruel punishment. Irrespective of the legal age of consent, any sexual involvement between a teacher and a student is classified as abuse due to the inherent age and power imbalances. Beyond physical acts, sexual violence can also take the form of verbal abuse, involving language that is sexually explicit or persistent, unwanted sexual attention, including mocking or taunting about one's looks or choice of clothes (USAID, 2023).

Probable Causes of School-Related-Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is a complex issue shaped by a multitude of social, cultural, psychological, and structural factors, emphasizing the need for comprehensive understanding to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies (UNESCO & UNWOMEN, 2016; UNGEI, 2019; Onoyase, 2019).

1. At the school level, corporal punishment by both male and female teachers is a concerning issue, reflecting an abuse of authority (Onoyase, 2019).
2. Contextual factors, such as social and economic disparities, conflict, and political instability, contribute to the prevalence of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) (USAID, 2023). Socio-economic disadvantage is associated with a higher likelihood of bullying, except in the Caribbean and Central America regions and East Asia, where differences in socio-economic status have varying impacts (UNESCO, 2019).

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3. Other contributing factors include age, religion, physical appearance, attitudinal behaviours, and sex differences, with girls more susceptible to psychological and sexual violence than boys. As children age, their vulnerability to different forms of violence evolves, with older students facing a greater risk of cyber bullying (UNESCO & UNGEI, 2019).

Consequences of School-Related-Gender-Based Violence

The following is a list of consequences of school-related gender-based violence:

1. Extensive implications for physical, mental, sexual, and emotional health during childhood (Ekine, 2020).
2. Hindrance of access to education, particularly for girls, due to sexual harassment (Ekine, 2020).
3. Significant social and economic burdens, including isolation, loss of income, and restricted participation in daily activities, imposed on women, their families, and communities (Agaba, 2022).
4. Increased feelings of social exclusion among students who experience frequent bullying, leading to a desire to leave school, absenteeism, and poor academic performance (UNESCO, 2019).
5. Higher likelihood for female students to experience physical consequences from teacher-perpetrated violence, resulting in various injuries (USAID et al., 2014).
6. Severe consequences of gender-based violence, including fatal incidents, unintended pregnancies, induced abortions, gynecological complications, and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (Dibekulu & Alem, 2019; Tanton et al., 2023; Wondimu, 2022; Onaolapo & Sekitla, 2022; Kalimaposo et al., 2022).

The normalization of certain forms of violence or bullying, even when harmful, poses challenges in measuring school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV). For instance, acts like mocking or excluding menstruating girls, though normalized in some contexts, constitute bullying and discrimination, with negative repercussions (UNESCO, 2023). Gender-based violence (GBV) not only profoundly affects survivors and their families but also carries considerable social and economic burdens (Ekine, 2020). Sexual violence's true prevalence is harder to ascertain due to sensitivity, inconsistent definitions, and potential disclosure risks (UNESCO, 2019; UNESCO, 2023; UNGEI, 2019).



Policy Frameworks and School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)

The issue of GBV against girls remains a grave and pervasive global concern, drawing significant attention from various organizations and campaigns aimed at raising awareness about its devastating societal impact, particularly in conflict and humanitarian crisis situations (WHO, 2014). SDG 16, one of the Sustainable Development Goals, emerges as a crucial player in addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV). This goal focuses on promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and it plays a pivotal role in the fight against SRGBV. By aiming to reduce all forms of violence and ensuring equal access to justice, SDG 16 provides a comprehensive framework for combatting SRGBV and fostering safer and more equitable learning environments for students of all genders. Its commitment to justice and inclusivity aligns seamlessly with the goals of eliminating gender-based violence within educational institutions.

Moreover, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), although not explicitly referencing School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV), offers a robust framework for addressing GBV and discrimination against women and girls. This framework encompasses a wide range of efforts to prevent and respond to violence occurring in educational settings, underlining the interconnectedness of gender-based violence with broader issues of gender discrimination and inequality. While SRGBV may not be explicitly stated in CEDAW, its principles and guidelines are instrumental in guiding policies and actions to create safer and more inclusive learning environments that are essential for all students, regardless of gender, to thrive.

Methodology

For this study, a comprehensive methodology was employed to achieve its objectives. It commenced with an extensive review of the existing literature, encompassing a systematic search across reputable databases including Google, Google Scholar, Research Gate, and specialized academic journals in the fields of Education and gender studies. The search query incorporated specific terms and keywords such as "School related gender based violence against girls," "gender based violence in schools in Nigeria," "Gender Violence in Nigerian Educational Institutions," "SRGBV policies," and "Social Learning Theory and SRGBV." The selected timeframe for inclusion in the review spanned from 1999 to 2023, ensuring that the analysis would encompass the most current and relevant sources.



The study researched the experiences of female students in schools at different levels, with a specific geographic focus on Nigeria. The relationship between social learning and the GBV barrier faced by female students in Nigerian schools was the topic of a thorough analysis of the literature review.

Discussion of findings

The comprehensive exploration of findings within this study casts a spotlight on a myriad of dimensions concerning gender violence entrenched within the educational landscape of Nigeria. It unveils a spectrum of gender-based violence forms, encompassing physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological abuse, with a distinct focus on the experiences of girls. These forms of violence, when dissected, reveal a distressing web of implications that extend far beyond the school gates, permeating into the realms of health and human rights. Consequently, they cast ominous shadows over academic achievement, effectively perpetuating and deepening the existing fissures of inequality within the educational sphere.

Moreover, the study serves as a compass, charting the intricate constellation of factors that converge to precipitate the phenomenon of School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV). These contributing elements traverse the domains of culture, society, and structure, while the echoes of corporal punishment reverberate alongside deeply ingrained gender dominance norms. Socio-economic disparities further fuel the flames, intermingling with regional conflicts and age-related dynamics, thus fanning the flames of SRGBV's persistence within the educational tapestry of Nigeria.

Perhaps the most poignant revelation lies in the stark absence of robust reporting mechanisms to address incidents of SRGBV within the school ecosystem. This critical void underscores the necessity for a systemic overhaul and the establishment of structured procedures to tackle such instances effectively. The study doesn't stop there; it underscores the profound impact of the home environment and peer interactions as determinants influencing vulnerability to SRGBV. By highlighting this interconnectedness between the school and home environments, it calls for holistic and integrated approaches to safeguarding the safety and well-being of Nigeria's children and adolescents.

In sum, this study serves as a clarion call resonating across the educational landscape of Nigeria. It urgently beckons the attention of policymakers, educators, and stakeholders alike. Its findings resound



with a singular message - the imperative to confront and combat SRGBV. This urgency reverberates through the halls of academia, emphasizing the pressing need for comprehensive interventions that will not only dispel the shadows of violence but also nurture the growth of safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environments for the children and adolescents who form the heart and future of Nigeria's educational system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a qualitative research methodology was used in this study to carefully investigate how GBV affects females in Nigerian educational institutions. This technique included a thorough examination of the body of current literature and a methodical search of reliable databases. In order to combat SRGBV and establish safer, more inclusive learning settings, the findings emphasize the urgent need for specific gender responsive interventions. The research examined how gender-based violence affects girls' educational experiences, with a focus on the psychological and emotional effects of normalizing violence, including the marginalization and ridicule of girls who are cycles of menstruation.

Moreover, it was shown that the effects encompass a range of facets related to mental, physical, sexual, and emotional well-being, with a specific focus on restricting girls' educational opportunities and placing financial and social demands on them.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion above, this paper recommends the following:

1. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, gender experts and educational stakeholders are crucial to create safe, inclusive learning environments.
2. Embracing gender responsive physical fitness skills in schools will help reduce female vulnerability. This serves as a personal mechanism for defence against physical GBV.
3. Strategies should focus on promoting gender equality, enhancing teacher and physical fitness training. Also, there's need for establishing clear reporting mechanisms, using help lines and involving families in combating (SRGBV).
4. Efforts to combat gender violence should address both immediate manifestations and the broader cultural and contextual factors enabling its persistence.

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5. The study underscores the importance of introducing reporting mechanisms within schools using school help lines to encourage victims to come forward.
6. Understanding the influence of the home environment on girls' vulnerability to SRGBV highlights the need for comprehensive interventions involving families and peers.
7. Given that a significant proportion of SRGBV cases are perpetrated by fellow students, promoting positive peer interactions and transforming the school environment into a safe and inclusive space is crucial.

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