

Percieved Strategies for Minimizing School Related Gender Based Violence in a Post Covid-19 Era among Adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The study is directed to determine the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence in a post covid-19 era among adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The researchers formulated one research question to guide the study. The instrument used to elicit information from the respondents is, "School – Related Gender Based Violence among adolescents and strategies Questionnaire" (SRGBVAASQ). The instrument was made up of 15 items on the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.87, language appropriateness, content and facial validity. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 102 respondents that participated in the research. The researchers and two research assistants retrieved 100 copies of the questionnaire from the respondents. The data from the field work were collected by the researchers, the mean of means were used to answer the research questions. The researchers used 2.50 as benchmark to determine if respondents agreed or disagreed with the 15 items in the questionnaire. The findings of the study indicated that addressing school related gender based violence (SRGBV) requires school authorities working in partnership with communities (including parents) and stakeholders at all levels including the legal sector. In addition, support the school counsellors and teachers to respond to violence using positive strategies.

KEYWORDS: Strategies, School, Gender, Violence, Post Covid-19, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent stage is usually seen as a time of transition in young people's life associated with emotional disorders and high risk behaviours. Generally adolescents are the future generation leaders of tomorrow of any nation and to be able to achieve these duties there is need to protect the rights of the adolescents. Adolescents (students) themselves attest to the impact of violence on their ability to get to and from school, to learn effectively while in school, and to remain in school long enough to reap the benefits of education. While school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) affects all adolescents, female adolescents are particularly vulnerable. School violence can also have an impact across generations, resulting in higher fertility rates, lower health status and a weakened household economy.

The victims and perpetrators of this violence are not only the students; but those who have a responsibility of care, including teachers and other school staff. Reports from Action Aid (2004), pointed out that many studies have indicated that SRGBV is perpetuated on female students by their male peers, teachers or community members. Saravanam, (2000), opined that SRGBV is referred to as violence inflicted on females in and around, or on their way to or from school due to roles attributed to or expected of them, on the basis of their sex or gendered identity. Saravanam, stressed that SRGBV include individual action as well as society's harmful practices that negatively impact females' right to education. Continuing, he stated that, if the perpetrators of this action are allowed to stay, it could lead to an unsafe and unwelcome learning environment, capable of adversely affecting girls' educational attainment.

Furthermore, other negative effects of SRGBV on students could manifest in form of low self – concept, withdrawal, aggression, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, contacting of infectious diseases (such as gonorrhoea and syphilis) and generally, phobia for school, (UNESCO, 2012). Thus, the United Nations referred to gender based violence as an act that is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, arbitrary deprivation of liberty either in the public or private life. That is to say that, gender based violence refers to any act that is done against a person's will on the basis of their gender or sex. In line with the assertions, UNESCO/UNGEI. (2015), posited that gender based violence has to do with threats of violence, coercion and deprivations of liberty, whether publically or privately. The UNESCO went further to make declaration on the elimination of violence against women, where they referred to violence against women as any act of gender based violence

Percieved Strategies for Minimizing School Related Gender Based Violence in a Post Covid-19 Era among Adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

that result in or likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm on the female gender. That is to say that it inflicts physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering on the person. According to Kameri-Mbote (2001) physical violation of a female's body through acts like kicking, pushing, burning, punching, pulling hair, rape, verbal abuse harassment among others all constitute violence against women. Tantu, Woka, Gunta, Mohammed and Duko (2020) concurred that SRGBV can take various forms such as physical, sexual, psychological, economic abuse, online violence and rape. The World Health Organization (2005) posited that one in every three female have been beaten, abused in some way or the other and identifies risk factors of GBV among adolescents in developing countries to include history of witnessing parents violence, drug abuse, child rural residence, religious affiliation, smoking and many more. Hence, the problem of SRGBV cuts across all the nook and crannies of the world and could be seen as a broad term used to capture aggressive acts committed towards the females, which cut across emotional, physical and sexual.

In the same angle, Oyediran and Isiguzo-Abanilie (2005) enumerated acts which constitute violence against females to include verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, early and forced marriages among others. This is seen as human rights violation and can cause life threatening and long term injury and trauma to victims or survivors. Hence, for millions of children and young people across the world, the school environment is not as safe and supportive as it should be. Instead, school days are marred by gender-based violence. Ugwu (2001) posited that an estimated 246 million children experience violence in and around school every year and its impact causes compromised attendance, lower academic results and higher drop-out rates. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention identified more than 800,000 reported cases of school violence in 2010. These statistics cover everything from bullying to threats to physical fights and show that school safety is a serious issue. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) violates children's fundamental human rights and is a form of gender discrimination. It also negatively affects school performance and can lead to school drop-out, especially when the school environment is not perceived as safe for learners. When the United Nations (2006) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development it was committed to strive for a world guided by human rights, a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and a world that is free from fear and from violence. Working towards sustained economic growth, social development and environmental protection for all, the agenda seeks to invest in children and young people and provide them with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights. Agenda 2030 places gender equality and inclusive and equitable quality education at the hearts of its concerns. It addresses violence against girls and boys as a cross-cutting concern, and includes concrete commitments under a number of Goals and Targets. In particular, under Goal 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education, the Agenda highlights the importance of knowledge and skills on human rights and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, the provision of child, disability and gender sensitive education facilities and safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come.

Another factor impeding gender equality in education, which does not receive appropriate attention, is the lack of safety of learners in institutions of learning, leading to sexual and other forms of abuse of children; particularly females. The gender mainstreaming within the education sector has been criticized for imposing a particular vision of gender equality, which may not be recognized or supported by those within the organizations, and for paying insufficient attention to the deeply entrenched historical inequalities that affects public institutions, as much as families and communities (Unterhalter and North, 2017) Taking action to address SRGBV is increasingly on global and national agendas, yet there is little evidence that this has reduced violence (Leach, Salvi and Dunne 2014). A recent analysis of data from Violence Against one another Surveys across four countries (Cambodia, Kenya, Tanzania, Swaziland) found that 78 % of girls and 79 % of boys had experienced some form of violence before the age of 18 years, with 20 % of girls and 11 % of boys having experienced sexual violence, including unwanted sexual touching, pressured and physical forced sex (Ravi and Ahluwalia, 2017). Globally, in the course of the 21st century there has been a rapid growth in concern about the common place of gender violence in and around schools. Evidence trickled in from the 1990s, focusing at that time mainly on sexual abuse of girls, since then definitions of gender violence in schools have expanded to include corporal punishment and bullying or peer violence, as well as sexual violence and harassment, in recognition of the implicit as well as explicit ways in which gender influences multiple everyday practices of violence in girls' and boys' life (Leach 2006). Recent writing has emphasized the multi-dimensionality of violence, with acts of physical, sexual and emotional force embedded within everyday interactions, and rooted in the structural violence of inequitable socioeconomic and political structures and institutions (Parkes et al., 2014).

The term school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is now widely used and underlined by recent disturbing reports of sexual abuse and corruption within development agencies (Mitchell, 2006). Although there is a growing body of research documenting SRGBV and evaluating NGO programmes, there are few studies on strategies for reducing school related gender based violence. The context of school closures in the post covid 19 era presents new challenges for preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Whilst our understanding of the impacts of this pandemic on violence is still evolving extended quarantines and other social distancing measures linked to COVID-19 have led to increasing reports of intimate partner violence, violence against children and other forms of domestic violence with up to 85 million more girls and boys worldwide potentially exposed to physical, sexual

Percieved Strategies for Minimizing School Related Gender Based Violence in a Post Covid-19 Era among Adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

and/or emotional violence over the period as a result of COVID-19 quarantine. The situation is aggravated by children's isolation from school friends, teachers, social workers, children's or youth clubs, and the safe space and services that schools provide. Where learning has shifted online, children and especially girls may have been exposed to increased risks of online violence, including cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and abuse. Girls have experienced particular challenges to learning during school closures. Often, girls disproportionately lack access to technology and the internet and face heightened expectations of duties at home in comparison to boys, particularly girls and those with disabilities, may not have the materials or support needed to access remote learning. Their progress may, therefore, be more limited than their male peers leading to inequalities in the classroom and potential for discrimination.

However, School – Related Gender – Based Violence (SRGBV) appears to be very prevalent in Nigeria and may have affected many children, their families, as well as the communities to which they reside or belong. Oyediran and Isiguzo-Abanilie (2005) in their study posited that the prevalence of SRGBV is high among adolescents during the covid-19 pandemic which has impact on their academic performance and social lives and recommends that stakeholders should initiate programs to ameliorate SRGBV. Furthermore, the National Human rights commission (NHRC) pointed out that 80% of complaints on human right abuse in Anambra state are gender based violence. Ngonga (2016) posited that poverty, illiteracy, alcohol intake, ignorance of existing laws, basic fundamental human rights under reportage, cultural issues and judicial processes as some of the factors giving rise to SRGBV. Often times victims of SRGBV decline in the academic performance and may even drop out of school. Numerous studies however, have indicated that violence against women occur in all geographical regions, countries, culture and economic classes, (Carlson, et al 2000, Saravanan 2000, kameri-Mbote, 2001).

However, the impact of school violence is even less understood than the causes because research on this topic tends to focus on perpetrators but is obvious that, prevention is key. No matter the extent, one thing everyone can agree on is that violence in schools needs to stop. Rather than focusing on what is behind violence in schools everyone needs to become focused on preventing school related violence, especially in the post covid -19 era. The goal is gender sensitivity and providing safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments. Available researches indicate that a number of studies have been done on violence against women but most of these studies focused on such issues as causes of violence, health implications of violence against women, perception of violence against women by women (Antai 2011, Fulu 2016, Adebayo 2003, Antai and Antai 2008). It is observed, that none of these studies have actually tried to find out the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence among adolescents, in a post covid-19 era. However, regardless of the form that SRGBV takes, it is a human rights abuse, a barrier to civic, social, and economic, public health and many more and there is need to intervene. Hence, it is worthwhile to study the strategies for minimizing SRGBV considering its effects on the victim and the society at large.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study, therefore is to determine the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence among adolescents in the post covid -19 era. Specifically, the study determined; the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence (SRGBV) in the post covid - 19 era among adolescents in Awka education zone, Anambra State Nigeria.

Research Questions

What are the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence among adolescents in the post covid 19 era?

METHOD

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Awka Education Zone. Awka Education Zone covers five Local Government Areas, namely, Awka North, Awka South, Anaocha, Dunukofia and Njikoka. The zone currently hosts sixty-one (61) public schools 102 professional guidance counsellors. (*Source: Post-Primary School Service Commission – PPSSC 2021*) The study covered all the public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State. The sample for the study consists the entire guidance counsellors within the 61 public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone both the head-counsellors and teacher-counsellors within the schools. The researchers sampled all the Guidance Counsellors in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State owing to the fact that the population of study is small (102). The instrument utilized for this study is, “School Related Gender Based Violence and Strategies in a Post Covid 19 era Questionnaire, (SRGBVCSPCQ)” with four (4) response options. The structured questionnaire was subjected to both face and content validity. The data collected were analysed using mean. The weighted mean of 2.50 stands as a decision mean. Thus any item above 2.50 was taken as agreement while those below 2.50 were taken as disagreement.

RESULTS

The data based on the research are presented in the following table:

Research Question

Percieved Strategies for Minimizing School Related Gender Based Violence in a Post Covid-19 Era among Adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

What are the strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence among adolescents in the post covid 19 era?

Table: The mean presentation of the Strategies for minimizing school related gender based violence in the post covid 19 era, among adolescents in Awka Education Zone,.

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	REMARKS
1	Teachers and Counsellors should be assigned with the task of being on the lookout for troubled students.	3.00	Agreed
2	Teachers and counsellors should take great measures to connect on a personal level with students.	2.40	Disagreed
3	Developing School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) policies will assist minimize violence in the post covid 19 era	2.97	Agreed
4	Establishment of clubs for young people will assist minimize SRGBV in the covid 19 era.	2.30	Disagreed
5	Development of skills, for instance legal skills or community engagement, helplines and support services for victims.	2.75	Agreed
6	Training initiatives on comprehensive sexuality education by counsellors will assist minimize SRGBV.	3.00	Agreed
7	Incorporating curricula and pedagogies that promote equitable, inclusive, anti-violence in the school system.	2.96	Agreed
8	Learning from young people on why they speak out or stay silent and their views on disciplinary systems, codes of conduct, reporting and response.	2.72	Agreed
9	Governments should adopt comprehensive, integrated action plans to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools.	3.00	Agreed
10	Classroom practices can be designed to be gender-transformative and promotion of peace, gender equitable norms and behaviours.	2.86	Agreed
11	Support the school counsellors and teachers to respond to violence using positive, gender sensitive teaching/counselling practices.	2.90	Agreed
12	Addressing SRGBV requires school authorities working in partnership with communities (including parents) and stakeholders at all levels including the legal sector.	2.70	Agreed
13	Both girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to SRGBV.	3.00	Agreed
14	Strategies to eliminate SRGBV should be integrated into other school-based initiatives such as violence prevention in schools, children's rights, gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.	3.00	Agreed
15	Donors and partners should invest in interventions that address SRGBV through partnerships among civil society and the media.	2.88	Agreed
Mean of means		2.82	Agreed

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that addressing SRGBV requires school authorities working in partnership with communities (including parents) and stakeholders at all levels including the legal sector. This in line with the Agenda 2030, which places gender equality and inclusive and equitable quality education at the hearts of its concerns. In particular, under Goal 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education, the Agenda highlights the importance of knowledge and skills on human rights and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, the provision of child, disability and gender sensitive education facilities and safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. Which is also in line with the finding on supporting the school counsellors and teachers to respond to violence using positive gender sensitive teaching/counselling practices.

Furthermore, the finding that both girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to SRGBV, is in line with the reports posited by United Nations (2015). Both girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to SRGBV. The findings also indicate that incorporating curricula and pedagogies that promote equitable, inclusive, anti-violence in the school system will go a long way to reduce SRGBV. Government should adopt comprehensive, integrated action plans to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools.

Percieved Strategies for Minimizing School Related Gender Based Violence in a Post Covid-19 Era among Adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Finally, at school level, learning from young people on why they speak out or stay silent, and their views on disciplinary systems, codes of conduct, reporting and response, have rich potential to feed into more effective policy making and implementation. Working across these multiple levels is essential to navigate the complex ebbs and flows of SRGBV policy enactments in order to support and sustain girls' and boys' efforts to prevent violence and stay safe. These imply that if proper measures are put in place by all stakeholders, school related gender based violence can be minimized.

The findings of the study in addition, indicate that School related gender based violence can be minimized using appropriate strategies. SRGBV being a very complex issue, it is necessary to involve many and several types of stakeholders. Thus it is about creating partnerships in order to tackle SRGBV. Wide range of researches are needed to address gaps in knowledge on the drivers of SRGBV including vulnerability of children marginalized by poverty, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, refugee status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Integrated programmes and policy evaluations are needed to better understand SRGBV: effective interventions to eliminate it; and its impact on psychological and physical well-being and learning outcomes. Systematic reporting and data collection on SRGBV should form part of the education sector plans.

CONCLUSION

Better documentation of gender based violence is critical in this regard, it requires investment in collection tools and models for intervention. If violence against women and girls is allowed to remain women's issue prevention efforts will continue to be deterred, the solution does not lie with women and girls alone. It is also vital that policies address the perpetuation of structural violence, which unknowingly affects the actions and concerns of women and civil society. Long term sustainable and flexible international support and funding for solutions to gender inequality are required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion reached, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

- coordination/collaboration between key ministries as well as at the local level
- partnerships with teachers'/counsellors' unions to ameliorate School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV)
- Engaging civil society organizations to curb SRGBV
- Further investments must to be made to support formative and action research, and programme and policy evaluations, in order to build the evidence base and good practice on SRGBV prevention and response. Governments should adopt comprehensive, integrated and multi-sectorial action plans to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools. These plans should be gender transformative to take into account the diversity of experiences and support the needs of all girls and boys including the most marginalized.
- Improving school governance is central, with guidelines and action plans on eliminating violence in schools, including corporal punishment, developed and enforced with the support of teachers, parents and children.
- Strategies to eliminate SRGBV should be integrated into other school-based initiatives such as violence prevention in schools, children's rights, gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, HIV and comprehensive sexuality education, life skills or citizenship education, disaster preparedness and peace-building.
- Education content, including curricula, textbooks, and classroom practices can be designed to be gender-transformative and promote peace, gender equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours.
- Reporting and response mechanisms and protocols should be strengthened within educational institutions.
- Provide training and support to school personnel and teachers to respond to violence and use positive, gender sensitive teaching practices.
- Violence prevention programmes should address gender norms, power inequalities and dynamics that interact with poverty, disability, sexual identity and orientation, race and ethnicity in the manifestation of violence.
- Addressing SRGBV requires working in partnership with communities (including parents) and stakeholders at all levels, including the judiciary, child protection authorities and the transportation sector.
- Listening to children's voices is critical in understanding the nature and causes of violence; girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to SRGBV and in accountability mechanisms.

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Percieved Strategies for Minimizing School Related Gender Based Violence in a Post Covid-19 Era among Adolescents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

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