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## School Violence and the Nigerian Child: Classroom Teacher Perspectives

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### **Abstract:**

Violence is viewed differently by different authors, though World Health Organization (WHO) put forward a comprehensive definition of violence based on the different aspects. This study therefore, investigated teachers' perception of violence on the school child in Nigeria. The design was a descriptive survey. Six research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. Sample was 264 serving teachers (192 females and 72 males) who were in their final year of a sandwich bachelor of education degree programme in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A 34-item Teacher Perception of Violence on the child questionnaire (TPVCO) developed by the researchers was used to collect data. Data were presented using means scores, standard deviation while *t*-test was used to test the hypothesis. Results indicated that teachers have adequate perception of the nature and manifestation of violence on the Nigerian child. However, their perceptions were restricted to physical assaults and not psychological violations on the child's rights. Among the implications was the need to define violence on the child to embrace any violation of the child's rights that may impede total health and development of the child.

**Keywords:** Violence, Nigerian child, perception, teacher

### **1. Introduction**

Violence is an antisocial behaviour which is intended to hurt and inflict pain on victims. It consists of actions, words, attitudes, or bodily damages that are capable of preventing people from reaching their full developmental potentials. By WHO definition, violence is 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation' (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano 2002a).

Because, violence is a complex phenomenon, researchers try to view it from different perspective. To understand violence better, O' Moore (n.d), categorised violence is an aggressive behaviour that may be physically, sexually or emotionally abusive and it is conducted by an individual or group and against one or another. Physically abusive behaviour, is where a child, adolescent or group directly or indirectly ill-treats, injures, or kills another or others. Such behaviour can also involve pushing, shoving, shaking, punching, kicking, squeezing, burning or any other form of physical assault on a person(s) or on property. Emotionally abusive behaviour, is where there are verbal attacks, threats, taunts, slugging, mocking, yelling, exclusion, and malicious rumours. Sexually abusive behaviour is where there is sexual assault or rape, O' Moore further explained. Hamby (2017) recommends that the following four elements are required before a behaviour is considered violent; such behaviour is (a) intentional, (b) unwanted, (c) nonessential, and (d) harmful.

Violence can occur in the communities, homes as domestic violence and in schools, along the streets, in the church, market or even on the play grounds. School violence especially among primary school pupils has continued to manifest in different forms, in spite of school authority's efforts to minimize violence in school. According to Selekman, Pelt, Garnier, and Baker, (2013a), school violence includes fighting/assaults (with or without weapons by two or more individuals); bullying; physical, sexual and psychological child abuse; dating violence; and violence against oneself (intentional non-suicidal self-injury). More so, it can be as threats, verbal and physical attacks, vandalism, ostracization, extortion and other delinquent behaviour perpetrated by student(s) against others in the school community (Adeyemi, 2013).

Violence cannot be attributed to a single factor. Its causes are complex and occur at different levels, Finkelhor (1994). For instance, Fareo (2015) citing Asonibare, considered societal factors such as parental neglect, family instability, and aggression within the home or in the society, family stress, rejection, isolation, and exposure to violent movies, marginalization, child abuse, antisocial acts and inconsistent reinforcements as contributory factors to violence among children in Nigerian schools. Ferréol and Neculau (2003) also believed that school violence has as causes, factors outside the school, such as the family environment, the social environment and the personality of the individual. In addition, Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, Hamby and Kracke (2009), affirms that exposure of students to violence occurs from association with friends, class mates, or an adult. Some other causes as peer pressure, untamed mass media influence, globalization, prevailing economic and political systems and other social issues may equally contribute to disposition to violence by different individuals.

Children who get exposed to violence in the form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, or even witnessing violence in the home has a significant effect on their wellbeing. It is a risk factor for a range of risk behaviours and disorders. For example, smoking, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviour, and depression that are, in turn, causally related to other major public health problems such as cancer, heart disease, sexually transmitted disease, and suicide. (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano 2002b). Violence has further damaging effects on the perpetrator, victim and the entire society at large. A violent child can develop into an adult criminal, suicide bomber, assassin and kidnapper or even become a militant who terrorizes the entire nation. Today in Nigeria, many persons live in fear because of increasing violence on the entire populace manifesting in rape, banditry, kidnapping, robbery, terrorism and extortion. School children have been kidnapped, and held hostage for ransom, many died and others presumed to be alive but yet to reunite with their families. More so, research has shown that the health consequences of violence are far broader than death and injuries. Victims of violence are at risk of psychological and behavioural problems, including depression, alcohol abuse, anxiety, and suicidal behaviour, and reproductive health problems, such as sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and sexual dysfunction. Wiederman, Sansone & Sansone (1998) and Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey (1996).

Violence also has negative implications on the progress of the child as reported by United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) (2007) that violence against children in school results to school absenteeism, school dropout and poor achievement, as well as the long term implication of threat to safety and security. It has an impact on the social, psychological, and physical well-being of students and staff. It disrupts the teaching-learning process through fear, intimidation, absenteeism, or class disruption and affects the victim, the aggressor and the bystanders (Selekman, Pelt, Garnier, & Baker, 2013<sub>b</sub>). Violent behaviour among school children can also lead to failures in examinations and subsequent withdrawal from school, delinquent acts and destruction of private and public properties or the dispositions to engage in other minor or serious criminal activities. This is the typical situation of schools in the northern part of Nigeria where people daily experience with rude shock the spread of violent activities in schools and wider society. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2010, the whole nation woke up with the shocking news of the abduction of 15 school children in a bus in Aba, Abia state Nigeria and sadly, this violence in schools seem to be a normal phenomenon. Ojelu, (2021), reported that in April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, more than 200 school girls were abducted in Chibok, Borno State; February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018, 110 Dapchi girls in Yobe state; over 300 Kankara Boys were taken by bandits in December 11<sup>th</sup> 2020. From February 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, March 11<sup>th</sup>, April 20<sup>th</sup>, May 30<sup>th</sup> and June 17<sup>th</sup> in 2021, over 600 school children and some parents were abducted at various locations in the Northern part of Nigeria. Violence on school children in Nigeria is assuming different and dangerous dimensions. The nature of violence changes with age and sometimes may be gender based. Boys and girls may perpetrate violence on the opposite sex to extract underserved favours such as attention or to show supremacy. Gender as viewed from the social constructivist perspective refers to qualities of masculinity or femininity as culturally attributed and defined (Ferguson, 2000). This means that gender is the socio psychological construct used to define roles and attributes or behaviour that society has assigned to the two sexes. Gender based violence may be a significant problem in schools in Nigeria.

School violence may be reduced by advancing a school environment that supports zero tolerance for weapons of any kind, focusing on anger management, and counseling for the victim, aggressor and bystanders. School authorities as a matter of normal school instructional management put in place measures such as corporal punishment, expulsion, suspension and others to curb violence in schools, to pacify victims to victims to violence or to check other children who might learn violence from perpetrators. According to Nnachi and Eze (2003), these measures had not yielded much success. Apparently, there is need to redefine the meaning of violence on school children since such social problems also change along with society and also search out more effective strategies for tackling the menace. How do teachers perceive violence on school children, what does the school do to perpetrators of violence and victims of violence and what strategies are put in place to curb violence in schools? These issues form the problem of this study.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the classroom teachers' perception of violence on the school children. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain:

- What teachers perceive as violence on the school child
- The manifestation of violence in school;
- The causes of violence among children;
- Teachers personal strategies for reducing violence in the classroom
- Whether gender influences teacher perception of violence on school child.

## 3. Research Questions and Hypothesis

- What do teachers call violence against school children?

- What forms does violence against children take?
  - What situations make children victims of violence?
  - What strategies do school teachers employ to stop or reduce violence against school children?
  - What is the influence of gender on teacher perception of violence against school children?
- Ho<sub>1</sub>: Gender does not significantly ( $p < .05$ ) influence teachers' perception of violence on the school child

**4. Method**

The research design was a descriptive survey. The population was 450 (324 female and 122 male) serving teachers in public primary schools in various states in Nigeria who are on sandwich Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programme in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The sample was 264 (192 females and 72 males) teachers obtained through proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The sample represents 58% of the population in the ratio of 72% females to 28% males (7:2).

A 34-item Teacher Perception of Violence on Child Questionnaire (TPVCQ) developed by the researchers was used for the collecting data for the study. The questionnaire was structured to: (1) capture teacher definition of violence on the child; (2) teacher understanding of forms of violence; (3) situations that make people show violence on the child; (4) strategies school authorities employ to stop or reduce violence in the classroom.

Items on the questionnaire were scored on a four-point response options of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Questions on the negative valence were scored on the reverse. A mean score of 2.5 and above was adjudged adequate perception (A) and below 2.5 as inadequate (IA). The internal consistency estimate for TPVCQ was 0.83. Data were analyzed using mean, Standard deviation and t-statistic.

**5. Results**

Results are presented in Tables in line with research questions and hypothesis.

A child is a victim when:	M		F		Total		Remark
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
1. Stronger child beats him/her up.	3.19	1.80	3.18	1.99	3.18	1.94	A
2. A group of pupils gang up against him/her	3.15	1.85	2.98	1.92	3.03	.90	A
3. One pupil verbally abuses him/her	2.43	1.00	2.54	1.04	2.50	1.03	IA
4. The victim is of opposite sex	2.36	.97	2.40	1.04	2.37	1.02	IA
5. A stronger authority over-punishes him/her	2.90	1.02	2.55	.99	2.65	1.00	A
6. A stronger child frightens him/her	2.50	.93	2.84	.94	2.75	.95	A
7. A teacher tortures him/her	2.53	1.10	2.89	.96	2.79	1.01	A
8. The school authority inflicts any type of punishment on him/her	2.49	1.03	2.66	1.07	2.61	1.06	A
Cluster: $t_{cal} = 0.0897; t_{crit} = 0.370; p > .05; df = 262$	2.69	.45	2.75	.50	2.74	.48	A

Table 1: Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Test on Teachers' Perception of Violence  
\*A: Adequate  
IA: Inadequate

Data in Table 1 indicate that teachers have adequate perception ( $\bar{X} = 2.74; SD = 0.48$ ) of the meaning of violence against the school child. To the teacher, violence against the child includes body violation by stronger children, school authority and teachers. The results also indicate however, that teachers do not perceive psychological violation of a child's right such as verbal abuse ( $\bar{X} = 2.50; SD = 1.03$ ) as violence against him/her. The female teachers mean score ( $\bar{X} = 2.75; SD = 0.50$ ) differs significantly from male teachers mean score ( $\bar{X} = 2.69; SD = 0.45$ )  $t_{cal} = 0.897; t_{crit} = 0.370; p > 0.05; df = 262$ .  $t_{cal} = 0.897$  is significant at  $t_{crit} = 0.370; p > .05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Violence on a school child may take different forms including	M		F		Total		Remark
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
9. A child is unhappy with classroom instruction	2.82	1.11	2.80	1.02	2.80	1.05	A
10. A child is excluded from classroom activities	2.83	.93	2.73	1.13	2.64	1.08	A
11. A child is stopped from asking questions in class	2.68	1.01	2.81	.97	2.78	.98	A
12. A child from poor home is discriminated against by classmates.	2.78	1.04	2.80	1.09	2.80	1.08	A
13. A child is discriminated by teachers	2.71	.98	2.66	1.06	2.67	1.04	A
14. A teacher plays truancy	2.39	1.01	2.77	1.03	2.69	1.04	A
15. Parents abandon the child in school	2.49	1.02	2.76	1.03	2.69	1.03	A
16. A child is denied access to play activities and toys	2.43	1.05	2.81	1.21	2.71	1.11	A
Cluster: $t_{cal} = 1.653; t_{crit} = 0.100; p > 0.05; df = 262$	2.64	.52	2.77	.58	2.73	.57	A

Table 2: Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Test on Teacher Perception of Forms of Violence

Data in Table 2 indicate that teachers have adequate perception ( $\bar{X} = 2.73$ ;  $SD = 0.5$ ) of different manifestations of violence on the school child. Violence on the school child may take such forms as inadequate classroom instruction, discrimination against the child in instructional and social activities, child abandonment and truancy by teachers. The female teachers mean score ( $X = 2.77$ ;  $SD = 0.58$ ) differs significantly from the male teachers mean score ( $X = 2.64$ ;  $SD = 0.52$ );  $t_{cal} = 1.653$ ;  $t_{crit} = 0.100$ ;  $p > 0.05$ . The null hypothesis is rejected.

Different things and situations that make people Show violence on child include:	M		F		Total		Remark
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
17. Repeated failures in school exams	3.10	1.06	2.58	1.09	2.72	1.11	A
18. Envy directed at more able children	2.63	1.09	2.74	.91	2.71	.96	A
19. Deprivation of parental affection	2.96	1.09	2.98	.09	2.83	.96	A
20. Violence modelled in television screens	2.96	1.03	2.87	.96	2.89	.98	A
21. School activities not relevant to child developmental needs	2.54	.99	2.91	.97	2.80	.94	A
22. Violence experienced in earlier stages of debt.	3.03	.95	2.93	.93	2.97	.93	A
23. Poor supervision by adults	2.62	.80	2.97	.95	2.99	.91	A
24. Desire to use power to control	2.89	.45	2.83	.50	2.85	.49	A
Cluster: $t_{cal} = 0.729$ ; $t_{crit} = 0.461$ ; $p > 0.05$ ; $df = 262$	2.89	.45	2.83	.50	2.85	.49	A

Table 3: Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Test on Perception of Teachers on Situation People Show Violence on the School Child

Data in Table 3 indicate that teachers have adequate perception ( $\bar{X} = 2.83$ ;  $SD = 0.49$ ) of the situations that make people show violence on the school child. For the teachers, situations at which a child may show violence on another include: repeated failures in school exams, desire to use power on other children, poor supervision by adult, early childhood experiences.

The female teachers mean score ( $X = 2.83$ ;  $SD = 0.50$ ) differs significantly from the male teachers mean score ( $X = 2.89$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ );  $t_{cal} = 0.729$ ;  $t_{crit} = 0.461$ ;  $p > 0.05$ . The null hypothesis is rejected.

Teachers' strategies that can be employed to stop or reduce violence on school children include:	M		F		Total		Remark
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
25. Improving social skills among pupils	3.65	.75	3.04	1.05	3.20	1.00	A
26. Rewarding good behaviour of children	3.67	.65	2.23	.97	3.35	.92	A
27. Putting the names of non-violent pupils in school honours list	3.32	.89	2.90	1.06	3.01	1.03	A
28. Ignoring the acts of violence among perpetrators	2.10	1.08	2.74	1.06	2.50	1.01	A
29. Ensuring that violence in the school receives approval neither teachers nor pupils	2.58	1.20	2.77	1.05	2.72	1.10	A
30. Modelling non-violent acts	3.29	.95	2.87	1.01	2.98	1.01	A
31. Discussing rules governing violent acts with pupils	3.29	.85	3.04	1.02	3.11	.98	A
32. Building positive attachment with pupils who perpetrate violence on other children	2.78	1.09	3.04	.99	2.97	1.02	A
33. Consistently not allowing violence perpetrators get away with the act	3.31	.83	3.29	.64	3.30	.78	A
34. Monitoring closely violence perpetrators to catch them as they begin the violent act	3.29	.88	3.23	.86	3.25	.87	A
Cluster: $t_{cal} = 1.795$ ; $t_{crit} = 0.074$ ; $p > 0.05$ ; $df = 262$	3.11	.38	3.02	.42	3.04	.41	A

Table 4: Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Test on the Teachers' Own Strategies to Reduce Violence in the Classroom

Data in Table 4 indicate that teachers have adequate perception ( $\bar{X} = 3.04$ ;  $SD = 0.41$ ) of how to reduce violence in the classroom. The different strategies each teacher employs to curb violence include: improving social skills, rewarding good behaviour, modelling non-violent acts, close monitoring of violence perpetrators.

The female teachers' mean score ( $X = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 0.42$ ) differs significantly from the male teachers' mean score ( $X = 3.11$ ;  $SD = 0.38$ );  $t_{cal} = 1.795$ ;  $t_{crit} = 0.074$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ;  $df = 262$ . The null hypothesis is rejected.

## 6. Discussions

It has been shown in this study that teachers have adequate perception of the nature, the different forms or manifestations of the violence on the school child. The results of the study also show that teachers have adequate perception of the situations that make persons show violence on the school child. Adequate means near understanding or approximating the experts' definition or perception. It was also shown that they have adequate perception of the strategies they themselves can employ to curb or minimize violence on the school child.



The study has also shown that teachers however perceive violence as physical assault. Verbal abuses do not constitute violence to the respondents. What this means is that teachers do not consider non-physical violation of children or deprivation of privileges as violence on the school child. This is inadequate perception, meaning misconception or not close to experts' perception or definition that includes verbal abuse constituting violence among children. This finding can be explained from the cultural orientation of most Nigerians which predispose them to poor knowledge of legal rights of a child and not include both physical and psychological torture as violation of a child's right (Ezeilo, 2002).

Teachers also apparently do not conceive on the child from the point of view of gender differences. It means that teachers perceive violence as a violation on a child as a person irrespective of whether the violence was inflicted by a male or female. This finding may be explained by the fact that violence on the child is perpetrated equally by men and women in Nigeria, (World Aid Collective, 2003). It may also be conjectured that teachers have a legalistic conception of violence on the child in Nigeria. This is so because although laws on the right of the child exist in Nigeria, children are rarely the focus in legal practice. Child sexual abuse, neglect and other forms of exploitation of the child are rampant in Nigeria despite heavy penalties provided under the criminal and penal codes (Ezeilo, 2001).

Results also indicated significant gender influence on their perpetrators of the nature and forms of violence, environmental cues that may predispose a child to being a victim and strategies which teachers employ to reduce such in schools. This shows that gender role stereotype might still be having significant impact on teachers' perception of not only their role expectations but also their behaviour and how these may impact the school child's total health and development. This finding agrees with the findings of Ngwoke and Akaneme (2010) that gender significantly influenced teachers' control orientation. Female teachers were found to depict internal control while male teachers depicted external control orientation.

## 7. Implications/Recommendation

Violence on the child in Nigeria is a source of concern for the child or the victim, the perpetrator and the general public. For the victim and the perpetrator, violence is an educational problem. Both require counselling and rehabilitation. For the victim, violence poses extra educational concern such as low threshold for repeated failures in school tasks and school dropout. Both way, it is both economic and health risk for the child. Legalistic conception of violence on the child may preclude the teacher from taking proactive measures to curb propensities to committing violence by perpetrators. There is need for the teacher to be properly reoriented to be able to identify psychological threats that are precursors to violence.

Based on the findings of this study and the educational implications, it is recommended that training programmes and workshops for teachers address psychological conceptions of violence on the child. Teachers need to understand violence on the child as encompassing any violation of any aspect of the child's right that would be inimical to the child's total health and development. It is also recommended that international convention on the rights of the child be properly entrenched in Nigerian's criminal and penal codes. School authorities are also invited to take more proactive measures to ensure that the child's physical and psychological right is protected at all times.

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