
SEXUAL ABUSE IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OVIA NORTH EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT, EDO STATE**IMASUEN KENNEDY****IYAMU IKPONMWEN FLORENCE**

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Abstract

The incessant abuse of the female students by their male counterparts including teachers has reached an alarming rate. This has led to many of the girls dropping out of school either as a result of unwanted pregnancy or psychological trauma. This study examined the prevalence of sexual abuse of the girl child in public senior secondary school in Ovia North - East Local Government, Edo State. Survey design was used for the study. Three hundred and sixty students from 12 public schools in Ovia North - East Local Government Area of Edo State formed the sample. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the students. Ranking and descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and mean deviation were used to analyze the data. The result showed that intimate fondling ranked first among the types of abuse the girl child was subjected to. It also revealed that the girl child was more abused than their male counterpart. It was recommended, among other things, that offenders should be punished in accordance with the law so as to reduce cases of sexual abuse. In addition, counseling units should be provided in each school that will address issues of sexual abuse.

Keywords: Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Girl Child, Public School.**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.35386/ser.v18i1.72>**Introduction**

The childhood period is supposed to be a time of great happiness, filled with joy and good cheer, devoid of the crises, uncertainties and danger that are often the hallmark of adult life. There is a general assumption that the child ought to be provided with adequate needs (psychological and physical needs) necessary for a secure and healthy growth. It is the cardinal responsibility of every parent to ensure that the transition from childhood to adulthood of their children is smooth and crises free. Mathews (2011) reported that in almost all societies man tends to raise children in consonance with the philosophy which emphasizes that a child is the most cherished asset and the hope of tomorrow. In spite of this assumption, children are still exposed to traumatic experience within the society by some unscrupulous individuals. As a result, children have been psychologically and physically battered, abused and neglected by their community.

Moreover, one of the fundamental human rights is the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation. The mission of United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is to advocate for the protection of children's rights, especially children under the age of 18 years; to help them meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potentials. These rights include the

right to protect children from sexual harassment and abuse, and right to be educated. Antonowicz (2010) stated that sexual harassment is a major public health crisis that significantly hinders development and education of the girl-child, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The National Population Commission (NPC) (2009), declared that the number and group of those harassed sexually in Nigeria are females. The reason being that females are often victims of some abusive social practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child labour practices that are ingrained in traditions (NPC, 2009). In agreement with the above assertion by NPC (2009), Adeyinka (2010) opined that the special circumstances in which girl-children find themselves expose them to possible risk of physical, psychological, and sexual harassment, which in turn increase their vulnerability to early pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. This situation when allowed to foster in the secondary schools, may have devastating consequences on the girl-child's education and further impair the attainment of post-primary education goal.

Conceptual Clarification

The word 'abuse' from the English dictionary is the misuse of something resulting to a bad effect or to a bad purpose. It can also be seen as to treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly. The consequences are usually devastating on the victims. Piheiro (2005) stated that abuse is usually done by a person who is more superior or powerful, taking advantage of the other person who is vulnerable. Abuse of any kind is a cruel act on humanity. Adusei, (2009) stated that sex abuse can be in many forms such as physical or verbal maltreatment, rape, unjust practices, crimes or other types of aggression. The analysis by Adusei (2009) indicated that sexual abuse occurs in secondary schools either among students or between teachers and students. Most of the times, this form of abuse does not just start or happen to the victims at once, there are usually gradual advancement that had been played by the attacker to his victim. However, Taylor and Canrad (2008) argued that though sexual abuse is prevalent among females, their male counterparts also fall victims sometimes. Boys are usually not prone to the same types of abuses as that of girls but they also experience a degree of violence and molestation. Corroborating this, Thurman, Brown, Maharaja, and Magnani (2006) claimed that, most times, boys are abused by the same male counterpart. A boy could be abused by a fellow boy in the form of rape. Also, there are cases of women or girls molesting boys in order to get them to have sex with them. Notwithstanding, girls are usually at high risk of sexual abuse than the boys; this is because it is believed that the female counterpart is weak and unable to defend herself (Adusei, 2009). In the same vein, many adolescent girls have also been sexually harassed, neglected, and exposed to violence at home and in their communities, experiences that have also been linked to criminal behaviour and aggression (Hall & Hall 2010). More so, the socioeconomic status of parents in many parts of Sub-Sahara Africa including Nigeria has resulted to poor parenting, which had brought untold hardship to the girl child. They are neglected to fend for themselves, therefore, exposed to sexual harassment.

Furthermore, Nelson (2002) asserted that adolescent girl sexual harassment can result in both short-term and long-term harm, including psychopathology in later life. Psychological, emotional, physical, and social effects include depression, post-traumatic stress, disorder and anxiety (Arnow, 2004). Freud, Putnam and Lyon (2005) put the consequences of sexual harassment as to include; poor self-esteem, anxiety,

disorders, neurosis and chronic pain. The International Labour Organization–ILO (2010) revealed that cases of sexual harassment are not often reported for fear of victimization and stigmatization. Based on the aforementioned consequences of sexual harassment, it can be adduced that sexual abuse may lead to devastating health, social, emotional and educational consequences which may jeopardize attainment of Nigerian educational objectives for secondary school education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education. Apart from that, it may also hinder the accomplishment of individual adolescent girl's ambitions. Suffice it to say that adolescent girls in Ovia North-East Local Government Area secondary schools may also be unable to concentrate on their studies as a result of sexual harassment by male teachers and students, thus, the accomplishment of their set educational goals and ambitions may be jeopardized. It becomes necessary to examine sexual abuse among public senior secondary school girl child in Ovia North – East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Rational for the Study

The thrust of this study is to investigate prevalence of sexual abuse of secondary school students in Ovia North - East Local Government Area of Edo State. Although a lot of studies have been carried on child abuse in school, but with reference to Ovia North East Local Government Area it is scarce. This study is carried out to examine the rise in the incidents of reported cases of sexual abuse by stakeholders, parents and administrators. The prevalence of sexual abuse of adolescent girls in Nigerian secondary schools has received little or no attention- from government and school authorities alike. Government and school authorities were found to be silent about the issues pertaining to sexuality and sexual abuse. This abuse brings untold hardship on their victims so much so that some of them become neurotic, depressed and most times dropout of school. This study therefore specifically, attempt to address the following questions

1. What are the different types of sexual abuse among secondary school students?
2. Are boys and girls exposed to the same kind of sexual abuse?
3. What are the factors that predispose students to sexual abuse?
4. What are the possible solutions to mitigate sexual abuse of secondary school students?

Methodology

The survey design was used for the study. The target population for this study comprised of Senior Secondary II Students in the 23 public Schools in Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State with a total student population of 7,200. Three hundred and sixty students presenting 20% of the total population were selected from twelve public senior secondary schools that were randomly selected from 23 public senior schools in Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State. The cluster sampling was used to select 30 Students from the twelve sampled schools.

A questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; A and B. Section A elicited personal information of the respondents. Section B contained items used to elicit information on sexual abuse. A four-point Likert's

scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was used to scale the students' responses.

The instrument was validated by three experts at the Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City. The instrument and the objectives of the study including the research questions were given to the three experts. Face and content validity were used and their comments and corrections were incorporated in the final draft. To establish the reliability of the instrument, the split-half method was used. Thirty questionnaires were administered to senior secondary school students in Ovia North-East Local Government Area that was not part of the sample. The scores were divided into two halves (odd and even), and a reliability index of 0.73 was obtained using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed in twelve senior secondary schools in Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State. The questionnaires were administered to the students by the researcher. The data from the field was analyzed using simple ranking and descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and mean difference. A mean rating of 2.50, which is the mean of the weights of the four Likert's scale, was used as a benchmark. Any item whose mean rating is 2.50 and above was considered acceptable, while those below 2.50 is considered unacceptable.

Results

Research Question One

What are the different types of sexual abuse among secondary school students?

Table 1: Frequency counts and ranking of the different types sexual abuse among secondary school students

S/N	Types of sexual abuse	Frequency	Ranking
1	Kissed by teacher without consent	07	9
2	Raped by teacher	08	8
3	Raped by peer	12	6
4	Raped by school heads	15	5
5	Kissed by peer without consent	38	3
6	Stripped naked in public by teacher	10	7
7	Touched on genital by peer	40	2
8	Touched on genital by teacher	03	10
9	Fondled on genital	23	4
10	Fondled on breast	44	1

The data in Table 1 showed that ten different types of sexual abuse were identified by students in secondary school of Ovia North- East Local government area of Edo State. These abuses are as follows: Kissed by the teachers without consent, raped by teachers, raped by peer, raped by school head, kissed by peer without consent, stripped naked in public by teachers, touched on genital by peer, touched on genital by teachers, fondling genital, and fondling breast. It further showed that fondled on breast was ranked first, followed by touched on genital by peer and kissed by peer without consent. Kissed by the teachers without consent and touched on the genital by teachers were ranked as the least sexual abuse among secondary school students.

Research Question Two

Are boys and girls exposed to the same kind of abuse?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of boys and girls exposure to sexual abuse

Sexual abuse	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean difference
sex				
Male	92	49.17	7.41	2.07
Female	108	51.24	9.03	

The data in Table 2 showed the mean and standard deviation of the responses of secondary school students on boys and girls exposure to sexual abuse as 49.17 and 7.41; and 51.24 and 9.03 for boys and girls respectively. It also showed a mean difference of 2.07 in favour of the girls. This implies that the boys and the girls are not exposed to the same kind of sexual abuse. Moreover, the girls are more prone to sexual abuse than the boys.

Research Question Three

What are the factors that predispose students to sexual abuse?

Table 3: Mean ratings of the factors that predispose students to sexual abuse

S/N	Factors	Mean	Standard deviation	Remark
1	Lured with a gift into having sex	1.41	0.75	NA
2	Drunk and forced into sexual behaviour	1.53	0.87	NA
3	Exposure to drugs	1.52	0.86	NA
4	Dressing style	3.12	1.00	A
5	Street begging by children during school	3.14	0.98	A
6	hours	3.07	1.01	A
7	Hawking by children during school hours	1.48	0.87	NA
8	Lured with money	1.35	0.71	NA
	Sexually abused because parents are poor			

A = Accepted; NA = Not accepted

The data in Table 3 showed the mean ratings of the factors that predispose secondary students to sexual abuse. It further showed that the items whose mean ratings is equal to or above the mean rating benchmark of 2.50 are considered to be acceptable as a factor that predispose secondary students to sexual abuse. They are: dressing style (3.12), street begging by children during school hours (3.14), and hawking by children during school hours (3.07).

Research Question Four

What are the possible solutions to mitigate sexual abuse of secondary school students?

Table 4: Mean ratings of the possible solutions to mitigate sexual abuse of secondary school students

S/N	Possible solutions	Mean	Standard deviation	Remark
1	Talking to parents about sexual abuse of their children.	1.653.75	0.91	NA
2	Severe punishment for those who sexually abuse students.	3.03	1.29	A
3	Schools should have office to report sexual abuse cases.	2.28	1.09	A
5	Talking to others about sexual abuse without fear of discrimination Students should dress decently	3.28	1.19 1.01	NA A

A = Accepted; NA = Not accepted

The data in Table 4 showed the mean ratings of the possible solutions to mitigate sexual abuse of secondary school students. It further showed that the items whose mean ratings were equal to or above the benchmark mean of 2.50 were considered to be acceptable as the possible solutions to mitigate sexual abuse of secondary school students. They were: severe punishment for those who sexually abuse students (3.75), schools should have office to report sexual abuse cases (3.03), and students should dress decently (3.28).

Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 1 revealed the various sexual abuse prevalent among secondary school students as: kissed by the teachers without consent, raped by teachers, raped by peer, raped by school heads, kissed by peer without consent, stripped naked in public by teachers, touched on genital by peer, touched on genital by teachers, fondled on genital, and fondling breast. It further showed that fondled on breast was ranked first, followed by touched on genital by peer and kissed by peer without consent. Kissed by the teachers without consent and touched on the genital by teachers were ranked as the least sexual abuse among secondary school students. This agreed with American Psychological Association (2011) who opined that child sexual abuse may include fondling a child's genitals, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, and vaginal and anal intercourse. In the same vein, Ajuwon, Akin-Jimoh and Olley, (2001); Jejeebhoy and Bott, (2003) affirmed that sexual coercion among youth encompasses a range of experiences, ranging from non-contact forms such as verbal sexual abuse and forced viewing of pornography, as well as unwanted contact in the form of touching, fondling, attempted rape, forced penetrative sex (vaginal, oral, or anal), trafficking, and forced prostitution. It also includes sex obtained as a result of physical force, intimidation, pressure, blackmail, deception, forced alcohol and drug use, and threats of abandonment or of withholding economic support. Transactional sex through money, gifts, or other economic incentives (especially in the context of extreme poverty) often has a coercive aspect as well.

The result in Table 2 revealed that the girls are more exposed to sexual abuse than boys. But the girls are more prone to sexual abuse than the boys. This result is in agreement with American Association of University Women, AAUW (2011) which asserted that sexual harassment is more prevalent among female students at the upper

strata (middle and high schools) of secondary education (grade 7-12). They further affirmed that this category of female students experienced a plethora of sexual harassment. In the same vein, Cortina et al. (2002) alluded that sexual harassment of girls is more prevalent at the upper class and also impinges deleterious effects on their psychological, physical, and academic well-being. Also, Duffy, Wareham, & Walsh, (2004) posited that academic sexual harassment, however, is not a new social problem; it has long threatened women in the context of school, interfering with equal opportunities in higher education and in secondary education as well.

The result in Table 3 revealed the factor that predispose secondary students to sexual abuse as: dressing style, street begging by children, and hawking by children. The result in Table 4 showed the possible solutions to mitigate sexual abuse of secondary school students as: severe punishment for those who sexually abuse students, schools should have office to report sexual abuse cases, and students should dress decently.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the prevalence of sexual abuse in secondary schools in Edo state is of a high degree. Also, the teachers, students and school heads are all involved to some extent. This could be attributable to a lot of factors among which are mode of dressing on the part of the students and inducement with money

Recommendations

Sexual abuse is major social disease plaguing the society most especially among secondary school students. Based on this the following recommendations are made. Provision of a counseling unit in each school that will look into addressing issues of sexual abuse. This will guide students on the importance of staying safe and help them when there are cases of sexual abuse.

1. Parents and the government should provide all the educational needs of the students, so as to reduce their dependence on strangers for help or care.
2. Better and friendly relationship should exist between parents, teachers and school heads so as to monitor the activities that take place in the life of these children.
3. Finally, severe punishment should be given to those who are found culpable of sexual abuse. This is one major way of controlling the increasing rate of sexual abuse and it goes a long way to assure students that they are never alone.

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