

Comparison of Knowledge and Perceptions of Teachers in Public and Private Secondary Schools on the Causes of Gender-Based Violence in Iwo Local Government, Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Objective

To compare teachers' knowledge and perceptions in public and private secondary schools on the causes of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Iwo Local Government, Osun State, Nigeria.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted using a 17-item questionnaire filled out by 256 teachers from 128 private and public schools. Data were analyzed and compared for school differences by descriptive statistics and chi-square tests.

Results

Private school teachers were slightly more aware of the various forms of GBV, such as psychological violence (81.3% vs. 71.1%, $p = 0.057$) and sexual violence (77.3% vs. 68%, $p = 0.092$). They also significantly perceived female circumcision as GBV (58.6% vs. 46.1%, $p = 0.045$), whereas both groups were poorly informed about economic violence. In contrast, public school teachers reported overt disciplinary actions, including corporal punishment (52.3%), and showed a greater tendency to blame male students as the primary perpetrators (91.4% compared to 85.9%, $p = 0.167$). Private school teachers largely linked gender-based violence (GBV) to social dynamics like familiarizing with boys (62.5%).

Conclusion

Disparities in GBV knowledge and perceptions highlight the influence of institutional training and sociocultural contexts. Private schools revealed broader, context-sensitive awareness, while public schools focused on obvious behaviors associated with patriarchal norms. Standardized, culturally responsive training is recommended to address gaps in recognizing economic violence and systemic drivers of GBV.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) in educational settings is not a recent issue. There has been an increased awareness among society and researchers regarding its fundamental causes and enduring effects in the last few years ^(1, 2). GBV poses a significant public health challenge and is a widespread concern, particularly impacting marginalized populations and reinforcing cycles of violence ^(3, 4). It plays a major role in causing avoidable physical injuries, mental health issues, and social inequalities across various cultures. As a result, there has been a surge in efforts to identify risk factors and establish preventive measures. An expanding array of studies on violence in schools indicated connections with cultural standards, economic inequalities, and institutional regulations ^(5, 6). However, most research concentrated on high-income nations or student experiences, creating a lack of evidence from an educator's viewpoints, especially in lower-income countries such as Nigeria ^(7, 8, 9). The absence of information hinders the creation of tailored interventions for teachers' knowledge and perception about the causes of GBV, which are crucial for influencing the school environment and reducing risks.

In many low-income nations like Nigeria, schools frequently reflect societal settings where GBV is prevalent and insufficiently addressed. Rapid urban growth, economic disparity, and deep-rooted patriarchal values intensify the exposure to violence, with both teachers and students in sub-Saharan African schools facing these dangers every day ^(10, 11). When detrimental cultural practices, such as gender stereotypes in educational content or an unspoken acceptance of corporal punishment, combine with a lack of institutional training on non-violent conflict management, educators may unintentionally continue cycles of GBV ^(12, 13). Without proper guidance, teachers, who play a crucial role in shaping school culture, might not possess the knowledge or resources needed to confront systemic factors of violence, including poverty or toxic masculinity ⁽¹⁴⁾. As a result, students are raised in settings where GBV is silently accepted, perpetuating its normalization through generations. This highlights the critical need to explore educators' perceptions about the causes of GBV, especially in the Iwo local government area (LGA), where differences between public and private schools might influence institutional strategies to combat violence.

Schools play a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of GBV, functioning not only as gathering places for adolescents but also as institutions that influence societal norms through their educators ⁽¹²⁾. In Nigeria, 47.24% of secondary school students are engaged in formal education, and teachers act as key socialization agents, shaping attitudes and behaviors across different socioeconomic backgrounds ^(15, 16). Schools are revered as fundamental parts of the community. Yet, they can also be environments where GBV occurs. This is reflected in practices such as gender-biased disciplinary measures or the unspoken tolerance of harassment ⁽¹⁷⁾. Although research emphasizes the effects of violence on students' academic success and mental well-being, insufficient focus has been placed on teachers' understanding of systemic GBV contributors, including cultural patriarchy and poor policy implementation. In Iwo LGA, where the differences between public and private schools may further influence institutional reactions, it is vital to investigate educators' knowledge and viewpoints to break the cycles of violence and create safer educational spaces.

In Nigeria, there are limited studies that have examined the institutional and systemic factors contributing to GBV from the viewpoint of educators, despite the concerning prevalence of violence reported in schools. A national situational analysis indicated that 85% of students encountered physical violence, while 50% experienced psychological violence in school ⁽¹⁸⁾. Additionally, research in Osun State revealed that 60.6% of male students and 59.9% of female students reported experiencing peer violence in the previous year ⁽¹⁹⁾. Nonetheless, these studies primarily concentrate on student experiences and overlook teachers' vital role in addressing fundamental issues like cultural norms, policy deficiencies, and institutional involvement. This deficiency is especially

significant in Iwo LGA, where public and private schools have rapid growth with differing resources and sociocultural expectations. The lack of investigation into teachers' awareness of GBV drivers, such as poverty and gender stereotypes, hampers the development of targeted interventions. Existing research on GBV in Nigerian schools has primarily examined students' experiences in public institutions, often overlooking the essential role of educators and the distinct dynamics present in private schools. Parents are increasingly choosing private schools due to their perceived quality of education ^(20, 21, 22), yet there is a notable lack of studies evaluating whether teachers in these environments are adequately aware of the causes of GBV or if there are systematic differences between them and their public-school colleagues. Moreover, inquiries into GBV within educational settings have largely disregarded the viewpoints of teachers, even though they play a crucial role in shaping school culture and tackling the systemic factors contributing to violence.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how educators from various school types perceive and comprehend the causes of GBV, providing critical insights necessary for breaking the cycles of violence in Nigeria's changing educational context. It also compared the knowledge and perceptions of teachers in both public and private secondary schools in Iwo Local Government, Osun State, Nigeria, to identify the institutional and sociocultural influences that shape their understanding of GBV causes. By focusing on educators, who are pivotal agents of change, this research aspires to inform targeted interventions that equip teachers to break the cycles of violence in both types of schools.

METHODS

Study Population

The study population comprised male and female teachers in secondary schools with at least one year of teaching experience in Iwo Local Government. In Nigeria, secondary education comprises both junior and senior secondary schools ^(23, 24). The junior secondary school is subdivided into Junior Secondary Schools 1 to 3 (JSS1-3), while the senior secondary school is subdivided into Senior Secondary Schools 1 to 3 (SSS 1-3) ⁽²³⁾. The secondary school teachers were employed based on the minimum NCE certification required. However, the majority of the teachers in secondary schools were employed based on a bachelor's degree certification. The exclusion criteria were teachers who were absent from school during the study period, students, parents, and non-teaching/ management staff.

Study Design

This study was a comparative cross-sectional survey.

Sample Size- Sample size was calculated using the two-sided test formula to compare two proportions, based on the assumption that the proportion of teachers with knowledge of GBV causes was 67% in public schools and 49% in private schools ⁽²⁵⁾. A minimum sample size of 115 respondents per group was estimated, assuming a difference of 18% between the two populations, 80% power, and a 5% significance level. A 10% adjustment was made for non-response, resulting in a final sample size of 128 respondents per group.

Recruitment Procedure

A three-phase stratified sampling method was employed for this research. The first stage was the selection of 7 wards out of the 15 wards in Iwo Local Government using a simple random sampling method without replacement, through balloting. The second stage involved using a simple random technique to select 1 public and 2 private secondary schools in the 7 selected wards in Iwo Local Government. The selection proportion was due to the number of private and public schools available in the selected wards. The third stage was the selection of teachers per school using a simple random sampling technique. Seven public secondary schools and 14 private schools were chosen from the selected wards in Iwo Local Government. All available teachers per school were included in the study, as selection was based on the study population. All full-time and contract staff who were physically available in the listed junior and senior secondary schools were selected and included in this study.

The study was initiated with advocacy visits to the chosen schools in January 2024. Discussions took place with principals and school boards to outline the study's objectives, obtain institutional consent, and arrange for data collection. The school authorities were very cooperative, permitting access to staff records and aiding teacher participation during non-teaching hours.

Study Instrument

A 17-item structured interviewer-administered questionnaire was developed by the study objectives. The questionnaire had four sections. The first section contained the socio-demographic data of respondents such as age, ethnic group, sex, religion, marital status, type of school, teaching experience, level of education and average monthly salary, the second section assessed the level of knowledge among teachers in private and public secondary schools on GBV where questions on the meaning of violence, forms of violence, the occurrence of violence and the act of violence were asked, and the third section explored the perceptions of teachers in private and public secondary schools on the causes of gender-based violence where perception of teachers on the cause of GBV were asked.

The questionnaire was pretested on 14 teachers at Precious Baptist High School Iwo (private secondary school) and Saint Mary Grammar School Iwo (public secondary school) for clarity, relevance, and reliability.

Data Collection

Four research assistants with post-secondary education were recruited and trained on participant engagement in school settings, one week before administering the questionnaire by the research assistant. The survey took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete by the teachers in both private and secondary schools in the Iwo local government. The administration of 256 questionnaires by the research assistants took two weeks to be administered to the teachers in selected secondary schools. The questionnaire aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge and perception of secondary school teachers on GBV in Iwo Local Government. Data collection was from the 28th of January to March 2024. A total of 256 teachers were interviewed.

Study Variables

The independent variables included type of school (e.g., private and public) and socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, religion, ethnicity, gender, teaching experience, educational background, and marital status). Dependent variables included knowledge of GBV and perception of teachers on the cause of GBV.

Data Analysis

Data processing, cleaning, and analysis were conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software package (2016). Univariate analysis described the demographic characteristics and distribution of key variables, while multivariate analyses explored relationships between independent variables (school type, age, gender, teaching experience, educational background, marital status, religion, ethnicity) and dependent variables (knowledge of GBV, perceptions of GBV causes, and practices to address GBV). The Chi-square test was employed to compare the mean scores of knowledge and perceptions between public and private school teachers. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. For instance, the Chi-square test assessed differences in teachers' knowledge and perception of GBV (e.g., cultural norms, economic disparities) across school types.

Ethical approval declarations

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Osun State Health Research Ethics Committee (OSHREC), Ministry of Health, Osun State, Nigeria (Approval Number: OSHREC/PRS/569T/478). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were strictly maintained throughout the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and relevant national guidelines for research involving human participants.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, equal numbers of teachers ($N = 128$ each) were sampled from public and private secondary schools. Gender distribution differed marginally, with 44.8% of public-school teachers being male (vs. 55.2% in private schools) and 54.3% female (vs. 45.7%), though this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.132$). There was a difference in the mean age of public and private school respondents (mean age: 37.6 ± 10.13 years); 74.1% of public-school teachers were ≥ 40 years old compared to only 25.9% in private schools ($p < 0.001$). There is no variation in religious affiliation; Christian teachers are more common in both public and private schools. There are no ethnocultural differences, as Yoruba teachers dominated both public and private schools. There are more married teachers in Public secondary schools compared to private secondary schools (114% vs 75%). In public schools, respondents have a higher number of years of teaching experience compared to teachers in private schools (83% vs 33%; $p < 0.001$). The monthly salary collected by public secondary schools is higher compared to the monthly salary of private secondary school teachers. Finally, educational qualifications differed, with public schools employing fewer NCE-certified teachers (31.1% vs. 68.9% in private schools) but more HND/Bachelor's degree holders (54.0% vs. 46.0%; $p = 0.005$) while private schools employed fewer HND/Bachelor's holders and more NCE holders.

Table 1
Social Demography Characteristics

Variables	Public School (%) N = 128	Private School (%) N = 128	P-value
Age(yrs) (37.6 ± 10.13)			0.000*
< 40 years	42(30.0)	98(70.0)	
≥ 40 years	86(74.1)	30(25.9)	
Sex			0.132*
Male	52(44.8)	64(55.2)	
Female	76(54.3)	64(45.7)	
Religion			0.013*
Christianity	73(44.2)	92(55.8)	
Islam	55(60.4)	36(39.6%)	
Ethnicity			0.004*
Yoruba	115(54.0)	98(46.0)	
Igbo	13 (30.2)	30(23.4)	
Marital Status (11.0 ± 7.50)			0.000*
Never married	14(20.9)	53(79.1)	
Ever married	114(60.3)	75(39.7)	
Experience (yrs) (10.96 ± 7.497)			0.000*
≤ 10 years	45(32.1)	95(67.9)	
> 10 years	83(71.6)	33 (28.4)	
Monthly salary			0.001*
< 100,000	105(46.3)	122(53.7)	
≥ 100,000	23(79.3)	6(20.7)	
Highest level of education			0.005*
NCE	14(31.1)	31(68.9)	
HND/Bachelors	114(54.0)	97(46.0)	

*Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Knowledge of teachers on gender-based violence in public and private secondary schools in Iwo Community

Table 2 presents a comparison of knowledge of violence between public and private school teachers, highlighting differences in understanding and awareness across various forms of violence. Private school teachers show a slightly higher knowledge of the meaning of GBV compared to public school teachers (46% vs 45%; $p = 0.896$). The definition was based on the WHO-defined scope of GBV (*Gender based Violence is defined as any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, wheather occurring in public or in private life*). Furthermore, both public and private school teachers have a higher understanding of psychological violence (71.1% vs 81.3%; $p = 0.057$), domestic violence (79.7% vs 86.7%; $p = 0.132$), physical violence (88.3% vs 93%; $p = 0.198$), and sexual violence (87.5% vs 89.1%; $p = 0.698$) in the school environment, but the level of understanding of economic violence (60.9% vs 66.4%; $p = 0.363$) is low compared to other forms of violence. Additionally, private secondary school teachers have higher knowledge of the occurrence of violence in the school environment compared to teachers in public secondary schools (77.3% vs 68%; $p = 0.092$). Moreover, based on the knowledge of the respondents on the actions know as act of violence, public secondary school teachers know discipline students for wrongdoing (60.2%), preferential treatment of male students over female students (64%; $P = 0.076$), students subjected to corporal punishment (67%), rape (84.4%), verbal abuse/curses (81.3%) and use or threat to use sharp objects on classmate (78.9%) as an act of violence, while private secondary school teacher know discipline students for wrongdoing, preferential treatment of male students over female students, student subjected to corporal punishment, rape, verbal abuse/curses, female circumcision (75%; $p = 0.045$) and use or threat to use sharp objects on classmate

Table 2
Knowledge of teachers on gender-based violence in public and private secondary schools in Iwo Community (N = 256)

Variables	Public School (%)		Private School (%)		P-value
	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	
What do you understand by violence?	45(35.2)	83(64.8)	46(35.9)	82(64.1)	0.896
Which of the following do you know as a form of violence?					
Psychological violence	91(71.1)	37(28.9)	104(81.3)	24(18.8)	0.057
Domestic violence	102(79.7)	26(20.3)	111(86.7)	17(13.3)	0.132
Physical violence	113(88.3)	15(11.7)	119(93.0)	9(7.0)	0.198
Economic violence	78(60.9)	50(39.1)	85(66.4)	43(33.6)	0.363
Sexual violence	112(87.5)	16(12.5)	114(89.1)	14(10.9)	0.698
Does violence occur in the school environment?	87(68)	41(32)	99(77.3)	29(27.3)	0.092*
Actions known as an act of violence?					
Parents deprive their children of food as a form of punishment for misbehavior.	42(32.8)	86(67.2)	42(32.8)	86(67.2)	1.000
Not allowing female students to be selected as class captain/representative	61(47.7)	67(52.3)	49(38.3)	79(61.7)	0.130
Discipline students for wrongdoing	77(60.2)	51(39.8)	71(55.5)	57(44.5)	0.448
Preferential treatment of male-to-female students	83(64)	45(35.2)	96(53.6)	32(25)	0.076*
Student subjected to corporal punishment	67(52.3)	61(47.7)	78(60.9)	50(39.1)	0.165
Rape	108(84.4)	20(7.8)	108(84.4)	20(7.8)	1.000
Verbal abuse and curses	104(81.3)	24(18.8)	99(77.3)	29(22.7)	0.441
Female circumcision	59(46.1)	69(53.9)	75(58.6)	53(41.4)	0.045*
Use or threat to use sharp objects on a school or a classmate	101(78.9)	27(21.1)	106(82.8)	22(17.2)	0.427

*Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Perception of teachers on the cause of gender-based violence in public and private secondary schools

As shown in the table three, both public and private secondary school teachers in Iwo Local Government perceived GBV is caused from students living in abusive homes, beliefs in male superiority, inadequate parental care of female children, expectations of female obedience, male students' close relationships with female peers outside school, girls wearing revealing clothing, abusive parenting, alcohol consumption, pornography exposure, and pupils witnessing maternal abuse by partners. However, only private secondary school teachers (62.5%) highly perceived that familiarizing with boys can result in violence/GBV. Furthermore, Public secondary school teachers perceived males as more likely to cause violence in the school compared to teachers in private secondary schools (91.4% vs 85%; $p = 0.167$)

Table 3
Perception of teachers on the cause of gender-based violence in public and private schools in Iwo Community (N = 256)

Variables	Public School (%)		Private School (%)		P-value
	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	
What is your perception of the cause of GBV?					
Familiarizing with boys can result in violence/GBV	68(46.9)	68(53.1)	80(62.5)	48(37.5)	0.129
The belief that students who live in abusive homes can cause violence	113(88.3)	15(11.7)	115(89.8)	13(10.2)	0.689
Believing that males are superior to females causes violence	105(82)	23(41)	110(85.9)	18(14.1)	0.394
Parents are not taking adequate care of female children and infants properly	104(81.3)	24(18.8)	117(91.4)	11(8.6)	0.018*
Believing that females should obey boys and not argue results in violence	106(82.8)	22(17.2)	107(83.6)	21(16.4)	0.867
Male students' close relationships with female students outside or in the school environment result in violence	106(82.8)	22(15.6)	108(84.4)	20(15.6)	0.736
A girl wearing revealing clothing leads to violence by boys/males	119(93)	9(7)	114(89.1)	14(10.9)	0.274
The belief that abusive parenting can result in violence	121(94.5)	7(5.5)	116(90.6)	12(9.4)	0.233
Drinking alcohol by students can result in aggression/violence toward the opposite sex	125(97.7)	3(2.3)	126(98.4)	2(1.6)	0.652
Watching pornography is a major cause of violence in the school environment	120(93.8)	8(6.3)	116(90.6)	12(9.4)	0.352
Pupils who witnessed their mothers being beaten by their partners or husbands can become aggressive and cause violence	125(97.7)	3(2.3)	127(99.2)	1(0.8)	0.313
Are males more likely to cause violence in the school environment than females?	117(91.4)	11(8.6)	110(85.9)	18(14.1)	0.167

*Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

Teachers' knowledge of GBV varies between public and private secondary schools, with private school teachers demonstrating marginally stronger awareness of the WHO-defined scope of GBV (*Gender based Violence is defined as any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, wheather occurring in public or in private life*), which includes physical, sexual, and psychological violence⁽²⁶⁾. Both groups exhibit higher familiarity with overt forms like domestic, physical, and sexual violence. However, recognition of economic violence, such as financial control or resource deprivation, remains comparatively low across institutions, reflecting a global trend where subtler forms of GBV are underemphasized^(26, 27).

Private school teachers also reported greater awareness of GBV occurrences within school environments, potentially due to better access to training programs or institutional policies that prioritize violence monitoring and reporting⁽²⁷⁾. In identifying specific violent acts, public school teachers focus on overt disciplinary practices such as corporal punishment and preferential treatment of male students, and direct threats such as verbal abuse and use of sharp objects. In contrast, private school teachers additionally recognize culturally embedded practices like female circumcision as GBV^(27, 28).

This disparity suggests that private institutions may integrate broader, context-sensitive GBV frameworks into training and addressing both universal and localized manifestations of violence. Moreover, the findings underscore the need for standardized, comprehensive GBV education for teachers, particularly to address gaps in understanding economic violence and culturally specific harms^(26, 27).

Public and private secondary school teachers recognize a range of sociocultural and environmental factors contributing to GBV. Both groups actively recognize that students from abusive homes, beliefs in male superiority, parental neglect of female children, expectations of female obedience, close male-female student relationships outside school, girls wearing revealing clothing, abusive parenting, alcohol consumption, pornography exposure, and witnessing maternal abuse significantly contribute to GBV^(7, 26, 27).

However, private school teachers uniquely identified familiarizing with boys as a risk factor, likely reflecting their exposure to broader human rights education frameworks that emphasize nuanced social dynamics such as those promoted by Amnesty International's training programs in West Africa⁽²⁹⁾.

Additionally, public school teachers more frequently perceived male students as primary perpetrators of violence compared to their private school counterparts, possibly due to public schools' closer ties to communities where patriarchal norms are more entrenched and less critically examined^(7, 30).

These disparities may also stem from differences in training. Private schools often integrate systemic GBV education, enabling teachers to recognize subtler drivers like gender policing. In contrast, public schools may focus on overt behaviors due to resource constraints or curricula emphasizing individual responsibility over structural causes^(31, 32).

Conclusion

There are distinct disparities in teachers' knowledge and perceptions of GBV across public and private secondary schools. Private school teachers demonstrated marginally stronger awareness of WHO-defined GBV, including psychological, physical, and sexual categories of violence, and also recognized

culturally specific harms like female circumcision, reflecting broader, context-sensitive training frameworks.

Both groups, however, underemphasize economic violence, aligning with global trends where subtle GBV forms remain overlooked. Public school teachers focused on overt disciplinary acts like corporal punishment and disproportionately perceived male students as primary perpetrators, likely influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms in their communities. In contrast, private school teachers identified nuanced social dynamics such as "familiarizing with boys" as GBV drivers, underscoring the impact of human rights-oriented training.

These disparities highlight the critical role of institutional resources and systemic education in shaping GBV awareness. Standardized culturally responsive training is urgently needed to address gaps in economic violence recognition to harmonize understandings of structural and localized GBV drivers across all educational settings.

Declarations

This study involved human participants. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Osun State Health Research Ethics Committee (OSHREC), Ministry of Health, Osun State, Nigeria (Approval Number: **OSHREC/PRS/569T/478**). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Permission was also obtained from the relevant school authorities. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and relevant national guidelines for research involving human participants.

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