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## School-Related Gender-Based Violence Among Female Undergraduates

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### Abstrak

This study investigated the school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates. School-related gender-based violence encompasses a spectrum of gender-based violence that specifically occurs within the context of educational institutions. It refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics. Three research question. Literatures related to the studies were reviewed. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design and the population of the study comprised twenty-one thousand, eight hundred and fifty-two full-time undergraduate students in University of Benin. The multi-staged sampling technique was used to select 235 respondents for the study. A Self-structured questionnaire was used for the collection of data. The research instrument was content validated and reliability tested using test-retest reliability method. Data obtained were analyzed using inferential statistics of t-test and descriptive Statistics of frequency counts and percentages and chart. Some of the results revealed that majority of the respondents have experienced various types of school related gender-based violence that does not differ by age. With reference to the findings, the researchers recommended among others that school management should develop and implement comprehensive awareness initiatives aimed at educating students and school personnel on recognizing, preventing, and addressing school-related gender-based violence.

**Keywords:** School-related, gender-based violence, undergraduates, predictive factors.

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## INTRODUCTION

Access to quality education and a secure school environment are essential rights for every learner, laying the foundation for both socioeconomic development and security. Also, poverty reduction is a critical factor in enhancing the standard of education and elevating literacy rates within society. Therefore, the realization of Education for All (EFA) objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) four and five faces significant challenges due to the presence of gender-based violence within educational settings. Within tertiary institutions, the issue of school-related gender-based violence has emerged as a critical concern globally, affecting the educational experiences and well-being of learners (Constanza, Nicole and Matthias 2019).

When gender-based violence occur within learning institutions, the corridors of learning institutions meant to foster growth and academic excellence becomes a breeding ground where the



rights, safety, and dignity of learners are compromised. This pressing concern not only undermines their educational experiences but also infringes upon their fundamental rights, perpetuating cycles of inequality and impeding academic progress. School-related gender-based violence encompasses a spectrum of gender-based violence that specifically occurs within the context of educational institutions. It refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) & UN Women, 2016). Gender-based violence on the other hand, refer to the violence, threats of violence or harassment arising directly or indirectly from values, beliefs or customs relating to gender or sexual orientation (Davies, 2019). In a more encompassing definition, Klugman et al. (2014) noted that gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females.

Gender-based violence indeed affects individuals of all genders; however, it disproportionately impacts women and girls (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2018) due to entrenched gender inequalities prevalent in societies worldwide. In line with this, the United Nation defined gender-based violence against women as violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (World Bank Group, 2019). Additionally, while Arango et al. (2014) stated that the forms of gender-based violence include intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and forced marriage, school-related gender-based violence can take various forms ranging from pervasive forms like intimate partner sexual violence in and around educational institution, sexual harassment from fellow students and school personnel, harmful traditional practices/norms in and around learning institutions, verbal or psychological abuse from fellow students and school personnel, physical violence and educational discrimination to the subtler yet equally impactful ones like bullying from fellow students and school personnel. In alignment with this view, the Council of Europe (2017) categorized gender-based violence into four main types: physical gender-based violence, sexual gender-based violence, psychological gender-based violence, and socio-economic gender-based violence. In the same vein, Thompson (2017) noted that bullying, discrimination, sexual assault or harassment, physical violence and psychological violence are some of the most prevalent forms of school-based violence. Also, Constanza, Nicole and Matthias (2019) reported that in sub-Saharan Africa, girls reported that male teachers demanded sexual favours in exchange for good grades, preferential treatment in class, money and gifts.

Gender-based violence is a pervasive human rights violation that affects women worldwide and violence in schools is widespread with discriminatory gender norms as one of the key driving forces. Globally, millions of women are affected by gender-based violence with statistics showing that 1 in 3 women could suffer physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime (Randall & Venkatesh, 2015). It is estimated that 30% of ever-partnered women aged 15 years and older have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes globally (Palermo, Bleck & Peterman, 2014). In the western countries, the lifetime prevalence of physical or sexual violence among ever-partnered women ranges from 15% to 37% (Conroy, 2013). In Sub-Sahara Africa, gender-based violence is reported as a common practice and sexual violence prevalence is high in some countries such as Zambia and Ethiopia (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), n.d; Tantu et al., 2020). Also, studies in sub-Saharan Africa have reported prevalence rates of gender-based violence ranging from



11.6% to 75.6% (Gust et al., 2017; Owaka, Nyanchoka & Atieli, 2017; Ogum et al., 2018). In Nigeria, gender-based violence has sadly become alarming and distressing reality, infiltrating the educational sphere. In line with this, Fawole, Balogun and Olaleye (2018) stated that a high proportion of Nigerian students have experienced gender-based violence. In Ekiti State, Nigeria, Afolabi (2019) reported that sexual-related violence is the most frequent gender-based violence in tertiary institutions. Similarly, Ojo et al. (2023) noted that gender-based violence is prevalent in tertiary institutions in Abuja, Nigeria.

Furthermore, there seems to be a correlation between age and the occurrence of school related gender-based violence. As female students transition through different stages of adolescence and young adulthood, their exposure to diverse social interactions and environments evolves, impacting their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Younger female undergraduates, often new to university life, may lack experience navigating social dynamics, potentially making them more susceptible to harassment, coercion, or manipulation within peer groups or intimate relationships. Moreover, girls in younger age groups might exhibit greater naivety or eagerness to engage in social activities, inadvertently placing themselves in situations where they are more vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. Conversely, older female undergraduates might possess increased social awareness, confidence, and assertiveness, potentially serving as protective factors against gender-based violence. They might have developed stronger social networks, possess better coping mechanisms, and exhibit more informed decision-making skills when faced with potentially risky situations. Additionally, older female students may have more established romantic relationships, which, if healthy and based on mutual respect, could contribute to a reduced risk of experiencing GBV compared to those in fledgling relationships. In corroborating age as a determinant of gender-based violence, Chipanga, Chikanya and Mundagowa (2021) reported that adolescent girls (11-19 years of age) were nearly five times more likely to be victimized when compared to post-adolescent girls (20 to 24 years of age). In a similar view, Rurangirwa et al. (2017) stated that younger adolescents were at a higher risk of becoming gender-based violence victims. However, in disagreement to this finding, Ajayi (2017) reported no significant relationship between age and the experience of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is a pervasive societal issue with repercussions that extends beyond the physical and psychological harm inflicted on survivors, seeping into social structures, perpetuating cycles of trauma, and impeding progress toward equality and societal well-being. Survivors of gender-based violence commonly experience feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame, despite being victims. This internalization of blame can erode self-worth, causing individuals to perceive themselves as unworthy or at fault for the violence they endured. In agreement with this view, the Council of Europe (n.d) and Tariq (2013) reported that gender-based violence including intimate partner violence undermines a person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. In the same vein, women experiencing gender-based violence were at an increased risk of anxiety disorders, mood disorder, substance use disorder and suicide attempts (Rees et al., 2011; Andarge & Shiferaw, 2018). Also, genital discharge/injury, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and acquiring STI symptoms were the physical health outcomes reported by female students who had experienced any type of gender-based violence (Beyene, Chojenta and Loxton, 2021). From the researcher's observation school-related gender-based violence is often overlooked despite its prevalence in educational settings necessitating a deeper understanding of its root causes. Conducting a study on school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates holds immense significance in safeguarding students' well-being, informing policy decisions, empowering prevention strategies, and contributing to the global discourse on eradicating gender-based violence within educational settings.



The study was guided by the following research questions: 1. What are the types of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin? 2. Is there a difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age? 3. Is there a difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have experienced gender-based violence and those who have not experienced gender-based violence?

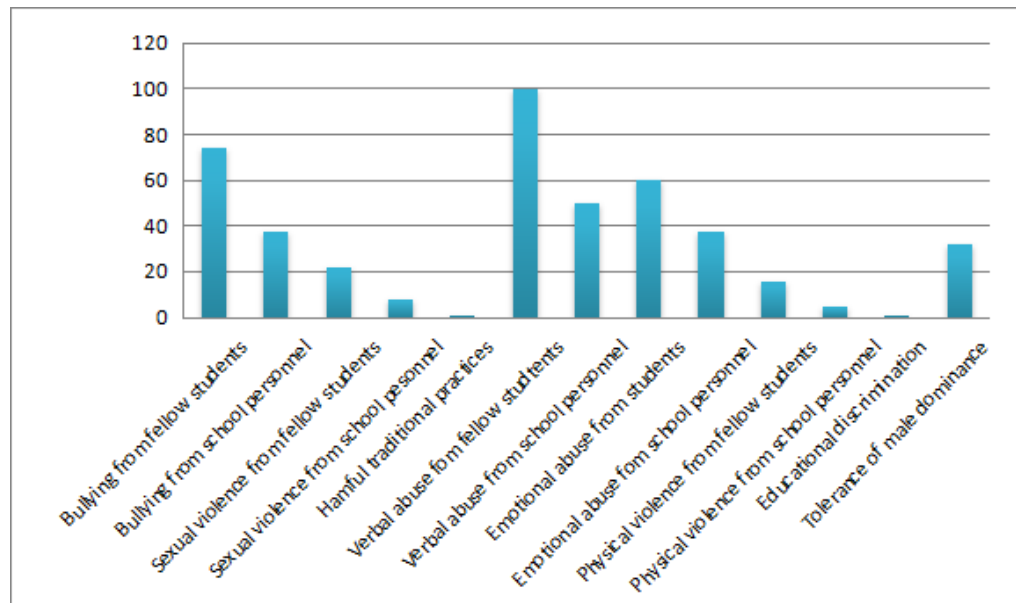
Three hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level of significance: 1. There is no significant difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age. 2. There is no significant difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have school related experienced gender-based violence and those who have experienced school related gender-based violence.

## METHODS

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The descriptive research design accurately and systematically describes, observes or validates aspects of groups collected through quantifiable information without manipulation of the variables (Siedlecki, 2020). Based on Siedlecki (2020) description of the descriptive survey research design, the researcher was able to use this design to effectively provide an in-depth investigation of predictive factors of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates. The population of the study is twenty-one thousand, eight hundred and fifty-two (21852) female full-time undergraduate students of University of Benin (University of Benin Academic Planning Unit, 2023). A sample size of 235 respondents was used for this study. The multi-stage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, simple random sampling technique of balloting by replacement was used to select five faculties out of the thirteen faculties in University of Benin. Same procedure was repeated in the second stage to select one department each from the five selected faculties. In the last stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select forty-seven respondents each from the selected department. Consent form was administered to participants and only those who filled the form were used for the study. To maintain confidentiality of the respondents, respondents were asked not to indicate their names on the questionnaires. The research instrument used for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire. The instrument was content validated and a reliability index of 0.82 was obtained using the test-retest reliability method. The collected data was coded and analyzed using inferential statistics T-test and descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages and chart.

## RESULTS

Research Question one: What are the types of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin.



**Figure 1.** Types of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin

Figure 1 shows the types of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin. It can be seen that the most common types of school-related gender-based violence were verbal abuse from fellow students, bullying from fellow students and emotional abuse from students as reported by 235(100%) 175(74.4%) and 141(60%) of the respondents. Also, educational discrimination and harmful traditional practices in/around the school environment were the least common types of school related gender-based violence as reported by only 1% of respondents respectively. Other types of school related gender-based violence reported by respondents were sexual violence from fellow students and school personnel (22.13% and 8.09% respectively), verbal and emotional abuse from school personnel (49.79% and 37.87% respectively), physical violence from fellow students and school personnel (15.74% and 4.68% respectively) and encouragement of male dominance (32.34%). It can therefore be deduced that the most common types of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates in University of Benin were verbal abuse, bullying and emotional abuse from students.

Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age.

**Table 1.**

Independent sample t-test analysis of the difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age.

	t-test value	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remark
Equal variance assumed	0.298	233	0.557	Ho retained

Table 1 shows the independent sample t-test analysis of the difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age. The





table reveals a t-test value of 0.298, degree of freedom of 233 and significance level of 0.557 which is greater than the set alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age is retained. It can therefore be inferred that the experience of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin does not differ based on age.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have experienced school related gender-based violence and those who have experienced school gender-based violence.

**Table 2.**

Independent sample t-test analysis of the difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have experienced school related gender-based violence and those who have experienced gender-based violence

	<b>t-test value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2 tailed)</b>	<b>Remark</b>
Equal variance assumed	1.177	233	0.020	Ho Rejected

Table 2 shows the independent sample t-test analysis of the difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have experienced school gender-based violence and those who have experienced school related gender-based violence. The table reveals a t-test value of 1.77, degree of freedom of 233 and significance level of 0.020 which is lesser than the set alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states there is no significant difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have experienced school related gender-based violence and those who have experienced school related gender-based violence is rejected. It can therefore be deduced that the experience of school related gender-based violence may have significantly affected the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin.

## DISCUSSION

The study revealed that female undergraduates in University of Benin have experienced various types of school related gender-based violence. This finding is in line with the finding of Fawole, Balogun and Olaleye (2018) who stated that a high proportion of Nigerian students have experienced gender-based violence. However, the most common types of school-related gender-based violence among female undergraduates in University of Benin were verbal abuse, bullying and emotional abuse from students. Again, this finding corroborates the finding of Thompson (2017) who reported that bullying and psychological violence are some of the most prevalent forms of school-based violence. The researchers believe that the prevalence of various types of school-related gender-based violence including bullying, verbal and emotional abuse among female undergraduates at the University of Benin reflects the entrenched societal norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes, normalizing behaviours that undermine the dignity of women. Also, the absence of comprehensive awareness campaigns and educational initiatives addressing gender equality contributes to a lack of understanding among students about the gravity of gender-based violence. Additionally, the inadequate support structures and reporting mechanisms fail to provide a safe space for victims to seek



assistance, perpetuating a culture of silence and making it challenging to break free from these abusive cycles.

Furthermore, the study revealed no significant difference in the occurrence of school related gender-based violence among female undergraduates of University of Benin based on age. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Ajayi (2017) reported no significant relationship between age and the experience of gender-based violence. However, this finding is in contradiction with the finding of Chipanga, Chikanya and Mundagowa (2021) and Rurangirwa et al. (2017) who reported a significant relationship between age and the occurrence of gender-based violence. In explaining this finding, the researcher believe that absence of a significant difference in the occurrence of school-related gender-based violence based on age within the study conducted at the University of Benin could be attributed to the shared exposure of students, irrespective of age, to similar university dynamics, societal influences, and cultural norms prevalent within the academic setting. Gender-based violence might pervade uniformly due to ingrained societal attitudes, creating a consistent experience for students of different ages. Additionally, underreporting stemming from stigma, fear, or distrust in reporting systems might obscure potential age-related variations.

Finally, the study revealed a significant difference in the self-esteem of female undergraduates of University of Benin who have experienced school related gender-based violence and those who have experienced school related gender-based violence. This finding is in line with the finding of the Council of Europe (n.d) and Tariq (2013) who reported that gender-based violence including intimate partner violence undermines a person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. It is the opinion of the researchers that while other factors may have impacted the self-esteem of female students at the University of Benin, including personal experiences, familial influences, and societal expectations, the significant difference in the self-esteem of female students who have experienced school-related gender-based violence and those who have not is noteworthy. School-related gender-based violence can profoundly impact self-esteem due to its direct impact on a student's sense of dignity, autonomy, and psychological well-being. The experience of bullying, verbal and emotional abuse within the academic environment for instance, can create feelings of worthlessness, shame, and insecurity. Such traumatic encounters might erode female students' confidence, leading to a diminished self-concept and a heightened sense of vulnerability. These experiences often result in a pervasive fear of judgment or further victimization, thereby affecting how these students perceive themselves and engage within their academic and social spheres.

## CONCLUSION

School-related gender-based violence is a heartbreaking betrayal of the very essence of education. School-related gender-based violence steals the opportunity for students to learn, connect, and flourish in an environment that should nurture their minds and souls. Female undergraduate students have experience various types of school related gender-based violence that does not differ based on age. Also, while various factors contribute to self-esteem, the stark difference observed between those who have experienced such school related gender-based violence and those who haven't highlights the detrimental effect of these abusive behaviours.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: The school management should develop and implement comprehensive awareness initiatives aimed at educating students and school personnel on recognizing, preventing, and addressing school-related gender-based



violence. These programs should emphasize creating a culture of respect, inclusivity, and zero tolerance for any form of abuse within the academic environment.

The school management should strengthen support systems within the university by establishing confidential reporting mechanisms, counselling services, and support groups specifically tailored to address the needs of students affected by gender-based violence regardless of their age. This inclusive framework acknowledges that students across various age groups might experience similar challenges related to school related gender-based violence.

The school management develop empowerment programs and workshops aimed at rebuilding and bolstering the self-esteem of female undergraduates who have experienced school-related gender-based violence. These initiatives should focus on resilience-building, fostering self-confidence, and providing tools to navigate the emotional impact of such traumatic experiences, ensuring a conducive environment for their academic and personal growth.

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