

SOCIAL IMPACT OF LOW-LEVEL VIOLENCE: PERSPECTIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOKOTO METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

LADAN Sirajo Alhaji¹, NASARAWA Jamila Abubakar², MUSA Abubakar Sadiq³
sirajoshu@gmail.com, jamilanasarawa@ssu.edu.ng.com, Mabubakarsadiq10@gmail.com

Department of Education Foundations¹
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Department of Educational Foundations²
Sokoto State University, Sokoto

Department of Educational Foundations³
ShehuShagari College of Education, Sokoto

Abstract

This study explored social impact of low-level violence in secondary schools within Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria. Qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was used. The population of the study consisted of 854 SSII students of secondary schools in Sokoto metropolis out of which Purposive sampling Techniques was used to sample 20 students based on recommendation in Qualitative design where emphasis is given to a limited or small sample size. In-depth interview guide was used for data collection and its Content Validity of In-depth interview guide was ascertained by two (2) Sociologists of Education from the Department of Education Foundations Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto while for reliability, this study selected three informants and took the transcribed data to them who evaded any inconsistency or discrepancies in the way they identified information within their views and thought. Thematic analysis revealed that students experience both physical and non-physical forms of low-level violence, including corporal punishment, sexual harassment, psychological bullying, and social stigmatization. These behaviors, often perpetrated by teachers, peers, and senior students, have profound social consequences which include low self-esteem, social withdrawal and negative peer relationships among others. The study concluded that low-level violence in secondary schools in Sokoto Metropolis is deeply embedded in school culture and significantly harmful to students' emotional and social well-being. On this basis, it was recommended among other things that, Ministry of Basic and Secondary education in Sokoto and the managements of Secondary schools should enforce clear anti-violence policies specifically addressing both physical and non-physical low-level violence that prevails in secondary schools.

Keywords: Low-Level Violence, Interactionism, Bullying, School culture

Citation: Ladan, S. A., Nasarawa, J. A., Musa, A.S. (2025). Social Impact of Low-Level Violence: Perspectives of Secondary School Students in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria. *Confluence Journal of Education and Knowledge Management*, 2992-2518 (Print) 2992-2526 (Online), Volume 2 (2), pages: 104 - 114. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19098381>.

Introduction

School is regarded as an institution where different patterns of social interactions are consciously and unconsciously designed to shape the behaviour of younger ones to conform to the norms of society. According to Ballantine and Spade (2012), school is one of the safest institutions in society, where practices are believed to impart acceptable behaviour, knowledge, and social norms, preparing students for future roles. Sociologists acknowledge this role but point out that there are undesirable aspects of school culture that often go unreported because they are taken for granted (Meighan, 2015). Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) described those undesirables and often ignored aspects as “*Low-level violence*”. Such violence refers to behaviours or school practices that are violent in nature or sources of violence but are

overlooked because they are perceived as normal parts of school culture. These may arise from both written and unwritten rules, beliefs, or norms used to instill school values in learners.

While incidents of “high-level school violence” such as murder, rape, or shootings attract wide media and public attention, Duffer and Meyer-Adams (2020) noted that such cases are relatively rare. In contrast, low-level violence such as bullying, battery, victimization, or psychological maltreatment of students by teachers receives little attention despite being widespread. Studies show that low-level violence is a common experience among students globally (Craig et al., 2009). In Nigeria, Adewutya et al. (2023) found that 51.9% of in-school adolescents had experienced at least one form of bullying. Similarly, Adebayo (2018) reported that physical bullying, such as kicking, pushing, or threats, was the most common. UNICEF (2007) identified various forms of violence in basic education physical, psychological, sexual, gender-based, and health-related while UNESCO reported that physical (85%) and psychological (50%) violence accounted for the majority of school-related violence. Ladan and Nasiru (2022) further classified low-level violence in Nigerian schools into physical and non-physical forms, and Ighaede et al. (2023) found that about 51.9% of students had been bullied, while 27.9% admitted to bullying others. Despite its prevalence, low-level violence has severe effects on students’ well-being. Hertz et al. (2017) linked it to anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance. Smith (2016) observed that it negatively affects students’ social relationships, leading to isolation and reduced empathy. Similarly, Olweus (2003) found that exposure to violence can increase aggression, while Olabiyi (2021) reported that bullying significantly impacts students’ anxiety and peer isolation, though not absenteeism.

Statement of the Problem

Low-level violence in schools has been found to be very rampant and pervasive issue that affects students' well-being in the context where studies were conducted. Despite its prevalence globally, there is a paucity of research on the forms and social impact of low-level violence on students in Nigeria, particularly in Sokoto Metropolis. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of students and the effects of low-level violence on their social interactions.

The problem this study seeks to address is the existing gap in understanding low-level violence in schools. Specifically, the study aims to explore, from the students’ perspective, the various forms of low-level violence they experience and how such violence affects their social interactions.

While there is a growing body of research on violence in schools, there is a need for more studies on low-level violence, particularly in the Nigerian context. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the social impact of low-level violence among secondary school students in Sokoto metropolis, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the forms of low-level violence experienced by secondary school students in Sokoto Metropolis.
- To explore the social effects of low-level violence on students’ interpersonal relationships.

Research Questions

The Research Questions for the study are as follows:

- What forms of low-level violence do students experience in their schools?
- How does low level violence affect students’ social relationship?

Methodology

The study adopts Descriptive Phenomenology as a Qualitative research design suitable for this study according to Giorgi (2020) in understanding human experiences. Hence, this study is an attempt to assess and understand in details the research problem from the perspective of students who experience it. The population of the study is all SSII students in three (3) secondary schools in Sokoto metropolis.

The sample of the study consisted of twenty (20) SS II Students purposively selected from the three (3) secondary schools in Sokoto Metropolis. As argues by Merriam (2002), in Qualitative study, less attention is given to number of the respondents (informants), the objective of the research can be achieved with few number of the informants. Instead, emphasis is being placed on informants with deep information on the subject matter being studied to ensure efficient and credible study outcome. UNESCO (2019) also justified the selection of SS II by suggesting that SSII having spent 3 years at junior level and additional year at senior level has more experience of school violence. In addition, the informants were suggested by their Counsellors as students with experience of low-level violence.

The instrument used for data collection was in-depth interview guide which contains items that are in lined with research questions. Content Validity of In-depth interview guide was ascertained by two (2) Sociologists of Education from the Department of Education Foundations Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto who scrutinized the guide and ensure that it is in line with research questions and objectives of the study. To ascertain the reliability however, this study selected three informants and took the transcribed data to them who evaded any inconsistency or discrepancies in the way they identified information within their views and thought. This enabled the informants to suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspective.

Approval to conduct the interview with students was obtained from the managements of the 8 secondary schools. Based on the recommendations of Guidance and Counselling officers of schools, the researcher conducted interview with informants using interview schedule, note pad and voice recording devise. Thematic method was used and data analysis was done through the following stages namely: Transcribing stage where data recorded was transcribed in written, familiarization stage which was with reading and re-reading the transcribed data, coding and organization where related data from interviews of the respondents was organized into themes and sub-themes in lined with research questions raised for the study.

Results

The results represent analysis of data collected from the 20 informants at eight (8) secondary schools in Sokoto metropolis. For confidentiality, informants were represented by letter I, or example, informant 1(I1).

Thematic Analysis of the Results

Themes generated from the data were categorized into themes and sub-themes. The two themes are:

1. Forms of low-level violence students experienced
2. Social Impact of Low-level Violence on Students

Theme 1: Forms of low-level violence students experienced

With respect to this theme, this study identified many sub-themes which are the forms of low-level violence in schools found after the interview with key informants. They can be grouped into two major low-level violence namely: physical and non-physical low-level violence. Under these two broad categories, many sub-themes emerged on the basis of responses are considered forms of low-level violence.

Bullying: Many informants described bullying as a prevalent form of low-level violence in schools which manifests in form of threats, intimidation and exclusion among others which is done on the basis of some

factors such as height, weight, skin, colour, academic ability or disabilities among others. (I3, I5, I7, and I12).

I frequently call with bullies that reflect my dark complexion by teachers, seniors and even mates. They would say things like, the black, why are you so black? Or Can we even see you in the dark (I3)

Informant (I17) recounted his experience with bullying in school, highlighting how his unusual physical appearance particularly his height made him a frequent target. According to him (I17), this trait, which is naturally part of his identity, became the basis for mockery, intimidation, and social exclusion.

Teachers and fellow students call me names like camel, skyscraper, or tree often laughing at how I towered over everyone else (I17).

Alongside these informants, I18 also faced bullying related low-level violence.

Teachers, seniors and peers make derogatory remarks to me, sometimes they compare me with charcoal or darkness, and joke about me being invisible at night. These comments were both hurtful and humiliating, leaving lasting emotional scars (I18).

Informant (I14) described how his obesity made him a constant target for mockery.

They call me with names such as fatty, elephant or big head and they laugh at me when I walked by. They would sometimes mimic the way I moved or made jokes about the way I ate during lunch breaks. These remarks were not only demeaning but also created an atmosphere that made school feel like a hostile place (I14).

Another informant gave his own experience of bullying this way:

Bullying was not always loud or obvious at times, it came in the form of isolation being left out of group activities or conversations or classmates shifting away from him as if his presence was unwelcome. This subtle but persistent exclusion was just as damaging as the verbal insults (I16).

Hitting: Forms of physical aggression such as punching, slapping, spanking, kicking, and beating were identified by I2, I6, I10, and I17 as routine practices in school.

I can recall while I was in SSI a teacher beat me multiple times for failing to answer a question in the class (I2).

Another informant with similar view expressed concern about how such violent actions are normalized and often justified as disciplinary measures.

I was slapped by a teacher for answering question wrongly even though he was the one who initially encouraged me to make an attempt (I17).

Still on this sub-theme (hitting) other informants I12, I14 and I15 recounted a deeply troubling incident that occurred during their time in junior secondary school.

I can recall how senior students routinely exerted their authority through frequent use of strokes and beating and other physical aggressions, often under the guise of maintaining discipline or enforcing school traditions (I12).

Similarly I14 stated that:

I vividly remembered time when I was punched in the chest and kicked in the legs by a senior student simply because I failed to bring water for their laundry (I14).

Use of Hard Labour: Informants such as I4, I9, and I13 discussed the use of hard labour as a low-level violence which they are subjected often for minor offenses. Works like cutting grass, fetching water, or carrying heavy objects were reported.

I was forced to clear overgrown fields under the sun for coming late to class(I4), while I13who also narrated the same experience emphasized that such practices can be exploitative and degrading.

Corporal Punishments for Violation of Rules: A common theme, as described by I1, I8, I11, and I16, was the use of corporal punishment for even slight breaches of school rules.

I still remember the humiliation of being forced to kneel down under the scorching sun as punishment. It was not just about the physical discomfort that hurt, it was the public shaming. Being made to do this in front of both junior and fellow classmate was very embarrassing. It left a lasting impact on my self-esteem (I1).

The informants (I1, I8, I11and I16) unanimously indicated that these punishments are used arbitrarily and can escalate to physical abuse. Some informants expressed concern that these punishments instill fear rather than discipline.

Sexual Assault on Students: Although none of the informants share personal experience on this sub-theme, some of them including I3, I7 and I18reported disturbing instances of sexual assault affecting both female and male students.

Battery: Informants such as I10 and I15 gave their own perspectives on cases of outright battery, describing them as unprovoked physical attacks, often from senior students or staff members.

A teacher tried to hit me with a cane aiming for my back. But when I flinched, the cane accidentally hit my eye. I can still recall the pain was intense and I ended up in the hospital facing a serious risk of losing my eye but God saved it. But the incident left a lasting impact on my vision (I10).

Incidence of this nature though less frequent, has severe physical and emotional consequences.

Verbal Aggression: Informants I5, I11and I20 mentioned instances where teachers and senior students shouted at or insulted their juniors. These incidents were cited as damaging to students' self-esteem. I5 stated that constant yelling creates atmosphere that stifles learning. I20 believed such verbal abuse reflects a broader culture of disrespect.

Indecent Sexual Comments, Gestures, and Jokes: I9, I14, and I19 reported the frequent use of sexually suggestive comments, jokes, and gestures directed at students.

At a point, I began to avoid certain students or areas of the school to escape these comments about specific parts of my body that are God given (I14).

These actions were often dismissed as harmless by perpetrators but left victims feeling uncomfortable and violated.

Coerced Sexual Intercourse for Favors: One of the most serious themes raised by I6, I13and I18 was the coercion of students into sexual acts in exchange for gifts, money, or academic grades. Although no personal experience was shared during the interview but I6narrated a case where a female student was pressured by a teacher with the promise of better grades. It was understood on the basis of information obtained during the interview that these situations often go unreported due to fear of stigma and disbelief.

Labelling with Negative Phrases: According to I2, I8, and I17students are sometimes subjected to verbal labels such as idiot, empty head or you only know how to eat.

I knew of a very slow learner while we were at JSSI who had to change school because of the constant use of these negative levels. There are certain teachers that anytime he was unable to answer their questions correctly they use negative labels on him such doll, empty head, donkey, you only know how eat among other labels (I17).

These negative labels often used by teachers are said to have long-term impacts on students' confidence and self-worth. I17 shared how a student dropped out after persistent verbal humiliation.

Information during interview with some informants revealed that despite reporting these different forms of low level violence to a teachers, discipline masters, parents who later reported to school authorities, the acts continued to occur as if no action was taken, as such behaviors were often dismissed as part of the normal school life.

Theme 2: Social Impact of Low-level Violence on Students

On the basis of responses that emerged from the analysis of data obtained, some sub-themes were found as social impact of low-level violence on students. They are outlined and explained as reported as follow:

Negative Emotional Impact: Negative emotional impact was also reported by some informant:

When I was labeled with names like charcoal or darkness, and joke about him being invisible at night, it is hurtful and humiliating and these of comments leave lasting emotional scars in me (I11).

Loss of Self-Esteem and Confidence: One of the impacts of low-level violence reported by informants was on their level of confidence.

One of the most significant impacts of the bullying I experienced was the erosion of my confidence. It was not just about hurtful jokes or teasing, the bullying was rooted in social exclusion, making me feel like an outsider. This experience had a profound effect on my self-perception and ability to interact with others (I3).

Another (I8) informant who was bullied because of his obesity narrated its impact which is related to confidence sub-themes.

Such bullies like fatty and elephant among others made me doubt my worth. At some points, I started wondering if there was something fundamentally wrong with me that made them treat me this way(I8).

Similarly, Informants like **I3, I7, I9,** and **I17** mentioned that repeated exposure to low-level violence (such as insults, ridicule, or labelling) leads to a **decline in students' self-esteem**. **I3** described a student who, after being repeatedly called “empty head” by a teacher, stopped participating in class discussions. **I7** noted that some students become overly self-conscious, avoid social interactions, and exhibit signs of low self-worth. These emotional effects often hinder students’ ability to interact well in peer groups.

Social Withdrawal and Isolation: Some informants reported being isolated and in some cases isolated themselves from some activities as results of bullies on them and feared of being bullied.

The physical bully I experienced from seniors while at JSS III made me feel like outcast.

The slapping I received left me humiliated and embarrassed. I started to avoid social interactions especially while we were in the hostel fearing I would be targeted again. I feel like I did not belong and my self-esteem fell (I9).

Many informants, including **I2, I10,** and **I13,** observed that victims of verbal abuse, sexual harassment, or bullying tend to **withdraw from peers and social gatherings**. **I2** noted that a female student who was subjected to indecent sexual jokes by male classmates became unusually quiet and refused to engage in extracurricular activities. **I10** highlighted that this social withdrawal makes students vulnerable to depression and alienation, creating a cycle of exclusion and emotional distress.

Development of Aggressive or Violent Behavior: A number of informants, such as I4, I5, and I14, indicated that low-level violence often lead to aggressive tendencies in students. I5 pointed out that students who are frequently beaten or harshly disciplined by teachers may start to see aggression as a legitimate way to handle conflicts. I14 described how bullied students later became bullies themselves, perpetuating a culture of violence. This internalization of violence affects not only peer relationships but also classroom interaction and group collaboration.

Distrust of Authority and Breakdown of Student-Teacher Relationships: Informants I6, I11, and I15 emphasized lack of trust between students and school authorities as a significant social impact. I6

observed that when teachers or senior students abuse their power through corporal punishment or insults, students begin to view authority figures with suspicion. I15 mentioned that this lack of trust discourages students from reporting issues, seeking help or forming meaningful mentoring relationships, leading to a breakdown in the school's support system.

Stigmatization and Peer Rejection: According to I1, I8, and I18, students who are frequently labelled with derogatory names or ridiculed for their background or appearance often experience stigmatization. I1 shared that some students are mocked for their socioeconomic status, which leads to social segregation and exclusion from peer networks. I8 discussed the long-term effects of such rejection, including reluctance to trust peers or form close friendships.

Impact on Academic Group Participation: Several informants, like I9, I16 and I20 discussed how low-level violence affects student collaboration and group learning. Victims of violence tend to avoid participating in study groups, discussions, or joint projects for fear of mockery or conflict. I16 noted that this not only hampers the individual's academic growth but also creates barriers to academic classroom interactions.

Gender-based Social Impact: I12, I17, and I19 highlighted that the social consequences of violence differ between male and female students, especially regarding **sexual harassment**. I12 explained that female students subjected to indecent comments or sexual coercion may be forced avoid social interaction especially in co-education settings.

Reinforcement of Negative Stereotypes and Prejudices: Informants such as I5, I10, and I18 noted that the labelling and name-calling some students can reinforce stereo types and social divisions. For example, students from poorer families being called bush people or village kids by others fosters class-based discrimination. I18 emphasized that these social barriers affect unity, collaboration, and the sense of community in schools.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study largely agree with previous studies reviewed. For example, Craig et al. (2009) and Adewutya et al. (2023) highlighted the high prevalence of bullying among adolescents, consistent with the present study's evidence of widespread bullying in secondary schools in Sokoto metropolis. Similarly, Hertz et al. (2017) and Smith (2016) described the psychological impacts of violence—such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation which are reflected in the emotional scars and social withdrawal reported by the study's informants.

Moreover, Olweus (2003) found that exposure to violence can lead to aggression among students, which aligns with this study's finding that some victims of low-level violence later became aggressors themselves.

However, the study shows some disagreement with Olabiyi (2021), who found that bullying, had no significant impact on school absenteeism. Although absenteeism was not directly investigated in this paper, the profound effects on students' emotional well-being and social interactions reported suggest that absenteeism could potentially be an outcome if not addressed over time.

Unlike previous studies that focus heavily on peer bullying, this study emphasizes the role of teachers and staff as perpetrators of low-level violence is a less highlighted issue in some earlier research. This finding adds new dimensions regarding authority-student relations in Nigerian secondary schools.

Conclusion

The study concludes that low-level violence in secondary schools in Sokoto Metropolis is deeply embedded in school culture, and significantly harmful to students' emotional and social well-being. Both physical and non-physical forms of violence negatively impact students' self-esteem and social

relationships. Without appropriate interventions, these experiences harm individual students and perpetuate a hostile school environment that undermines education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Ministry of Basic and Secondary education in Sokoto and the managements of Secondary schools should enforce clear anti-violence policies specifically addressing both physical and non-physical low-level violence that prevails in secondary schools.
- Functional and confidential counseling units should be established or strengthened within schools to provide emotional support for victims and promote conflict resolution. Similarly, Teachers, administrators, and senior students should undergo regular training to recognize, prevent, and address low-level violence. Emphasis should be placed on building respectful teacher-student and peer relationships.

References

- Adebayo, A. A. (2018). Bullying in Nigerian schools: Prevalence, consequences, and prevention. *Journal of Educational Research*, 111(4), 432-441.
- Adewuya, A. O., et al. (2023). Prevalence and predictors of bullying among in-school adolescents in Nigeria. *Journal of Taibah University Medical Sciences*, 18(2), 155-162.
- Ballantine, J.H. & Spade, J.Z (2012). *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education*, London, SAGE publications Inc.
- Craig W., Harel-Fisch Y., & Fogel-Grinvald H. (2009). A cross-national profile of bullying and victimization among adolescents in 40 countries. *International Journal of Public Health*, 54(2), 155-164.
- Dupper, D.R. & Meyer-Adams, N. (2020) *Low Level Violence as Neglected Aspect of School Culture*. J.H Ballantine, and J.Z, Spade (ed.) *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education*, London, SAGE publications Inc Pp. 225-233
- Giorgi, A. (2020). In defense of scientific phenomenologies. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 51(2), 135–161. DOI: 10.1163/15691624-12341375
- Hertz, M., et al. (2017). The impact of violence on children's mental health and well-being. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(3), 277-286.
- Ighaede, I.G., Olawade, D.B, Jonathan L. & David-Olawade A.C (2023). Prevalence and predictors of bullying among in-school adolescents in Nigeria retrieved 2/4/2025 from 10.1016/j.jtumed.2023.05.009
- Ladan, S.A and Yabo, N.M (2022) Exploring low level violence as neglected aspects of school culture: impact on academic self-concept of learners
- Merriam, B., S. (2002). *Qualitative Research (First edit)*. U.S.A: jossey Bass A Wiley I.M printers San Francisco U.S.A.
- Olabiyi O.B (2016). Impact of Bullying on Psychosocial Adjustment of School-Aged Children in Nigeria. *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies* - 2, 2 229-241
- Olweus, D. (2003). A profile of bullying at school. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 12-17.
- Smith, P. K. (2016). Bullying in schools: A review of the evidence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 25, 149-155.

UNICEF. (2019). Assessment of Violence against Children at the Basic Education Level in Nigeria
retrieved on 26/9/2022 from <http://nigeriahealthwatch.com>