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KNOWLEDGE, PREVALENCE AND SEVERITY OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN ODEDA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OGUN STATE

OLAJIDE B. I^a, OLOYEDE D. O^a, IDOWU-KOLEADE T. A^b, OLURIN T. K^a,
ADEBAMIRO, A. A.^b, ADUBI K. O^a and OLATUJA M. N. ^a.

^aDepartment of Home Science and Management
College of Food Science and Human Ecology
&

Nimbe Adedipe Library^b
Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

idowuta@funaab.edu.ng,
olajidebi@funaab.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a critical issue affecting adolescents worldwide, with severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences. This study investigates the knowledge, prevalence, and severity of GBV among in-school adolescents in Odeda Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design and multi-stage sampling technique, 400 respondents were randomly selected and administered a standardized questionnaire. Data analysis via SPSS revealed that most respondents (64.3%) were between 10-13 years old, female (66.7%), and lived with both parents (92.2%). More than 342 (88.6%) pupils demonstrated a good understanding of GBV, recognizing its link to gender and societal impact. Although the reported prevalence of GBV was low (11.0%), the study found varying levels of severity, including severe emotional (36.3%), moderate sexual (34.5%), and mild physical GBV. The study concludes that GBV occurs among adolescents, albeit at a low rate. Providing in-school adolescents with timely information on GBV is crucial and requires a growing trend of awareness towards a culture of lifelong learning. To better address GBV, it is recommended that disaggregated data be collected and published to identify trends and patterns, ultimately providing students with clear guidance on tackling the issue

Key Words: Knowledge, prevalence, severity, in-school adolescents, librarians, information scientists.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive and challenging human rights issues of our time, affecting millions of individuals worldwide regardless of their cultural, economic or social background. The United Nations (2020) defines gender-based violence as any act that results in or is likely to, in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to individuals based on their gender. Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls, although men and boys can also be victims of gender based violence. Some features are common in all GBV occurrences. GBV is universal across all races, class, tribes, sex, rich or poor (Ellsberg et al., 2015), a multidimensional problem (Mahlori, Byrne, and Mabude, 2018), a silent scourge, affecting mostly women (Mahlori et al., 2018). GBV occurs in public and private setting (Glass, Perrin, et al., 2018). Its occurrences are highly unreported due to: blame by family members, stigma, fear of reprisal, and the law enforcement levity (Gashaw, Schei, and Magnus, 2018).

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses a disturbingly wide range of abuses, including physical violence, such as hitting, slapping, choking, and using weapons. According to Gibbs, Dunkle, and Jewkes (2018), physical violence can lead to severe health consequences, both immediate (bruises, fractures) and long-term (chronic pain, disabilities). Sexual violence, another prevalent form of GBV, includes rape, sexual assault, and harassment, which can have devastating physical and psychological impacts on survivors (Decker, Wilcox, Holliday and Webster, 2018).

Psychological violence, or emotional abuse, is a less visible but equally damaging form of GBV, characterized by behaviors that erode self-worth and independence, such as constant criticism, humiliation, and control. According to Dokkedahl, Kok, Murphy, Kristensen, Bech-Hansen and Elklit (2019), its effects can be long-lasting and severe, leading to depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Economic violence, a growing concern, involves controlling access to economic resources, threatening victims' financial security and independence, and trapping them in abusive relationships due to financial dependence (Gibbs, Dunkle and Jewkes, 2018).

In this study, an in-school adolescent refers to a young person aged 10-19, actively enrolled and attending junior high, senior high, or secondary school. This definition specifically targets students experiencing gender-based violence within the school setting, enabling an examination of their knowledge, experiences, prevalence, and severity of such incidents.

According to Davenport and Prusak (1998), knowledge is a dynamic blend of experience, values, context, and expertise that enables individuals to interpret new information. They emphasize that knowledge resides in the minds of those who possess it. Semertzaki (2011) similarly defines knowledge as the product of mental processes shaped by experience, education, and background, where information becomes meaningful through individual interpretation and contextualization.

For in-school adolescents, knowledge of GBV involves understanding its forms, recognizing signs, and knowing where to seek help. Shaped by their experiences, education, and social context, this knowledge empowers adolescents to build healthy relationships, challenge harmful norms, and support peers experiencing GBV, ultimately promoting a culture of respect and safety in schools.

Access to information is crucial for in-school adolescents' knowledge about GBV, empowering them to identify healthy relationships, make informed decisions about their sexual health, recognize abuse signs, and seek help when needed. This, in turn, fosters a safer, more supportive learning environment (Agu et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2006).

The prevalence of gender-based violence is alarming. According to the WHO (2021), about one in three women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, predominantly from intimate partners. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation, with increased domestic violence cases reported during lockdowns (UN Women, 2021). This highlights the complex link between social stressors and GBV, underscoring the need for comprehensive strategies to address this urgent issue. When examining gender-based violence among adolescents (ages 10-19), it's crucial to recognize their unique vulnerabilities and manifestations. During this stage of rapid physical, emotional, and social change, adolescents are particularly susceptible to various forms of GBV, including physical violence, sexual violence, emotional/psychological abuse, and economic abuse.

Research by Decker, Wilcox, Holliday and Webster (2018) highlights adolescents' heightened vulnerability to intimate partner violence, sexual coercion, and harassment, often fueled by societal norms and power imbalances. UNESCO's (2019) survey found 31% of adolescent girls and 28% of adolescent boys experienced sexual violence or harassment in educational institutions, underscoring schools as both risk environments and critical intervention points for addressing adolescent GBV. According to UNGEI (2014), gender-based violence has devastating short- and long-term repercussions, severely impacting victims' mental, physical, and sexual health. Morrison, Ellsberg, and Bott, (2007) noted that GBV's harmful effects pose a

significant risk factor for various health problems, including mental disorders, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular issues, and premature death. Victims may experience suicidal thoughts, depression, PTSD, risky sexual behavior, and substance abuse, among other symptoms (Werwie, Hildon, Camara, Mbengue, Vondrasek, Mbaye, ... Babalola, 2019).

In Nigeria, in-school teenagers are disproportionately affected by various forms of violence, often unreported even to parents. Girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, frequently perpetrated by those close to them. This study assessed the knowledge, prevalence, and severity of GBV among in-school adolescents in secondary schools, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and intervention. The study assessed the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and examined the level of their knowledge on gender-based violence. It also determined the prevalence of gender-based violence within the population and evaluated the severity of such experiences among the respondents.

Research Questions

The study sought to investigate the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study area, find out their knowledge level about gender-based violence, determine the prevalence of gender-based violence among the respondents and evaluate the severity of gender-based violence among the population under study.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a descriptive survey design, in which quantitative data was collected from a sample that represented the population of the study area. The study area was Odeda Local Government Area. Odeda Local Government is in Ogun State, Southwest geopolitical region of Nigeria. It has an area of 1,560km² and a population of 109,449 as at 2006 census. The LGA is made of three zones, namely: Odeda, Opeji and Ilugun Zones. The LGA is made up of ten (10) wards: Alabata, Alagbagba, Balogun, Itesi, Obantoko, Obete, Odeda, Opemeji, Olodo, and Osiele wards. It has eighteen (18) Government-owned Junior and Senior Secondary Schools. These schools have a total number of 10,108 students both in junior and senior classes as at 2020/2021 academic session (Ogun State Universal Basic Education Board, 2021). The targeted population for the study consisted of students in all the Junior Secondary Schools in the Area. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 387 respondents for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 3 Junior Secondary Schools out of 18 Secondary Schools. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 134 students from each selected schools in stage 1. Convenience sampling technique was used to select minimum of 67 respondents from JSS 1 and JSS 2 of the selected schools in stage 2.

A well-structured questionnaire from similar studies was used to collect data. These comprised of four sections namely; Section A describing the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B consists of eleven items assessing respondents' knowledge on gender-based violence. Items were adapted from a questionnaire developed by al-Khaddam (2022), It was a 3-point Likert scale, scores ranging from Agree=1, No Idea=2 and Disagree=3. Section C determined the prevalence of GBV in the study area. A questionnaire developed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2023) and titled 'Youth Risk Behaviour Survey was adopted. It comprises of twelve questions on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Very often i.e. more than 10 times in the past year (4) to Never (0), the reliability coefficient is 0.85. Section D investigated the severity of occurrence of gender-based violence among the respondents. A scale by Abdullahi, Kochuthresiamma and Garba (2017) was adopted. The section contains 3 questions scored as

Mild = 3, Moderate= 2 and Severe = 1 and the alpha reliability value is 0.91. An on-spot distribution and retrieval after completion was the procedure for data collection. A research assistance was also recruited in administering the questionnaires. Data were analyzed for descriptive statistics comprising of prevalence, percentage, mean and standard deviation using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic data revealed the age distribution of respondents as follows: 64.3% were between 10-13 years old, 34.7% were between 14-16 years old, and a small minority (1.0%) were 17 years or older. With regards to gender distribution, female respondents (66.7%) outnumbered their male counterpart (33.3%). The religious affiliation of the respondents showed that 58.7% practiced Christianity, 40.5% practiced Islam and 0.8% were traditional worshippers. The ethnicity of the respondents indicated that Yoruba were predominant (85.0%), followed by Igbo (10.5%) and Hausa (4.5%). The educational level of the parents showed that 13.5% had primary education, 67.7% had secondary education and 18.8% had tertiary education. Nearly all the parents of the respondents' had formal education, which is consistent with the study's location in southwestern Nigeria, a region known for higher levels of female educational attainment and empowerment as shown in the work of Oladokun and Alawode, (2024). Also, this may have contributed to the reason why the majority of the respondents were females. Most respondents (92.2%) lived with both parents, while 4.3% lived with their mother, 0.5% lived with their father and 3.0% lived with a guardian respectively.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents		
SN	Variables	Percentage %
1	Gender	
	Male	33.3
	Female	66.7
2	Age	
	10-13	64.3
	14-16	34.7
	17 and above	1.0
3	Religious affiliation	
	Christianity	58.7
	Islam	40.5
	Traditional worshippers	0.8
4	Ethnicity	
	Yoruba	85.0
	Igbo	10.5
	Hausa	4.5
5	Educational level of parents	
	Primary education	13.5
	Secondary school education	67.7
	Tertiary education	18.8
6	Family background	
	Lived with both parents	92.2
	Lived with their mother	4.3
	Lived with their father	0.5
	Lived with a guardian	3.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Research Question Two: Respondents knowledge level on gender based violence

Table 2: Respondents Knowledge Level on Gender based Violence

S/N	Statement	Agreed	No Idea	Disagreed	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
1	Gender-based violence means the feeling to be lower when compared to others.	170 (44.2%)	62 (16.1%)	153 (39.7%)	1.96	0.92	11th
2	Gender-based violence means preventing a person from expressing their opinions in social situations	233 (60.8%)	41 (10.7%)	109 (28.5%)	1.68	0.89	8th
3	Gender-based violence means taking a person's money or refraining a person from spending from their money	197 (51%)	62 (16.1%)	127 (32.9%)	1.82	0.9	10th
4	Gender-based violence means the rooting of masculine dominance culture in the society	218 (56.5%)	70 (18.1%)	98 (25.4%)	1.69	0.85	9th
5	Marital assault in all its forms directly affects the woman's psychological and physical health	329 (85.2%)	35 (9.1%)	22 (5.7%)	1.2	0.53	4th
6	Actual assault or tending to commit assault and expressing feeling of anger towards the husband, the wife or both by means of hitting, insulting or cursing	339 (87.8%)	27 (7%)	20 (5.2%)	1.19	0.5	2nd
7	Gender-based violence means using force against women	269 (69.7%)	53 (13.7%)	64 (16.6%)	1.47	0.76	7th
8	Gender-based violence means various forms of physical, sexual, verbal and psychological harm practised by a party to oblige another party to do certain acts or refrain from doing them	342 (88.6%)	24 (6.2%)	20 (5.2%)	1.17	0.49	1st
9	Gender-based violence means any act characterised by assault and ending with a problem.	321 (83.2%)	35 (9.1%)	30 (7.8%)	1.25	0.59	5th
10	Gender-based violence means any act characterised by using force against someone who lacks it	299 (77.5%)	42 (10.9%)	45 (11.7%)	1.34	0.68	6th
11	Gender-based violence means an aggressive behaviour based on gender	338 (87.8%)	22 (5.7%)	25 (6.5%)	1.19	0.53	2nd
	Weighted Mean				1.45		

Source: Field Survey, 2024

From the table above, a lower mean score, corresponds to a higher knowledge of GBV. Key findings indicated that 88.6% (mean score of 1.17) understands GBV as encompassing physical, sexual, verbal, and psychological harm to compel or prevent certain actions, 87.8% agreed that GBV involves aggressive behavior based on gender (mean score of 1.19). Likewise, Additionally, 87.8% agree that actual assault or tendencies to commit assault, as well as expressions of anger through hitting or insulting, are forms of gender-based violence, leading to a mean score of 1.19. However, Gender-based violence means the feeling to be lower when compared to others ranked least in knowledge with a percentage of 44.2% (mean score of 1.96).

Moreover, the concept of gender-based violence as taking or controlling someone's money is less accepted, with 51% agreement and a mean score of 1.82. Preventing someone from expressing their opinions socially is recognized by 60.8% with a mean score of 1.68, and the idea that it involves feeling inferior compared to others is least accepted, with only 44.2% agreeing and a mean score of 1.96. These results suggest varying levels of knowledge and understanding regarding the broader implications and manifestations of gender-based violence.

Table 3: Prevalence of Gender based violence among the Respondents

S/N	STATEMENT	VO F (%)	OF F (%)	OC F (%)	R F (%)	N F (%)	Mean	Std. Dev	Rank
1	I carried a weapon eg (knife, gun) to school in the past 30 days	13 (3.3)	31 (7.7)	30 (7.5)	13 (3.3)	313(78.2)	0.54	1.12	9 th
2	During the past 12 months I carried knife to fight in school	11 (2.8)	50 (12.5)	30 (7.5)	8 (2.0)	301(75.2)	0.65	1.20	5 th
3	I was absent from school for some days during the past 30 days because I felt unsafe at school or on your way back from school	13 (3.3)	34 (8.5)	44 (11.0)	54(13.5)	255(63.7)	0.74	1.14	2 nd
4	During the past 30 days, I was threaten or injured with a weapon in school	7 (1.6)	38 (9.5)	49 (12.3)	17 (4.3)	289(72.3)	0.64	1.12	6 th
5	During the past 12 months I engaged in physical fight at home	23 (5.8)	38 (9.5)	28 (7.0)	36 (9.0)	275(68.7)	0.74	1.26	1 st
6	During the past 12 months I engaged in physical fight on school property	17 (4.3)	53 (13.3)	17 (4.3)	4 (1.0)	309(77.1)	0.66	1.27	3 rd
7	I have seen someone attacked physically, beaten, stabbed or shot in my neighborhood	32 (8.0)	33 (8.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	335(83.7)	0.56	1.30	8 th
8	I have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when I did not want to	9 (2.3)	37 (9.2)	18 (4.5)	2 (0.5)	334(83.5)	0.46	1.08	10 th
9	I have been forced to do sexual things I did not want to do eg (kissing, touching) in the past 12 months	4 (1.0)	13 (3.3)	10 (2.5)	8 (2.0)	365(91.2)	0.20	0.72	12 th
10	During the past 12 months I have been forced to do sexual things by someone I was dating or going out with	26 (6.5)	20 (5.0)	44 (11.0)	10 (2.5)	300(75.0)	0.65	1.23	4 th
11	During the past 12 months I have been physically hurt by someone I was dating or going out with	19 (4.5)	26 (6.5)	43 (10.8)	4 (1.0)	308(77.2)	0.61	1.19	7 th
12	I have been treated badly or unfairly in school because of my gender	6 (1.5)	10 (2.5)	43 (10.7)	5 (1.3)	336(84.0)	0.36	0.88	11 th
Weighted Mean							0.56		

Source: Field Survey, 2024

VO = Very Often, OF = Often, OC = Occasionally, R= Rarely, N = Never

Chart showing the prevalence of gender-based violence among the respondents.

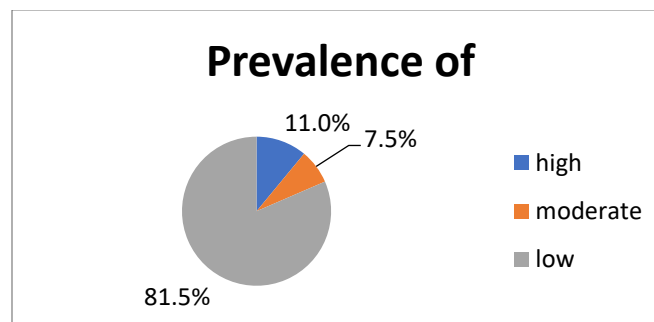


Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that 81.5% of respondents fall within the Low category, meaning they have either "Never" or "Rarely" experienced gender-based violence. About 7.5% of the respondents fall within the Moderate category, representing those who experience violence "Occasionally." Finally, 11.0% of the respondents fall within the High category, which includes those who experience violence either "Often" or "Very Often."

Table 4: Table showing the severity of occurrence of gender-based violence among the respondents

S/N	Statement	Mild		Moderate		Severe	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I have been harassed (molested, rape)	131	32.8	138	34.5	131	32.8
2	I have experience physical violence (beaten, kicked, burnt, slapped)	166	41.5	156	39.0	78	19.5
3	I have experienced emotional violence (insulted, guilt tripped, gas lighted)	145	36.3	111	27.8	144	36.3

Source: Survey, 2024

Chart showing severity of gender-based violence occurrence

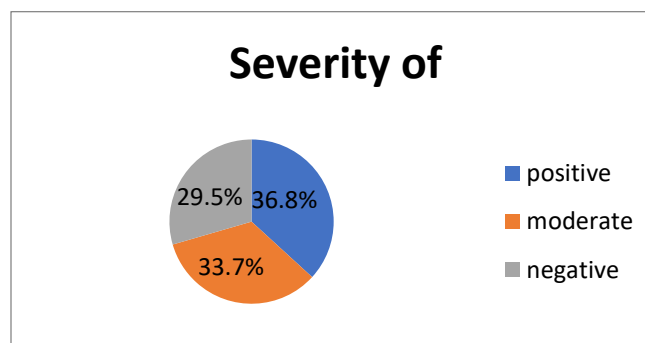


Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the overall severity of occurrence of gender-based violence among the respondents. From the result, 36.8% of the respondents had mild occurrence of GBV, 33.7% had moderate occurrence of GBV while 29.5% of the respondents had severe occurrence of GBV.

DISCUSSION

Research question one identifies the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents revealing that the majority (66.7%) were early adolescents and of female gender. 92.2 percent of the female respondents lived with both parents and the educational level of parents was predominantly secondary school leaving certificate, as shown 67.7% had Senior Secondary School Certificate. These socio-demographic characteristics offer crucial insights into the context and dynamics of gender-based violence as young adults are often at a critical stage of identity formation and socialization, which can influence their attitudes toward gender norms and violence. For instance, the educational level of the parents of the in-school adolescents could have played a positive role in mitigating the prevalence of GBV amongst the respondents. A study conducted by Akamike, Uneke, Uro-Chukwu, Okedo-Alex and Chukwu (2019) found that

having a partner with at least a secondary education level served as a protective factor against gender-based violence. Formal education enhances knowledge, expands access to crucial information, and empowers individuals to demand social change.

Research Question Two

Nearly 89% of respondents (342) accurately defined gender-based violence, recognizing it as a range of harmful behaviors - including physical, sexual, verbal, and psychological abuse - used to coerce or control others. This suggests a strong understanding of GBV among participants, with most acknowledging its gendered roots and broader societal impact. This finding aligns with the study conducted by al-Khaddam (2022) on social work students, which emphasized the vital role of education in raising awareness about gender-based violence. That study also found a high level of knowledge among participants regarding the different forms of GBV. Having adequate knowledge and the right perception of gender-based violence is essential in tackling this long-standing societal issue, particularly within school environments. The result clearly revealed that most adolescents were familiar with gender-based violence and demonstrated a strong understanding, accurately defining the concept. In contrast to our findings, a study by David et al. (2018) on in-school adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria, found that respondents had inadequate knowledge of gender-based violence.

Partners with secondary or higher education played a positive role in mitigating gender-based violence. Formal education enhances knowledge, expands access to crucial information, and empowers individuals to demand social change. In other words, the respondents' knowledge of gender based violence can be attributed to the educational status of their parents who were enlightened enough to dissuade masculine dominance culture in the society, the use of violent behaviors such as insults, beatings, physical aggression, being threatened with an object. Our findings diverge from Adika et al.'s (2013) study, which found many men unaware of gender-based violence's broader implications and holding attitudes that perpetuated it. The discrepancy may be due to our respondents' exposure to social media, where GBV is a trending topic, potentially increasing their awareness.

Research Question Three

Our study revealed a low but existing prevalence of gender-based violence among respondents, aligning with Gibbs et al.'s (2018) findings that a significant percentage of adolescents' experience GBV. The most common forms included physical fights at home, feeling unsafe leading to school absenteeism, and physical fights on school premises. This suggests that exposure to family violence may contribute to adolescent violence among peers. Associating with aggressive peers, holding harmful beliefs, and emotional dysregulation can exacerbate the link between family violence and adolescent aggression. These findings align with Social Learning Theory, which posits that adolescents learn behaviors through observation and reinforcement in their environment (Bandura and Walters, 1977). Research by Foshee et al. (2016) and Espelage et al. (2020) underscores that exposure to family violence increases adolescents' likelihood of replicating aggressive behaviors, while school-related violence like bullying and peer aggression further fuels GBV. To mitigate this, multi-level interventions targeting family, peer, and school dynamics are crucial to reduce violence exposure and strengthen protective factors.

Research Question Four

Our findings revealed that about a third of respondents acknowledged the negative effects of GBV, aligning with Falb et al.'s (2019) research highlighting long-term psychological impacts like depression and PTSD. Dovonou et al.'s (2024) study further emphasized that severe GBV disproportionately affects adolescents in low-income or traditional settings with limited reporting

mechanisms. Implementing trauma-informed care and expanding access to counseling services are crucial for supporting survivors."

Conclusion

This study highlights the stark reality of gender-based violence among in-school adolescents in Odeda Local Government Area, with prevalence rates varying from high to low. The profound psychological and social impacts, including anxiety, low self-esteem, and academic disruptions, necessitate immediate action. A collaborative effort involving policymakers, educators, parents, and community stakeholders is crucial to create a safer, more inclusive environment for adolescents. Ensuring their safety and well-being is essential for building a more equitable society and achieving Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, and 5.

Recommendations

1. Rules and regulations should be put in place to curb violence within the school environment and laws should be made to punish offenders.
2. Students should also be encouraged to speak up without fear by providing safe space for them to report to.
3. Workshops to create awareness of GBV and the harm it can cause to students' academic performance, mental health and social interactions with their peers should be upheld.
4. Meetings should be held regularly to discuss updates on any misconduct and also protective skills should be taught in the workshops.
5. There is a need to increasingly disseminate information on GBV through radio and television jingles along with social media to create awareness /enlightenment about the GBV in Nigeria.
6. Librarians and information scientist as change agents can play a vital role in addressing GBV among adolescents by providing access to critical information, promoting social inclusion, and advocating for change. They can publicize the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25) through seminars, workshops, training sessions, and school visits.
7. Information scientists can engage data-driven approach by collecting and publishing disaggregated data on GBV that would help identify trends and patterns, enabling students and stakeholders to understand and address the issue more effectively. Presenting data in a clear, accessible format can inform targeted interventions and support evidence-based solutions.

Limitation of the study

A limitation of this study is its lack of exploration into the sources of knowledge about gender-based violence among in-school adolescents. Future research should address this gap to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how adolescents acquire information about GBV.

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