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Antoinette Nneka Opara

Quentin Wodon

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Student Experiences with Violence in Schools: Insights from a Survey in Two Catholic Schools for Girls in Nigeria

Rev. Sr. Dr. Antoinette Nneka Opara, SHCJ is an educator and author with a creative professional mindset toward school improvement. She has 10 years of teaching experience and 14 years of secondary school leadership in Nigeria.

Dr. Quentin Wodon is a Lead Economist at the World Bank and a Distinguished Research Affiliate with the College of Business at Loyola University New Orleans. As part of his volunteer work, he created the Global Catholic Education project to provide resources for educators at https://www.globalcatholiceducation.org.
INTRODUCTION

As noted in a recent investment case at the World Bank to end violence in schools, violence is ubiquitous in schools throughout the world, directly affecting teachers and students and indirectly having an impact on the wider community itself. Violence in schools has multiple, lasting impacts on students, including lower academic performance as well as poor physical, mental and emotional health. It also undermines the ability of communities, local, regional and national governments to create schools where children and adolescents can develop their abilities and skills while also embracing the values of cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful problem solving.

A commonly accepted definition of violence comes from the World Health Organization’s 2002 World Report on Violence and Health which, following an earlier consultation, defined violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a person or group that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” Violence is the result of an abusive use of force or power against a person. The harm can be actual or threatened and it may take different forms. It can lead to injury or death, but also to trauma or other mental health symptoms. As such, the consequences of violence may not always be highly visible, but they are nevertheless always damaging. Violence is often multidimensional, meaning that individuals are often subjected to multiple forms of violence and in multiple locations, not only (for children) at school, but also at home and in communities.

The complexity of studying violence in a global and cross-cultural context should be acknowledged. Violence in schools, in communities, or at home is often the “tip of an iceberg” that has deeper systemic roots. In the World Bank investment case to end violence, pervasive patterns of gender inequality are mentioned as factors leading to the perpetuation and transmission of violence across generations. The fact that

multiple factors can be associated with violence is also clear in the ecological model used by health organizations. The model is inspired by the public health literature and points to risk factors at the individual, family, community, and societal levels.

Violence can take many forms, including in schools. Physical violence often comes to mind first, but emotional violence is as widespread, including through bullying which may include victimization and verbal abuse as well as intimidation or insults. Bullying may threaten relationships between students and with teachers and lead to low academic aspirations, isolation, and lack of self-esteem. Sexual violence includes rape and other forms of sexual assault.

Child abuse may also happen in schools. It is a broader concept defined by the World Health Organization as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”

Students should in principle be empowered to report cases of abuse or violence to appropriate personnel in schools and demand that actions be taken. The availability of child safeguarding officers in schools and actions taken against offenders should in principle ensure that violence and broader patterns of child abuse are on the decline, but as will be discussed later, school responses to episodes of violence are not always seen as adequate by students.

How do students experience violence in schools? The answer to that question is likely to be specific to each school, but case studies can help shed lights on patterns of violence in specific contexts. The analysis in this article is based on a survey implemented in Nigeria in November 2021 among students in two schools for adolescent girls. The questionnaire included only 11 questions—some closed, others open-ended. It was administered through the web in a way that guarantees the anonymity of respondents. Both schools are all-girl Catholic secondary schools catering to students ages 10-16.

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4 See for example https://www.who.int/groups/violence-prevention-alliance/approach.
5 See https://apps.who.int/violence-info/child-maltreatment/.
The first school is in an exclusive part of a highly populated city with Christians, Muslims and people of other beliefs residing together. This is a multi-ethnic city serving as a commercial hub and constantly expanding geographical boundaries. The school has over 600 students and about 180 staff. It has adequate educational facilities that it continues to update and improve. The second school is by contrast in a lower income rural town, not strategic by any means, with few basic amenities. The community is bi-ethnic with trading and farming as primary economic activities. Christians and Muslims live in separate parts of the community and both groups experience regular tension about land issues. The school has approximately 200 students and about 40 staff. It is still developing its basic infrastructure.

While the two schools are different from each other, both schools consider themselves as high-achieving quality schools. Some 80% of the teachers have been teaching in the schools for more than five years and depending on their age, the students have been in the schools from one to five years. Neither of the schools is in a geographic area where ethnic groups have been pushing for secession (in the southeastern part of the country).

The data indicate that violence is pervasive in the two schools, especially in the form of bullying followed by physical violence. About two thirds of violent episodes are considered as relatively mild according to the students, but in one in five cases, violence is considered as severe. Student who are victims of violence state that reconciliation has taken place in just above half of the cases, with reconciliation a possibility in another quarter of cases. Students also make some suggestions to school administrators for curbing violence, including taking the issue of violence more seriously.

The article is structured as follows. The next section provides general background on the prevalence of violence in schools globally and some of the recommendations that emerge from the literature on the types of interventions that can help reduce violence. The following three sections document the results obtained from the survey implemented in the two Nigerian schools. A brief conclusion follows.
BACKGROUND: ENDING VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

Multiple reports and studies have been published to estimate the prevalence of various forms of violence, including in and around schools. In the most recent report on the prevalence of violence in schools globally, UNESCO finds that a third of students are bullied by their peers at school at least once in the last month and a similar proportion are affected by physical violence. Among the subset of countries with trends over time, half of the countries had a decline in violence, one fifth had an increase, and there was no change over time in prevalence in the other countries. This suggests that without more forceful interventions, programs, and policies, progress is likely to be limited.

As mentioned in the introduction, different surveys have been used to measure the prevalence of violence at the national level. For low- and middle-income countries, the main survey instrument is the GSHS. Across countries that participated in the GSHS, more than a third of students were attacked in school at least once (37.8%) or while 27.6% got involved in fights—which is different from being attacked—at least once. In addition, just under a third were bullied at least once over the last 30 days (29.5%). Boys are more likely to be involved in incidents of violence than girls, especially physical violence (being attacked or fighting). They are also more likely to be injured, but for bullying differences are smaller. While this is not measured in that survey, girls (and women) may be especially at risk of sexual violence and harassment. For men, global data are lacking, but sexual violence

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7 The estimates are from Wodon, Ending Violence in Schools.

such as rapes may be less common.

There are differences between countries and regions in the prevalence of violence. Across regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence for several types of violence measured by the GSHS survey. South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa also tend to have high prevalence rates. By contrast, Europe and Central Asia have the lowest prevalence. There are also differences in the prevalence of violence in school according to their level of development of countries. While most countries regardless of economic development have unacceptably high prevalence rates, low income and lower-middle income countries tend to have higher prevalence rates than upper-middle and high-income countries included in the GSHS data (noting that very few high-income countries are included in those particular datasets).

The policy brief for the World Bank investment case on ending violence in schools emphasizes the need to look at the whole cycle of a child’s life and adapt interventions to every phase and situation to reduce the risk of violence. Too often, much is left to chance that the child will grow up and overcome challenges. As to interventions implemented in schools, whole school approaches to ending violence have proven successful. In Uganda, the Good School Toolkit led to a substantial reduction in violence, especially for violence by teachers to enforce discipline among students.9 Supporting teachers to manage their classrooms can reduce bullying and other forms of violence.10 Other successful interventions include socio-emotional learning, which can promote positive attitudes and pro-social behavior.11 Some programs may generate benefits much larger than their cost.12 In secondary schools,

cognitive behavioral training can reduce aggression and dating violence. Anti-bullying programs also tend to reduce violence with high benefit to cost ratios. More generally, guidance on how to prevent violence in schools, and more generally violence against children, has been provided by international organizations under the leadership of the World Health Organization.

PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE IN TWO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

Typical surveys of violence in schools are conducted at the national level for a sample of schools in a country. This is useful to obtain national estimates of the prevalence of violence and some of its effects, and to set national strategies, but for a particular school, such data may not be as useful as data collected specifically for the school. National surveys also tend to be expensive to implement. They have a wide range of questions, and those questions cannot be changed to be adapted to a particular school context since comparability across schools must be maintained. By contrast, when a school implements its own survey, it can adapt the survey to its specific needs, and it may be able to implement the survey at very low cost. It is therefore interesting to consider case studies of schools having implement such surveys, as is done in this article for two Nigerian schools.

The focus of this article is on student experiences with violence in the two Catholic schools in Nigeria described earlier. To assess patterns of violence in the schools, a web survey was implemented in November 2021 among students in such a way that student anonymity could be ensured. The online survey link was sent to the schools by email to a management team member, who posted the link for students.


The students could access the link through their school email addresses. Students in the boarding house filled out the forms in the school computer room using their workstations during their evening free time, and the responses came directly to the researcher. Students who come to school daily from home accessed the link using their personal computers at home after school hours, and responses were sent directly to the researcher. The anonymity of student responses was ensured.

A total of 151 responses were received, which represents a response rate of about 20%. Though the number of responses represents enough students to conduct a statistical analysis, the survey had a relatively low response rate. The survey is not necessarily representative of the views of all students as some students may have been more inclined to respond than others. Given that only one in five students answered the survey, the key findings should be considered as tentative. Still, responses are nevertheless instructive not only in terms of how students perceive violence and whether they are personally affected by it, but also in terms of how they perceive the responses of the schools to episodes of violence and whether they consider these responses as adequate. The survey had 11 questions, and the questionnaire is provided in an appendix.

The first question was: How would you define violence in school? Students acknowledged that violence may take many forms. Examples of answers included the following:

- Violence in school is when issues between staff members or between staff and students or between students degenerate to verbal confrontation and fighting.

- It is activities that can cause a disturbance and disorderliness in an educational system; it could be verbal or physical.

- Violence is an act that causes pain, destruction and suffering.

- It is an act of bullying, intimidation and repression.

- Violence in schools is not only physical combat or fight among the students
but also among teachers. Also, violence is not only physical but also emotional and spiritual.

Violence in schools doesn’t really need to be physical it also be through word.

Violence in schools refers to all forms of physical abuse such as fighting and sexual abuse, mental and emotional abuse such as insulting of students and discrimination. Violence can be when a student inflicts pain on another student.

In some cases, students emphasized extreme forms of violence: “Violence is extreme form of assault, rape or murder.” But in other cases, a much broader set of behaviors were considered as forms of violence: “It is any activity that can create a disturbance in an educational setting.” The fact that threats are a form of violence was recognized: “[It is] any deliberate action or inaction or threat to harm another.”

Finally, while responses suggested that violence takes place mostly between students, students noted that teachers can be engaged in violence too: “I feel violence in schools not only has to be the physical beatings but also emotional and mental; some students suffer a lot from the aggressive and mean words said to them by either a teacher or any member of staff in the school.” There were indications that students progressively learned to recognize various forms of violence. As a student explained it:

As a junior, I never thought that the things I experienced was violence, but my school has tried to re-orientate the mindset of students to believe that anything is violence. Now, I am forced to consider the fact that everything I have experienced in this school both as a junior and senior student was an act of violence.

The second question in the survey was: Do you agree that violence exists in Catholic schools? Students could choose one of five responses: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Figure 1 provides the responses. Almost two thirds (63.7%) of respondents acknowledged the prevalence of violence in Catholic schools, stating that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. About one in five students (18.8%) stated that they were neutral. Less than one in five students
(17.5%) stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was violence in Catholic schools. While it could be the case that the prevalence of violence is lower in Catholic than other schools, students in Catholic schools are in no way immune from it.

The third question in the survey was: *What types of violent actions are prevalent in your school?* Students were asked to name three types of violence, which many students did, but others responded in the form of a sentence or named fewer types of violence. As shown in Figure 2, looking at the overall set of responses, the most common type of violence identified was emotional violence and especially bullying (124 mentions out of a total of 247, or 50.2% of all responses). Physical violence and especially fights was the second most common type of violence (25.5% of responses). Other forms of violence mentioned included the fear of kidnapping or terrorism (4.9% of responses), self-injuries including suicide attempts (2.3%), corporal punishment by teachers (2.0%), and sexual violence (1.2%). Other types of violence, including destruction of school property or some students stealing from other students were also common. (All other types of violence accounted for 13.0% of the types of violence mentioned.) It is especially noteworthy that several
students mentioned self-harm including suicidal behavior and self-mutilation as forms of violence.

A few students also included as forms of violence behaviors that are typically not considered violent, such as students not doing and submitting their assignments when due, staff and students coming to school, classes and other school functions late, and students being absent from school without notifying the school. Some respondents also named not listening or paying attention to someone in need of help or forcing staff to do what may be beyond their power as forms of violence. This suggests an awareness that actions may affect others more than we imagine. It may also reflect the fact that thanks in part to efforts by schools, social expectations may be changing.

The surveys suggest that bullying is the most common form of violence identified by students. Some of the forms of violence identified by students suggest patterns associated with groups of students victimizing other groups. There does not seem to be substantial gang violence in the two schools, but there are episodes in which the schools are being vandalized and property is being damaged. There is also a fear of shootings and other threats which may lead to the closure of schools. This type of collective violence has been described as the “instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group...against another group or...
set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives.” It can also lead to substantial emotional stress for students. There is also a widespread pattern of seniors (students in higher grades) treating juniors (students in lower grades) badly, and often systematically so.

One of the two schools is located closer to areas with warring communities because of territorial conflicts. Locally armed militia and groups, including Boko Haram, create violent situations for everyone, including schools. This leads among others to fears of kidnapping for ransom (a common occurrence in Nigeria in recent years). Students are major casualties in such conflicts with schools being closed sometimes for extended periods of time. Ethnic groups pushing for secession may promulgate laws that interfere with schooling. This is the case with the weekly “sit at home” order by the Biafra Separatist group in Nigeria.

Some schools are also threatened by terrorism especially in the north but also in other parts of the country. Terrorism is defined by United Nations as “any act intended to cause death or bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants for the purpose of either intimidating a population or compelling a government or a government institution to do or not to do something.” It is fast becoming a major threat, with the federal and state governments having limited success in tackling the problem. In particular, schools are the target of terrorists whose ideologies are against Western-type education. There have been multiple instances of terrorists kidnapping students, leading to major trauma for the school community. The threat of terrorism emerges clearly from the survey.

Finally, student unrest is also mentioned as a form of violence by some students. Such unrest refers to incidents in secondary schools (not necessarily Catholic schools and not in the two schools surveyed) that may stem from increases in school, teacher strikes, issues with examinations, or other problems. When schools

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are not meeting the basic needs of the community, this can lead to unrest and student protests. During episodes of unrest, buildings and other school properties may be damaged.

The fourth question in the survey was about whether students themselves experienced any form of violence. A follow-up question asked them to describe their experience, and another asked whether their experience was mild (slight) or severe. The two questions on whether students experienced violence and its severity can be combined to provide a categorization into three levels: no experience of violence, mild experience, or severe experience. In a few instances, students stated they had not experienced violence but nevertheless mentioned episodes of violence. Examples include:

- It was something I could handle; nevertheless it was still annoying and frustrating.

- I was once pushed to the wall but no injury or bruise just slight pain.

- My experience was a terrible one. I was being bullied by some senior school students, they all gathered against me, and it was horrifying but luckily for me some teachers came to my rescue.

- It was terrifying and upsetting.

- When I said I was not going to fetch water for a senior so their set mates started insulting me. It was really painful; I cried a lot that day.

- Seniors shouting at me.

In those cases, while students responded they had not experienced violence, they typically rated their experience of violence as mild or severe, and those were the answers used for analysis.

Overall, as shown in Figure 3, two thirds of students (65.8%) stated they had experienced mild violence. One in eight students (13.0%) stated they had experienced
severe violence. Only one in five students (21.2%) stated they had not experienced any violence, although among those, some witnessed their friends being subjected to violence. Based on the descriptions of the episodes of violence, most appeared to be indeed mild. But some were not. Examples of descriptions include the following:

One day during prayers in the chapel I was called to explain the reading, but I wasn’t able to so the seniors asked me to fly my hands and lift one leg up after that [and] I was asked to wash cooler and plates for one week.

My experience was horrible, … I was bullied being asked to fetch water, wash plates, copy notes.

When I was being bullied, it was a very new and terrible experience for me mostly because I’m not that kind of girl that fights back or retaliates.

My roommates were holding each other’s necks and were hitting themselves against the wall.

The teacher was beating the student with a wire and then the student collected the wire and started beating the teacher back, and it resulted into a big fight.

My experience was a terrible one, … they all gathered against me, and it was horrifying but luckily for me some teachers came to my rescue and that was how the senior students were all punished.

My experience was horrible. I was on my way to class when a group of people came to me and started to beat me, and I eventually fell on the floor and got hot, and perhaps being locked inside a toilet once.

A girl was asked by a senior to wash her plate and the girl ended up saying no. When the senior started getting angry she mistakenly slapped the student and the student reacted badly by slapping the senior back, and they both started fighting.
Students who had been affected by violence were also asked about how it felt to be the object of school violence. They could choose one of five modalities: sad, angry, afraid, depressed, and bored. As shown in Figure 4, feelings of sadness and being depressed were the most likely responses (38.3% and 24.1% of respondents respectively), denoting the feeling of helplessness that emerges from many of the responses to open-ended questions. About a fifth (21.8%) of students felt angry, and one in eight (12.0%) felt afraid. Fewer students felt bored. Sadness, anger, depression, fear, and boredom may all affect the emotional stability of students (and staff) if these feelings are not expressed. Depression may lead to suicide attempts by students. Fear and sadness may also lead to involvement in drugs and gang-related crimes in schools and local communities. Sadness, depression, and fear can increase drop-out rates if help is not provided to the victims of violence. When students are affected by violence, academic aspirations may also be weakened. Research suggests that violence has both immediate and long-term adverse consequences for victims, but also for perpetrators. If the fear generated by violence is not contained and becomes widespread, it can have crippling psychological effects, again leading to a higher risk of student absenteeism or some students dropping out of school.
An interesting question asked in the survey is whether the students who were affected by violence forgave the person who committed the violence or reconciled. As shown in Figure 5, the statistics are somewhat encouraging. More than half of the students (56.9%) stated that they forgave perpetrators or reconciled, and one fourth (24.9%) answered maybe. Still, for almost one fifth of the students (18.5%), there was no reconciliation of forgiving. Forgiveness and reconciliation are virtues that are encouraged in Catholic schools. To a large extent, students seem to practice these virtues. Yet in some cases violence may be more severe or may affect students profoundly, leading forgiving and reconciliation to be more difficult.
SCHOOL RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Three questions were asked in the survey about the school responses to episodes of violence. First, students were asked whether they were pleased with the way the episodes of violence were handled. They could respond: yes, no, or not sure. The survey asked students in which way their school handles violence. Finally, students were asked to give two suggestions on how their school could reduce violence. Figure 6 provides the responses of students on whether they were satisfied with their school’s response to violence. Unfortunately, only slightly more than one in four students (28.9%) were satisfied, with 26.7% of students not being sure and 44.4% not being satisfied. This suggests that the schools may not yet have mechanisms in place to adequately respond.

![Figure 6: Satisfaction with School Response (%)](image)

Source: Authors’ estimation from the surveys.

When asked how their school handles violence, students mentioned that perpetrators could be punished or dismissed from the school (mechanism mentioned in 50.3% of responses as shown in Figure 7). Other mechanisms mentioned relate to various forms of counseling, whether through sessions with school counselors or through seminars that perpetrators must attend (28.8% of responses). Schools were also seen as implementing additional security measure or changing rules (6.2% of responses). Finally, the role of investigations by the school leadership or committees was also mentioned (3.4% of responses). At the same time, there is a distinct
feeling from many responses that many students felt that not enough is being done by schools. This was mentioned explicitly in 11.3% of all responses in terms of how schools respond to violence. Examples of such statements include the following:

Most often, nothing is done to the person who [committed violence against] another. Sometimes, the victim is not carried along in the judgment.

They handle it by being partial; not understand the other person's view so they pass judgment unfairly.

They are proactive but can be much better.

My school sees violence like it is a normal thing; they care less about the things that happen to their student and do not even try to put in any effort to make life comfortable for them.

They may not take it seriously and they might only listen to one party.

They have no way of handling it, they are only focused on their own views and sometimes nothing is done.

Concerning bullying, the sisters speak to us about it and threaten to severely punish any offender, but I don't really like the way they handle it because they always focus on warning the senior students, meanwhile bullying can happen between set mates and other junior students.

Just by an authority telling you sorry and warning the senior to not do it again—offenders should be punished seriously.

Talking about it with no immediate actions; punishment should be there.

Not very well. It is basically ignored in my school.
What are some of the suggestions made by students to reduce violence in their schools? By and large, students expect more severe actions to be taken against offenders. They feel that issues related to violence are not taken seriously enough when reported. They also suggest that students should be more aware of the consequences of violence for those being victimized. The suggestions made by students on how to respond are not fundamentally different from their perceptions of how the schools are already responding, but there is a request for schools to take the problem more seriously, be systematic in their responses, prevent violence through better awareness of its consequences, and punish students more severely when violence occurs.

Based more broadly on the context in which many schools operate in Nigeria and the experience of the school leadership for the two schools in which the survey was implemented, a few more specific recommendations can be suggested, at least tentatively. Seven such suggestions are made here.

First, there is a need to improve pastoral counseling services to handle child safeguarding and mental health issues and inculcate spiritual values in students. Multiple challenges are impacting students’ self-concept, aspirations, goals, and development. Pastoral counseling provides safe spaces for students to communicate outside academics to a professional who listens without judgment and guides students on the road to development and better self-esteem. Mental health is less
taboo today than it used to be in Africa. Schools should be enabled to take a greater professional interest in staff and students’ mental health. Through training, the school community must learn to communicate and confront violence. Counselors should mediate between the school and parents, including to prevent child abuse outside of schools. Regular engagement with students may enable them to deepen their values. Patience, friendliness, forgiveness, love, compassion can all help students’ when in uncomfortable situations. Students suggested that “ensuring the unity and peace existing among all students and even all staff of the school will curb violence.” Pastoral service can “encourage students to take responsibility in maintaining safe schools [and] encourage students to speak out when being bullied.” Most importantly, it can help provide care and support to victims.

Second, there is a need to focus on prevention, which can take the form of seminars or workshops on various aspects of school life throughout the year. Students point to the need to make perpetrators of violence aware of its consequences for victims. As a student put it, “all new students should be enlightened on the dangers of violent actions and its implications for them and everyone else and encourage educational conferences or programs against violence.” Workshops targeting behavior improvement and non-violent conflict resolution and peace building skills can help change school culture. Students also need access to individual counseling, as already mentioned. Violence is often a learned response to stress, but it can be unlearned. Workshops can create opportunities for more awareness. They can also enable open conversations on topics that otherwise are not discussed. This can in particular encourage students to speak out when being bullied or maltreated.

Third, when needed, there may be a benefit from stronger disciplinary measures. Violence relates mostly to bullying and neglect, but it can be severe. Students believe that adequate punishment can serve as a deterrent for perpetrators, whether students or staff. Strengthening school laws may help. In terms of disciplinary measures, permanent exclusion from school or suspension for a period of time may be considered. It is however often beneficial to adopt a restorative justice approach to conflict resolution. While punishment focuses on offenders, restorative justice involves prevention, intervention, and reintegration in such a way that victims are
also part of the process apart from offenders. Restorative justice resonates with Catholic social teachings on the dignity of the human person and the ability to forgive. In addition, schools may also need to invest in helping students develop socio-emotional skills and community service can serve as a way not only to discipline students, but also to create empathy for the needs of others, possibly with better long-term results than a suspension or an expulsion.

Fourth, students require regular academic counseling to stay focused on why they are in school: to learn. Students who are not making adequate progress may resort to bullying or other aggressive behavior to express their frustration. Through regular and individualized professional academic counseling, students can communicate their challenges and learn how to manage them. Counselors should meet students at risk on a weekly basis to discuss their aspirations, progress, anxieties, and other challenges. Caring interactions will help students while also informing schools on students’ attitudes and dispositions, thus identifying areas that need attention. Often counselors are unavailable, in part because cost considerations limit their numbers. But without the benefit of adequate academic counseling for students, violence may persist, and could become worse over time.

Fifth, there may be a need to diversify learning opportunities. Traditional learning spaces such as schools are fast giving way to other learning spaces. The COVID-19 pandemic may accelerate this trend through more online learning. Multiple forms of learning may increase student performance. They may also decongest schools that are too crowded. When students may need to be suspended, online and other forms of learning may enable them not to fall behind and re-join schools later. Quality supervision and assessment of learning must take place in non-traditional as well as traditional learning settings, but investing in non-traditional forms of learning may contribute to reducing violence when students come back to school.

Sixth, in some cases there may be a need to improve security around schools, especially in contexts where conflict and terrorism are widespread, as is the case in parts of Nigeria. Catholic schools traditionally employ few security personnel. This may need to change for some schools. Because the cost of security services is substantial for schools to bear alone, the government may need to provide security support to
keep the children safe. This may be a necessary investment to avoid much larger costs of students dropping out of school or even school closures. Adequate security may also reduce access in schools to alcohol, guns, knives, and other dangerous items which tend to be associated with higher levels of violence.

Finally, creating awareness of students’ conduct among parents during meetings and asking for their support in reducing violence and improving behaviors more generally may help. At the Nigeria school attended by one of the authors as a child, during meetings with parents, bullying was addressed. It was agreed with the parents that perpetrators or victims who would not report incidents could be expelled from the school. Parents communicated this decision to their children, and students welcomed this development as it helped reduce bullying in the school.17

CONCLUSION

Schools are more aware today of the need to reduce violence and create conditions that are favorable to students’ mental health. This can be done by equipping teachers and other staff with the skills they need to support students. But a first necessary step is to have a proper diagnostic of the prevalence of violence in schools and how to prevent it. This article suggests that simple surveys can go a long way in providing teachers and administrators with the information they need to act. Specifically, a short student survey implemented online in two secondary schools for girls in Nigeria suggested that violence is pervasive, albeit in most cases relatively mild. Proposals for curbing violence based in part on suggestions from students were outlined.

The two schools that implemented the survey received key results as a working document to enable teachers and administrators to improve the school culture and learning environment. The schools’ disciplinary committee and management teams studied the responses and identified areas that could be improved for both school procedures and student relationships. The students’ councils also discussed some

aspects of the survey to create awareness on available procedures for resolving conflicts. The document proved to be worthwhile for creating awareness on the issues that can lead to violence in the schools and how various available strategies could enable solutions, in particular to rebuild strained relationships among staff and students. While there is no magic bullet to end violence in schools, progress can be made.

APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would you define violence in schools?

2. Do you agree that violence exists in Catholic schools?
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Neutral
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Strongly agree

3. What types of violence actions are prevalent in your school? Name three types.

4. Have you experienced school violence?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] Maybe

5. Describe your experience.

6. Rate your experience of violence.
   - [ ] Slight
   - [ ] Heavy
7. How does it feel to be the object of school violence?

☐ Sad
☐ Angry
☐ Afraid
☐ Depressed
☐ Bored

8. Were you pleased with the way it was handled?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

9. What is the major way your school handles violence?

10. Did you forgive the person and was reconciled?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

11. Give two suggestions how your school can reduce violence.

Thank you very much for taking out time to respond to this survey. God bless you.

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