



The Prevalence of Weapon-carrying/use amongst Senior Secondary School Students in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Weapon-related violence has become an issue of global concern. Every country of the world, both high income and low income, is plagued in a very dangerous dimension, making the need to contain it a question of life and death. This study examined the prevalence and differences, and similarities based on gender in weapon carrying/use among ages 14-17 (mean age 15.5 years) in-school adolescents of Anambra State, Nigeria. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population consists of in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. A sample of 500 students, 258 males and 248 females, were used. The sample was selected using multistage sampling techniques, using sex as a stratum. Data were collected with a research instrument titled Gender Influences on Weapon-carrying Questionnaire (GIWQ), which was validated by two experts from Educational Foundations and Psychology, respectively. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. Researchers and their assistants administered the questionnaire after the consent of the participants was secured. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages to answer the research questions, while the hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance using Chi-square statistics. Result revealed high involvement of school adolescents in weapon-carrying (67.6%). It was also revealed that weapon-carrying cuts across gender. However, the rate of weapon-carrying and use was significantly higher with males than females. Reasons for carrying weapons include lack of attention to adolescents' needs and adolescents' affiliation with delinquent peers. It was concluded that there is a need to teach students the dangers of unauthorized weapon-carrying and use. School managers should take students' grievances serious rather than resort to the brutal use of force to address every problem.

Keywords: weapon carrying/use, in-school adolescents, gender

Introduction

Violence and adolescents' involvement in violent practice and other unwholesome behaviors have been an endemic and cancerous menace that plagues and interferes with all facets of development and strata of human existence. The Nigerian nation is getting an excess share of this global experience, especially in the face of Boko Haram, herders and banditry terrorists' events, and cultism activities. Maiming and killing hold sway in schools all over the world.

Adolescents of today are not only the adults of tomorrow but are the future workforce of any society. This explains why adolescents are the leading target group for social, health promotion and risk prevention. Adolescents are in the age bracket we can categorize as college/school-aged people, which justifies the priority given to the place of school, especially secondary schools, in almost every effort being made to turn out well-adjusted youth who can hold forth their own in the generation to come. As Turkkahramana (2015) opined, schools are an indispensable part of society's general social system. Accordingly, schools cannot be considered independent from the social structure of society and innovations and changes in the world. School is one of the core institutions of modern society to varying degrees in virtually all nation-states. This justifies the effort being made to protect and nurture our children and adolescents in all schools in Nigerian and globally to churn them out, cleaned of all evil vices. However, this concerted effort to keep the youth safe and healthy is consistently faced with many challenges that seem to be so insurmountably nagging. One of these nagging issues bedeviling the youth (both those still in school and those outside school) is violence. Violence is defined as the use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person (interpersonal) or against a group or community that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (World Health Organization; 2002s). In 1996, the World Health Assembly declared violence a major health issue; a resolution they followed up on October 3, 2002, released their first World Report on violence and health. The report contained a list of violence types and among the types of violence documented was youth violence and others like child abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, collective violence etc. (Krug G. Etienne, Mercy J.A, Dahlberg L. L. and Zwi A. B (2002). Olufunmilayo, Olubunmi, and Oladipupo (2018), in their study of gender-based violence in public and private secondary schools in Ilorin Nigeria, also observed a high proportion of students in both schools had experienced violence.



Although violence at school cannot be said to be a new phenomenon yet, the rate at which weapons are involved in recent years has significantly contributed to preventable morbidity and mortality for young men and women has become worrisome. A look at the list of attacks related to secondary schools that have occurred around the world will help us appreciate the alarming height of weapon-related violence (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia- see appendix A). These are attacks that have occurred on school property or related primarily to school issues or events just between January 2018 and November 2019. Of similar interest is a record of school attack with weapons before 2016, as Birnbaum (2013) reported in Lewis and Brown (2015). They are the following: Columbine's high school shooting in 1999, which left 15 killed and 21 injured; attack by a lone gunman in Virginia Tech in 2007 which left 33 dead and another 25 injured; attack in Oakland, California in 2012 which killed seven and injured 3; the same year 2012, Newton Connecticut experienced an attack that left 28 elementary children and staff murdered by a 20-year-old; Santa Monica, California in 2013, 6 children killed and four were wounded while Umpqua Community College, Oregon in 2015 was attacked and left ten dead and nine injured etc. The list could not be exhausted here as the researchers were constrained by space and time.

Adolescents' involvement in the weapon-violence situation has given rise to a growing social and scientific concern. Researchers like Vaughn, Perron, Abdon, Olate and Groom (2003), in their study, lamented that weapons are involved in the most deadly form of school violence, averring that weapon carrying is a highly salient contemporary adolescent health issue. In their part, Murnan, Drake and Price, (2004) stated that weapon-related violence among adolescents is a severe public health concern. They further noted that the adolescents had become victims while perpetrating violence. Earlier in 1993, Webster, Gainer, and Champion said that almost half of the black males aged between 15 through 19 who died in the United States in the past ten years were murdered with a gun. Also, about 10% were stabbed to death. Data sources from the United States Department of Health and Human Services for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) on high school students carrying weapons confirmed that in 2017, the proportion of students who reported carrying weapons such as guns, knife or club on, at least, one occasion in the past 30 days was 15.7%. Birnbaum (2013), cited in Lewis and Brown (2015), observed that there had been at least 136 school shootings since the Sandy Hook tragedy in

December 2012, an average of about one shooting a week, which is indicative of the fact that 77 % of violent deaths in schools from 1992 to 2001 resulted from gun violence. These numbers help to convey the urgency and gravity with which stakeholders of adolescents' health and safety, including policy-makers, keep college students safe.

Consequent to the above need, the current researchers got interested in studying weapon-carrying and used among adolescents in Nigeria, and specifically in Anambra State. Their interest motivated them to embark on an extensive review of published literature across diverse cultures on weapon carrying and use. Some studies were identified as pertinent as they indicated results that are worrisome. It is observed that among these pertinent studies, including those already mentioned above, the majority focused on weapon carrying related issues among adolescents in high-income countries such as United States, Britain, Canada, France etc. At the same time, only a handful exists in a low-income country like Nigeria.

One of the studies from the high-income countries was that of Begue, Roche and Duke (2016), which empirically identified for the first time in France, the prevalence of adolescent weapon carrying with a particular focus on the contributions of social bonding, strain, social learning and socio-demographic predictors. They found out that the odds of weapon carrying increased among adolescents who suffered from past victimization, who had a negative relationship with their mother and repeated a grade at school. Many other previous studies identified motivations for weapon-carrying and use among students. This motivation includes having friends who engage in delinquency (Mattson, Sigel & Mercado, 2020); self-defence, victim coercion (Brennan, & Moore, 2009); drug abuse, physical fights, peers' carrying guns, and gender (Cao, Zhang, & He, 2008); past-year of exposure to violent content in video, computer, and Internet games, as well as peer aggression and biological sex (Ybarra, Huesmann, Korchmaros, & Reisner, 2014). Begue et al. (2016) highlighted three distant reasons for assessing the prevalence of weapon carrying and understanding the risk factors associated with it (Barlas & Egan 2006). The three reasons are:

1. Weapon carrying is a criminal offence in most countries which categorizes it as a form of delinquent behaviour.
2. Weapon increases the likelihood of weapon-related conflicts and is linked to the use of physical violence (Lowry, Powell, Kann, Collins & Kolbe, 1998).

3. Adolescents' weapon carrying can be an indicator of other problem behaviours such as poor academic achievement and commitments (Wilcox & Clayton, 2001), fighting (Lowry et al., 1998), gang participation (Muula, Rudatsikira & Siziya, 2008), suicidal ideation (Nickerson and Slater, 2009), emotional distress (Evans, Marte, Betts & Silliman, 2001) and alcohol and drug use at school (Ybarra, Huesmann, Korchmaros & Reisner, 2014).

Butters, Sheptycki and Brochu (2011), in their study, also examined gun usage and the harm it is capable of causing other people. They aimed to identify the correlates of sub-lethal violence among at-risk youth in Toronto and Montreal. From their results, they found, among others, high levels of relationship between sub-lethal violence and conduct disorder and prior delinquency, drug selling, crack trade and gang fighting. They reported ready access to firearms. The study of Butter et al. was the first in Canada. Wallace (2017) examined the perceived popularity of adolescents who carry weapons in comparison to those who both carry and use weapons in acts of violence or threatened violence. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health found no differences existed in the number of friends between weapon carriers and weapon users.

In Nigeria, few works that exist touched on the use of firearms and unknown gunmen activities. One such work addressed illegal stockpiling and firearms by the terrorists and other shooters in Nigeria (Arinze & Simon, 2016). In their article, titled "Illegal Guns Flooding in Nigeria, Fuelling Violence," Arinze et al. queried how the guns being used by cattle-rustlers, armed robbers, and Boko Haram found their way into Nigeria when the constitution of the country prohibits illegal gun buying/selling or use. Hazen and Horner (2007) cited the Small Arms Survey Report of 2007 as putting the estimated number of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria between 1 and 3 million. They reasoned that this estimation points to an apparent dearth of reliable data on the problem of the large number of people carrying and using small arms firearms illegally or illicitly. Afolabi and Deji (2014) carried out a comparative study on the prevalence of violence in public and private schools in Osun State. They used 100 students picked through systematic random sampling and found various forms of violence among in-school adolescents. Their study only mentioned weapon carrying as one of the forms of violence used in threatening and attacking opponents. Other forms he noted were verbal abuse, forceful collection of other people's properties, physical assaults and intentional act of damaging properties. They found public schools as having more of the different forms of violence, with the most typical forms being verbal abuse (87.2% & 62%), physical assaults (53.3% & 28.7%), while

threat with weapons was the least form of violence (18% & 3.3%). Fawole, Balogun and Olaleye (2018), on their part, studied gender-based violence in public and private secondary schools and the type of violence the students experienced. The study was carried out in the Ilorin South Local Government Area (LGA) of Kwara State. They found that GBV was a common problem experienced by both public and private senior secondary school students.

Although extensive studies focused on weapon carrying and use among both in-school and out-school adolescents in high-income countries, the same could not be said concerning Nigeria, particularly Anambra State. The closest issue to weapon carrying among adolescents studied so far had been that of school violence. Afolabi et al. (2014) only mentioned threat with the weapon as one form of violence. Egenti (2017) studied causes, effects and possible solutions of teenage violence in secondary schools in Anambra State. Despite the alarming rate of insecurity in Nigeria today, prevalence, causes, types of weapon use/carrying in Anambra state and indeed Nigeria have not gotten the researchers' expected attention. These are gaps that call for attention. Another gap exists because none of these studies looked at male-female differential as a factor, particularly in Southeastern Nigeria. There is a paucity of literature on weapon carrying/use among male adolescents compared to females in secondary schools in Anambra State and Southeast of Nigeria in general. The study of solutions to the high rate of weapon use/carrying by adolescents has not been studied in Anambra State. These, therefore, were the gaps the current researchers addressed in this study.

The purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study was to assess the prevalence of weapon carrying/use amongst in-school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Ascertain the specificities of weapon carrying and use among in-school adolescents.
- ii. Find out the role of gender on the frequency of weapon carrying and use among adolescents.
- iii. Contribute to the existing literature on weapon carrying and use by the youth.



Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Do the in-school adolescents of Anambra State carry and use the weapon?
2. What are the determinants of adolescents' weapon carrying and use?
3. What types of weapon do in-school adolescents carry/use?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

There is no significant difference in the rate of weapon carrying and use between male and female in-school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Method

The study was a cross-sectional survey. The population consists of in-school adolescents in public-funded secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Participants

A representative sample of 500 respondents, 258 males and 242 females between 14 and 17 participated in the study. The sample was selected using multistage sampling (stratified, simple random and proportionate) techniques using age, sex, and type of school as strata. The participants were selected from 12 schools out of the three senatorial districts in Anambra State. Two schools were selected from each of the six educational zones that made up the state's senatorial districts. The six educational zones are Aguata, Awka, Ihiala, Nnewi, Ogidi and Onitsha.

Instrument of Data Collection

Data were collected with a research instrument titled Gender Influences and Weapon-carrying Questionnaire (GWQ), divided into two broad sections. Section A is demographic, while section B consists of questions on the type of weapons the respondents had ever carried and used and conditions under which weapon carrying and use is considered an option; and whether gender-differential makes any significant difference at the rate students are involved in weapon carrying and/use.

Procedure

Two experts in Educational Psychology validated the research instrument. A trial testing was conducted, using 50 adolescents/secondary school students from Nnamdi Azikiwe High School, Awka, who was not part of the final sample. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. Before administering the questionnaire, the researchers took time to explain the purpose of the exercise and assured the participants of utmost confidentiality. Researchers and their assistants administered the questionnaire. To protect the anonymity of the students, the researchers asked them not to write their names on the questionnaire. It took participants one day to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Data was collected and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages to describe the data. The null hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance, using chi-square statistics.

Results

Research Question 1: What percentage of senior secondary school students had ever carried/used a weapon in the past four weeks in Anambra State?

Table 1: Percentage of students who have carried a weapon and used one in the past four weeks

Item	Yes		No	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Have you ever carried/used a weapon in the past four weeks?	338	67.6	162	32.4

The result of the analysis in Table 1 shows that the proportion of in-school adolescents in Anambra State who reported carrying weapons at one time or the other within the past four weeks is quite high (67.6%). Weapon carrying and use are prevalent among the secondary school students of Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What are the determinants of adolescents' weapon carrying and use?

Table 2: Frequency distribution and percentages of situations that warrant weapon carrying and use by in-school adolescents.

	Reasons for weapon carrying/use	YES		NO	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
1.	Pain from past victimization	359	71.8	141	28.2
2.	Negative relationship with mother	230	46	270	54
3.	Affiliation with delinquent peers	426	85.2	74	14.8
4.	Failure to achieve a desired goal eg repeating a class	199	39.8	301	60.2
5.	Low school attachment/ Teachers' harshness	300	60	200	40
6.	Drug use and alcohol consumption	377	75.4	133	26.6
7.	Exposure to violent videogames and films	399	79.8	101	20.2
8.	Defensive motive	262	52.4	238	47.6
9.	Inattention of society to adolescents' needs	250	50	250	50
10.	Emotional instability	271	54.2	229	45.8

Analysis in Table 2 revealed that many factors do cause weapon carrying in secondary school in Anambra State. Among the factors that motivated weapon carrying/use, affiliation with delinquent peers ranked first (85.2%), followed by exposure to violent films (79.8%), closely followed by Drug use and alcohol consumption. In the fourth place is pain from past victimization etc. It was also evidenced that Failure to achieve a goal and Negative relationship with mothers were not much of forces that push the students into weapon carrying and use (39.8% & 46%, respectively).

Research Question 3: What types of weapon do in-school adolescents carry/use?

Table 3: Frequency distribution and percentage of types of weapons commonly carried/used in weapon-related violence by in-school adolescents irrespective of gender

Types of weapons in use	Yes		No	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%

1. Handgun	113	26.6	387	77.4
2. Comb-concealed knife	416	83.2	84	16.8
3. Club	182	37.8	311	62.2
4. Short axe	262	54.4	238	47.6
5. Catapult	220	44	216	43.2
6. Any sharp object, e.g. broken bottle, razor blade or syringes	307	61.4	193	38.8

The result in Table 3 revealed the various types of weapons the adolescents in Anambra State public secondary schools arm themselves with and make use of in weapon-related violence/fights. Among the weapons which they armed themselves with and use, the comb-concealed knife was most popular to them (83.2%), followed by sharp objects (61.4%) and short axe (54.4%). As indicated in the result, the least carried weapons by Anambra State were handgun (26.6%) and club (37.8%).

Hypothesis

Table

4: Chi-square values verifying whether the rate of weapon- carrying and use is dependent on the gender status of students

		Total	<i>X_{cal}</i>	<i>X_{table}</i>
	Yes	No		
Male	155 (140.35)	103 (117.65)	258	20.91
Female	117 (131.65)	125 (110.35)	242	3.94
	272	228	500	

Table 4 above shows that the calculated value of x^2 which is 20.91, is greater than the critical or table value of 3.94. The null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in weapon carrying and use between male and female in-school adolescents in Anambra State. The males do more weapon carrying and use than their female counterparts.

Discussion



The purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of weapon carrying and use among Anambra state senior secondary school students, otherwise called the in-school adolescents in the study. Overall, the study results revealed an overwhelmingly high existence of weapon carrying and use behaviours among the in-school adolescents in Anambra State (67.6%). This prevalence may reflect the high incidence of killing and maiming of many Nigerian people with high powered explosives and AK-47 guns in our society by Boko Haram, Fulani militia, political thugs and daredevil armed robbers; not forgetting the reports of the brutality of law enforcement agents on civilians. This finding is similar to results from other studies that also found violence to be a common experience. Olufunmilayo, Olubunmi, and Oladipupo (2018) studied gender-based violence in public and private secondary schools in Ilorin, Nigeria, found a high proportion of students in both schools had experienced violence. Webster et al. (1993), in a study of Weapon Carrying among Inner-City Junior High School Students in Canada, found an alarmingly high prevalence of weapon carrying and use among the students. In the same vein, similar collaboration is a record of school attack with weapons before 2016, as reported by Birnbaum (2013) and cited in Lewis and Brown (2015).

The study also revealed certain odds which trigger, sustain and increase weapon carrying and use. These are the conditions under which adolescents see weapon carrying and use as warranted. They included; affiliation to delinquent peers, exposure to violent video games and films, Drug use and alcohol consumption, pain from past victimization, and a and negative relationship with the mother. This finding collaborated with Mattson, Sigel & Mercado (2020), which showed that having friends who engage in delinquency can influence the youth to access, possess or carry firearms and subsequently be involved in violent behaviour. This also corroborated the following studies; Brennan & Moore (2009), which identified self-defence, victim coercion etc., as motivations for weapon carrying. Cao, Zhang, & He, 2008; Ybarra et al., 2008; Bègue et al. (2015) all found similar situations as motivations for weapon carrying among students.

The types of weapons which are in use by in-school adolescents in Anambra State was revealed in the study, among which are, in the order of popularity: comb-sealed knives; sharp objects such as razor blade, hypodermic syringes and pieces of the broken bottle; short axe; catapults; club and handguns. This agrees with results from studies cited in Moore (2016). They found the handgun, razor, knife, shotgun in use by students they studied. Meehan & Cricket (2010), Walsh et al. (2013) also found similar results. Bègue, Roché, and Duke (2016), in their study, cited another

estimation which indicated that 14.1% of adolescents sampled reported carrying a gun, knife, club, or another weapon on their person in the past 30days.

Another relevant finding of the study agrees with other studies that male students carry and use weapons more than female students. This may also be a result of exposure to violent video games and practices while growing up. These studies established that males are more likely than females to carry weapon (Lowry et al., 1998; Muula et al., 2008; Yun & Hwang, 2011; Bègue et al., 2016). Drug use and alcohol consumption by male students may also be the reason for the difference in the involvement level in weapon carrying and use between males and females. This concurred with a previous study (Vaughn, Perron, Abdon, Olate & Groom, 2012). Their result from a series of logistic regression models indicated that males selling and using illicit drugs were robustly associated with an increased probability of handgun carrying among adolescents.

Conclusions

This study has empirically established a high rate of weapon carrying and use behaviour among adolescents at the level of senior secondary schools in Anambra State in the Southeast region of Nigeria. It has ruled out any doubt about the inclusivity of females from the web of weapon-related school violence. Ordinarily, without a painstaking study such as this, many would have been excusing the females from involvement in weapon-related school violence and other crimes. The study equally has ruled out the error of using gender as a criterion for making decisions on school intervention programmes directed at high-risk children to possibly buffer them against many social factors that foster criminal deviance and most violent behaviour patterns. The researchers believe that this study has opened stakeholders' eyes to the need to go beyond gender differences in fishing for delinquent students who need psychological attention.

Recommendations

Based on the above, the researchers make these few recommendations:

1. Education planners should provide curriculum/subject content that teaches children at all levels the risks associated with weapon carrying and use in schools.
2. School authorities should endeavour to make sincere efforts in checking the activities of student terrorists. This involves, among other measures,

conducting a random search on students and giving appropriate punishment to offenders to serve as a deterrent to others.

3. With the help of other stakeholders, the government should design-intensive and comprehensive interventions to prevent delinquency and deter less hardened adolescents from carrying weapons in the future and rescue those already entrapped in the evil web of weapon carrying and use and other crimes.
4. Parents and guardians should provide the adolescents with the much-needed family support; be there for them emotionally, monitor what they engage their time and energy in; role model good behaviour; know who their children's friends and associates are and what they enjoy doing, censure what they watch in the TV etc.
5. Government should criminalize the use of adolescents for political thuggery and other crimes.
6. Synergistic interventions that involve the parents, school authorities and students in non-violence conflict resolution are urgently required.

Limitation of the study

This study is limited by its inclusion of only 500 in-School adolescents from a state like Anambra known for her teeming population of youths. Additional studies are needed to determine how well these findings generalize to other youth populations in another Southeastern region of Nigeria. Greater insight into what initiates lifestyle of weapon carrying and use could also come from studies that explore the possibility of weapon carrying stemming more from antisocial attitudes and behaviours rather than from purely defensive motives of otherwise nonviolent youths.

Implications of the study:

High prevalence of weapon-carrying/use, high prevalence of drugs use, high susceptibility of adolescents who have never carried nor used weapons to initiate use in the years to come are all troubling indicators for future mass school shooting similar to the types being witnessed in the western world. What this holds is that without good efforts to implement the recommendations of the study and those of other related works, students' carrying and use of weapons will continue to remain a recurring event, especially among male students.

Consequent to this, the researchers make a clarion call to our government and policy-makers to rise and work with the urgency and gravity required to keep our students safe and desensitized from criminal influences.

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