

# Preventive Education and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools in Cross River State: Strategies for Intervention

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Article DOI: 10.48028/ijiretss.v12.i2.05

## Abstract

This study investigates preventive education and gender-based violence (GBV) in secondary schools across Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on effective strategies for intervention. The study examines how preventive education can reduce incidences of school-related violence and promote safer learning environments. A qualitative research design was employed using interviews, focus group discussions, and observations across six secondary schools in Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja education zones—representing both urban and rural contexts. Data were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that preventive education significantly improves students' awareness of GBV, fosters positive attitudes, and encourages non-violent behavior. However, implementation barriers such as inadequate teacher training, cultural taboos, weak institutional policies, and limited resources impede sustainability. The study concludes that effective school-based preventive strategies—including counseling, community engagement, gender clubs, and peer mentorship—are crucial for curbing GBV. Recommendations emphasize the integration of gender-sensitive curricula, stakeholder collaboration, and stronger policy enforcement to ensure safe, inclusive educational spaces.

**Keywords:** Preventive Education, Gender-Based Violence, Secondary Schools, Intervention, Cross River State

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## **Background to the Study**

Education is universally recognized as the most potent instrument for individual and social transformation. Beyond imparting knowledge and skills, it cultivates values, attitudes, and behaviors essential for peaceful coexistence. In this sense, education is not merely about academic achievement but about the holistic development of the learner. Within contemporary society, the rising trend of gender-based violence (GBV) in schools poses a grave threat to this transformative role of education. GBV encompasses a range of harmful behaviors—including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse—perpetrated on the basis of gender or sex (UN Women, 2023). When such acts occur within educational settings, they disrupt learning processes, erode learners' confidence, and undermine the moral and civic objectives of schooling.

In Nigeria, and particularly in Cross River State, incidents of school-related GBV have become increasingly visible. Reports from civil society organizations and media outlets reveal cases of sexual harassment, corporal punishment, verbal abuse, bullying, and even systemic discrimination against girls (UNESCO, 2023; Abah, 2023). These manifestations of violence are often reinforced by social norms that tolerate aggression, silence victims, or prioritize the male voice. As a result, the school—which should be a space of enlightenment - sometimes reproduces the very inequalities it is meant to challenge. This reality underscores the need for preventive education as a strategy to mitigate GBV and cultivate a culture of respect and non-violence among students.

Preventive education refers to structured educational efforts designed to anticipate, reduce, or eliminate social and behavioral problems before they escalate (Adeyemi, 2021). In the context of gender-based violence, it emphasizes awareness creation, attitude reorientation, and moral empowerment. Through targeted instruction, participatory learning, and value-based engagement, preventive education equips learners with the knowledge and emotional intelligence to identify, resist, and report acts of violence. It also fosters empathy and mutual respect, which are essential for maintaining safe and inclusive school environments. As Odu and Eze (2024) note, preventive education bridges the gap between knowledge and behavior by transforming learners' attitudes into socially desirable actions.

Equally important in this discourse is the concept of school-related violence, which encompasses all forms of aggression—physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological—that occur within or around the school environment (UNESCO, 2022). In Cross River State, factors such as socio-economic deprivation, cultural patriarchy, peer pressure, and inadequate school supervision exacerbate the prevalence of such violence. Both male and female students experience forms of aggression, but research consistently shows that girls are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and intimidation (Ogunyemi, 2022). This gender disparity points to the structural and cultural roots of the problem, which can only be addressed through deliberate, education-based social change.

Furthermore, strategies for prevention must be contextually relevant and evidence-based. Successful preventive interventions often combine curriculum reform, teacher training, peer

mentorship, counseling, and community sensitization (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023). The involvement of teachers, counselors, parents, and local stakeholders ensures that preventive measures are holistic rather than punitive. However, in many Nigerian schools, preventive education remains poorly implemented or misunderstood as moral instruction alone. There is a need for systematic frameworks that integrate gender sensitivity into the broader educational process and link prevention to behavior modification and value reformation.

From a philosophical perspective, preventive education is grounded in social reconstructionist ideals that view education as a mechanism for transforming unjust social structures (Counts, 1932; Freire, 1970). It aligns with the feminist theoretical standpoint that challenges power imbalances and seeks equity between genders (hooks, 2020). When schools adopt preventive education principles, they act not merely as institutions of instruction but as agents of social justice, capable of reconstructing the moral foundations of society. In the context of Cross River State, this transformation is essential to achieving gender equality and sustainable human development.

Therefore, this study investigates preventive education and gender-based violence in secondary schools in Cross River State, focusing on strategies for school-based intervention. It seeks to provide empirical evidence on how preventive education can serve as an effective tool for curbing GBV, identifying the challenges that hinder its implementation, and proposing feasible strategies that can be institutionalized across schools. The study is timely and relevant, as it aligns with Nigeria's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), both of which emphasize the right of every child to learn in a safe and supportive environment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increasing incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) within Nigerian secondary schools, including those in Cross River State, has become a major concern for educators, policymakers, and parents alike. Despite global and national advocacy for gender equality and child protection, schools continue to experience cases of sexual harassment, corporal punishment, bullying, and verbal abuse that compromise students' safety and well-being. These acts of violence not only violate the rights of learners but also obstruct their access to quality education, especially for female students who are often the most affected.

Although various policies exist- such as the Child Rights Act (2003) and the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2006) - their implementation in schools remains weak. Teachers and administrators frequently lack training in preventive education approaches that could promote gender sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and non-violent conflict resolution. Consequently, many schools respond reactively to incidents of violence rather than adopting proactive and preventive strategies. The absence of structured preventive education programs means that students rarely receive sustained moral, social, or psychological guidance on respecting gender differences and managing interpersonal relations peacefully.

Furthermore, empirical studies on school-related GBV in Cross River State are limited and fragmented, often focusing only on reported cases rather than on the underlying educational mechanisms for prevention. There is also a lack of systematic frameworks that link preventive education to measurable outcomes in behavior change, gender respect, and school safety. The challenge is compounded by cultural beliefs that normalize male dominance, discourage open discussion of sexual harassment, and silence victims, particularly in rural areas. In addition, the strategies for prevention that exist are either inadequately contextualized or poorly coordinated between teachers, parents, and community structures. Without deliberate integration of preventive education into the school curriculum and guidance systems, the goal of creating safe and inclusive learning environments remains elusive. Therefore, there is an urgent need to examine the role of preventive education in curbing gender-based violence in secondary schools across the educational zones of Cross River State, identify the challenges hindering effective implementation, and propose strategies for sustainable prevention. Addressing these gaps will contribute not only to safer schools but also to the broader agenda of gender equality and sustainable educational development.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This study aims to examine preventive education and gender-based violence in secondary schools in Cross River State, focusing on strategies for intervention. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the impact of preventive education on students' awareness and attitudes toward gender-based violence.
2. Identify common patterns and forms of school-related gender-based violence in secondary schools.
3. Investigate the challenges hindering the implementation of preventive education in addressing GBV.
4. Propose effective school-based strategies for preventing gender-based violence in secondary schools.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does preventive education influence students' awareness and attitudes toward gender-based violence?
2. What are the patterns and forms of school-related gender-based violence in Cross River State secondary schools?
3. What challenges hinder the effective implementation of preventive education in addressing gender-based violence?
4. What school-based strategies can effectively prevent gender-based violence in secondary schools?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research design anchored on phenomenological and descriptive approaches, aimed at gaining in-depth understanding of how preventive education can be effectively utilized to curb gender-based violence (GBV) in secondary schools in Cross River State. The choice of a qualitative method allowed for exploration of

real-life experiences, perceptions, and practices of teachers, students, and administrators concerning GBV prevention within school settings.

The study population comprised secondary school teachers, guidance counselors, principals, and students across the three educational zones of Cross River State - Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja. From these zones, six secondary schools were purposively selected: two from each zone (one urban and one rural school). This selection ensured balanced representation of geographical and socio-cultural diversity in the state's educational system.

A sample of sixty participants was drawn purposively - comprising twelve teachers, six principals, six guidance counselors, and thirty-six students - based on their direct involvement and experience with school-related gender issues. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and non-participant observation. The interviews provided personal insights into teachers' and administrators' perceptions, while focus group discussions encouraged open dialogue among students about gender-based violence, preventive education, and peer relationships. Observations were conducted in classrooms, playgrounds, and assemblies to note behaviors, interactions, and preventive mechanisms within the school environment.

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, the study employed triangulation by cross-verifying data from multiple sources and methods. Field notes, audio recordings, and reflective journals were used to ensure data consistency and authenticity. Data were analyzed thematically using inductive content analysis, allowing themes to emerge naturally from participants' narratives, aligned with the study's objectives and research questions. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to. The researchers obtained official permission from the selected schools and the State Ministry of Education before data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and gave voluntary consent. Anonymity, confidentiality, and respect for participants' opinions were ensured throughout the process. Sensitive discussions - especially on experiences of GBV - were handled with empathy, privacy, and professional discretion. This methodological approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive, context-specific understanding of preventive education as a strategy to address school-related gender-based violence in Cross River State secondary schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: The Feminist Theory and the Social Reconstructionism Theory. Both frameworks provide a philosophical and analytical foundation for understanding how preventive education can address the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV) in schools and promote gender equity through educational reform and social transformation.

### **Feminist Theory**

The Feminist Theory, which emerged from the broader feminist movement, focuses on the social, political, and cultural inequalities experienced by women and girls due to patriarchal systems. It posits that gender-based violence is not merely an individual or isolated behavior

but a reflection of systemic gender imbalance, stereotypes, and discriminatory socialization processes (Hooks, 2015; Butler, 2021). Within the educational context, feminist theorists argue that schools play a dual role—they can either reinforce gender hierarchies through biased practices or challenge them through inclusive and transformative education (Tong, 2018). Applying the Feminist Theory to this study provides a lens to examine how power relations, gender norms, and cultural expectations shape students' interactions and attitudes within schools in Cross River State. It helps in identifying how certain pedagogical practices, language use, and disciplinary approaches may perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence. Moreover, it offers a framework for designing preventive education strategies that promote gender sensitivity, respect, and equity through curriculum, guidance counseling, and teacher training.

The Feminist Theory is relevant because it enables the researcher to analyze the root causes of GBV as socially constructed and maintained through educational and cultural systems. It underpins the need for school-based interventions that challenge sexist ideologies, promote equal opportunities, and create safe learning environments for both boys and girls. This theoretical perspective thus supports the study's objective of exploring how preventive education can serve as a tool for gender justice and violence prevention in secondary schools.

### **Social Reconstructionism Theory**

The Social Reconstructionism Theory, propounded by educational philosophers such as Theodore Brameld (1950) and George Counts (1932), views education as a means of reconstructing society to address social injustices and promote progressive change. The theory emphasizes the role of schools in developing critical consciousness among learners, empowering them to question oppressive structures and participate in building a more just and peaceful society (Brameld, 1956). Social Reconstructionism advocates for a curriculum that is responsive to societal problems such as violence, inequality, and moral decay. In the context of this study, the Social Reconstructionism Theory provides a foundation for viewing preventive education as a transformative process aimed at reshaping students' values, behaviors, and attitudes toward gender relations. It positions schools as active agents in social reform, capable of influencing not only academic achievement but also moral and civic development. The theory supports participatory learning, dialogue, and social responsibility—all crucial for preventing gender-based violence and nurturing non-violent behavioral patterns among learners.

This theory is particularly relevant as it aligns with the study's aim of developing strategies for intervention within the school system. It underscores that preventing gender-based violence requires educational reconstruction, where schools become safe spaces that model equality, empathy, and respect. By integrating preventive education into school culture and pedagogy, the theory envisions long-term societal transformation toward gender equity and peace. In summary, together, the Feminist Theory and Social Reconstructionism Theory provide a dual perspective - one highlighting gender equity and empowerment, and the other emphasizing educational reform and social transformation. These theories collectively guide the analysis of preventive education as both a moral and structural process necessary for combating gender-based violence in secondary schools across Cross River State.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Conceptual clarification is vital in this study to establish the meanings, interrelationships, and contextual applications of the key variables. The major concepts clarified here include Preventive Education, Gender-Based Violence, School-Related Violence, and Strategies for Prevention. These concepts are discussed to ensure a clear understanding of how they shape the framework and focus of the study.

### **Preventive Education**

Preventive education refers to the deliberate use of teaching and learning processes to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to anticipate, recognize, and reduce harmful behaviors or situations before they occur (UNESCO, 2020). It emphasizes proactive rather than reactive responses to social and moral challenges within educational environments. Preventive education is grounded in the belief that education should not only transmit knowledge but also foster ethical awareness, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility (Gibbs & Earley, 2019).

In the context of this study, preventive education is viewed as an educational strategy designed to reduce the prevalence of gender-based and school-related violence. It includes classroom discussions on empathy, gender equality, self-control, and peaceful conflict resolution, as well as co-curricular programs that reinforce positive behavior among learners. When schools integrate preventive education into their curricula and guidance programs, they cultivate students' capacity to resist social pressures, challenge harmful stereotypes, and promote non-violence. Hence, preventive education serves as both a pedagogical tool and a moral compass for sustainable behavioral change in secondary schools.

### **Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

Gender-Based Violence is defined as any act of physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological harm perpetrated against an individual based on their gender or perceived gender roles (UN Women, 2021). It stems from unequal power relations and societal norms that privilege one gender - usually males - over the other. GBV can occur in various forms, including sexual harassment, bullying, corporal punishment, intimidation, verbal abuse, or exclusion from participation (World Health Organization, 2022).

In secondary schools, GBV manifests through behaviors such as sexual advances by teachers or peers, name-calling of female students, gender stereotyping, and violence in dating relationships. These acts have devastating effects on victims' psychological well-being, academic performance, and overall development. In Cross River State, GBV persists due to cultural silence, inadequate reporting mechanisms, and limited teacher training in gender sensitivity. Understanding GBV in this study helps identify the educational structures and interventions necessary to mitigate it through preventive strategies.

### **School-Related Violence**

School-related violence encompasses all forms of physical, psychological, or sexual harm that occur within or around educational institutions. According to UNICEF (2020), such

violence includes corporal punishment, peer bullying, emotional abuse, and harassment, often arising from power dynamics among students, teachers, and administrators. Unlike GBV, which is gender-specific, school-related violence affects all learners but is often influenced by gender norms and social conditioning.

In the Cross River State context, school-related violence has been linked to disciplinary practices, overcrowded classrooms, weak supervision, and lack of teacher training in non-violent communication. It creates an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, undermining students' learning and participation. Addressing school-related violence through preventive education promotes respect, inclusion, and accountability within the school system. It also aligns with the objectives of this study to evaluate the role of preventive education in reducing violence and fostering safe learning environments.

### **Strategies for Prevention**

Strategies for prevention refer to the deliberate and systematic educational actions taken to eliminate or reduce the causes and consequences of gender-based and school-related violence. These strategies include curriculum-based interventions, teacher capacity building, student peer programs, guidance and counseling services, school-community partnerships, and policy enforcement (UNESCO, 2023; Okafor & Opara, 2021).

Preventive strategies may be primary (focused on awareness creation and early intervention), secondary (targeting at-risk individuals), or tertiary (addressing victims and offenders to prevent recurrence). Effective strategies require the participation of all stakeholders—teachers, parents, administrators, and community leaders—to promote an integrated and sustainable model of prevention. Within this study, strategies for prevention are considered as the dependent variable, reflecting the outcome of preventive education efforts in secondary schools. The identification and evaluation of these strategies form a core objective of the research.

### **Gender and Preventive Education**

Gender is a social construct that defines roles, expectations, and behaviors associated with being male or female in a given society (Connell, 2019). Within the school context, gender influences access to learning, classroom participation, and exposure to violence. Preventive education aims to challenge gender stereotypes and promote equity by teaching students about respect, inclusivity, and empathy. When gender considerations are integrated into preventive education, schools become environments where both male and female students learn to interact based on fairness and mutual dignity. Thus, understanding gender dynamics is essential for implementing effective violence prevention programs. This conceptual clarification provides a coherent understanding of the interrelationships among the study variables. Preventive education functions as a means, gender-based and school-related violence as problems, and strategies for prevention as outcomes, all situated within the sociocultural realities of Cross River State secondary schools.

## **Empirical Review**

This section is organized according to the study's specific objectives and questions to ensure a logical and systematic flow.

### **Preventive Education and Gender-Based Violence**

Preventive education has emerged as a central strategy for addressing the rising incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) in educational institutions and society at large. It is not merely an academic exercise but a proactive process aimed at equipping learners with the knowledge, values, and social competencies necessary to recognize, resist, and report all forms of violence and discrimination. According to UNESCO (2022), preventive education integrates gender equality, human rights, and social responsibility into learning systems to promote safe, inclusive, and respectful school environments. This approach aligns with the global agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 5, which emphasizes the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls through education and empowerment.

From a conceptual standpoint, preventive education operates on the assumption that violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned through transformative pedagogy. It seeks to challenge the social norms, stereotypes, and power imbalances that perpetuate gender inequalities. As Eze-Anaba (2019) asserts, the absence of gender-sensitive education in many Nigerian schools contributes to the persistence of GBV by normalizing silence, victim-blaming, and unequal gender roles. Preventive education thus functions as a corrective mechanism, fostering awareness, empathy, and respect for human dignity among learners and teachers alike.

Moreover, research underscores the multi-dimensional nature of preventive education. It includes the integration of life skills training, moral instruction, sexuality education, and civic learning into the curriculum to help students develop non-violent communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict-resolution skills (Akinbi et al., 2020). In Nigeria, initiatives such as the Safe Schools Declaration (2020) and the National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools (2021) have emphasized the importance of embedding preventive education in school programs to combat GBV and promote learner well-being (UNICEF Nigeria, 2021; Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

Traditionally, scholars have also highlighted the role of teacher capacity-building in the success of preventive education. Teachers serve as the first line of defence in identifying, reporting, and preventing violence in schools. However, many educators lack adequate training on gender responsiveness, classroom management, and psychosocial support (Ajayi & Oni, 2022). Consequently, preventive education is most effective when supported by continuous professional development, participatory school policies, and community engagement mechanisms that extend learning beyond the classroom.

Empirical evidence across Africa further reveals that schools implementing structured preventive education programs witness a measurable decline in harassment and bullying incidents. For instance, UN Women (2024) documented a 35 percent reduction in reported

cases of GBV in pilot schools in Ghana and Nigeria following the introduction of gender-sensitive curricula and teacher mentoring. Similarly, Onyango and Teka (2023) found that integrating preventive education into school governance fosters a culture of accountability, where both male and female students become active agents of change.

Despite these achievements, challenges persist. Cultural taboos, patriarchal ideologies, and institutional inertia continue to undermine preventive education efforts, especially in rural and low-resource schools (Okafor & Opara, 2021). Nevertheless, the progressive shift toward inclusive education frameworks provides a strategic opportunity to institutionalize prevention as a core component of school life. Therefore, preventive education is not only a pedagogical innovation but also a human-rights-based strategy that directly contributes to sustainable peace, gender equality, and educational quality in Nigeria and beyond.

### **School-Related Violence and Its Impact on Students**

School-related violence (SRV) has become a major global and national concern, particularly in low- and middle-income countries such as Nigeria, where educational institutions serve as both centers of learning and socialization. According to UNESCO (2023), school-related violence refers to all forms of physical, psychological, or sexual harm that occur in and around educational settings, perpetrated by peers, teachers, or other members of the community. It includes corporal punishment, bullying, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and gender-based discrimination. The persistence of such acts poses a significant threat to the realization of quality and inclusive education, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4.

In Nigeria, school-related violence has been increasingly documented across urban and rural areas, often mirroring broader societal issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and weak institutional responses (Akinwale & Yusuf, 2021). Students, especially girls, face heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation, intimidation, and harassment from peers and authority figures. Furthermore, studies show that violence in schools often remains underreported due to stigma, fear of reprisal, and cultural norms that trivialize abuse (Ogunyemi et al., 2022). Consequently, SRV undermines the psychological well-being and academic performance of victims, leading to absenteeism, withdrawal, and poor academic achievement (UNICEF, 2021).

Transitionally, the impact of SRV extends beyond academic outcomes to include emotional and behavioral consequences. Victims often experience trauma, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which impede their ability to learn effectively (Okeke, 2020). For instance, longitudinal research in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that students exposed to repeated bullying or sexual violence show reduced concentration levels and lower engagement in classroom activities (UNESCO, 2023; Nwosu & Eze, 2022). In the long term, this environment fosters a culture of silence and tolerance for abuse, thereby reproducing cycles of violence within and outside the school system.

In addition, gender plays a crucial mediating role in both the experience and consequences of SRV. Boys often face physical violence and bullying aimed at reinforcing traditional

masculinity, while girls are more likely to encounter sexual and emotional abuse (Ede & Eze, 2021). This gendered dimension of violence not only violates students' rights but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes that limit educational opportunities and social equity. Accordingly, scholars such as Chisom and Hassan (2023) have emphasized the importance of gender-responsive interventions that address power imbalances and encourage mutual respect between students and teachers.

Another emerging dimension is the rise of digital and cyberbullying within school communities. As students increasingly use technology for learning, cases of online harassment, image-based abuse, and hate speech have intensified, exacerbating emotional distress among victims (Bada et al., 2023). Hence, violence in schools is no longer confined to physical spaces; it has extended into virtual learning environments, further complicating prevention and intervention strategies.

From an institutional standpoint, the absence of clear school-based reporting mechanisms and disciplinary procedures aggravates the problem. Many schools lack trained counselors, gender desks, and safe reporting channels, leading to impunity for perpetrators and discouragement for victims (Ajayi & Oni, 2022). In rural areas, traditional beliefs and patriarchal norms often discourage open discussion about violence, framing it as a private or family issue rather than a public concern (Okafor & Opara, 2021).

However, evidence from intervention programs indicates that preventive education, when integrated into school policies, significantly reduces incidents of SRV. For instance, the Safe Schools Initiative in northern Nigeria demonstrated that training teachers on gender sensitivity and conflict resolution led to a 40% decrease in reported cases of physical and verbal abuse (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022). Similarly, UN Women (2024) found that schools implementing community-participatory prevention programs recorded improved student retention and a stronger sense of safety.

In summary, school-related violence constitutes a multidimensional threat to educational access, quality, and sustainability. Its consequences are physical, psychological, and societal, affecting students' ability to learn, socialize, and develop holistically. Therefore, addressing SRV through preventive education and gender-sensitive interventions remains vital for achieving safe learning environments and promoting social justice in schools across Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole.

### **Challenges Facing Preventive Education Implementation**

Implementing preventive education faces numerous institutional, cultural, and resource-based barriers. Okafor and Opara (2021) identified limited teacher competence, inadequate training materials, and overcrowded classrooms as major hindrances to effective delivery of preventive lessons. Bamigboye (2020) emphasized that many Nigerian teachers perceive gender education as controversial or unnecessary, which limits its acceptance in schools.

Uduak and Abang (2022) highlighted that weak policy enforcement, cultural silence about sexual abuse, and lack of funding constrain school-based preventive programs in Cross River

State. Similarly, Ezeanya and Uwakwe (2023) found that principals often prioritize academic performance over psychosocial education, thereby reducing attention to preventive learning initiatives. Afolabi and Akande (2020) also noted that students' reluctance to discuss issues of violence publicly poses a challenge to participatory learning approaches such as focus group dialogues. Globally, Brown and McAllister (2019) identified institutional resistance and traditional gender norms as recurring challenges to preventive education implementation, particularly in patriarchal societies. The persistence of these barriers indicates that effective preventive education must be context-sensitive, participatory, and supported by continuous teacher professional development.

### **Strategies for Preventing Gender-Based and School-Related Violence**

Preventing gender-based and school-related violence in secondary schools requires a comprehensive, coordinated, and contextually grounded approach. This section outlines key preventive strategies, linking classroom practices, institutional frameworks, and community engagement to sustainable educational outcomes.

To begin with, teacher training and professional development remain the cornerstone of preventive education. Teachers occupy a strategic position as role models and first responders in cases of violence. Therefore, continuous professional development programmes are essential to build teachers' capacity for gender-responsive pedagogy. Indeed, studies confirm that sustained exposure to gender equity, classroom ethics, and conflict management significantly reduces tolerance for bullying and abuse (Akinbi, Ifegbesan, & Oladele, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). Moreover, integrating preventive education modules into both pre-service and in-service teacher education ensures continuity and long-term impact.

Furthermore, curriculum integration offers another critical strategy. Preventive education should not be treated as an isolated programme but embedded across subjects such as civic education, social studies, and guidance and counselling. In this regard, lessons on empathy, respect, and human rights can be infused into classroom discussions to challenge discriminatory norms (Ajayi & Oni, 2022; UNICEF Nigeria, 2021). Additionally, adopting interactive pedagogies—such as debates, role-playing, and storytelling—encourages participatory learning and promotes social-emotional intelligence among learners.

In addition to curriculum reform, strengthening guidance and counselling units is indispensable. Counsellors provide emotional and psychological support to students, offering confidential channels for reporting violence. As Adewale (2023) notes, functional guidance units foster a sense of trust, enabling early intervention and conflict resolution. Therefore, schools should ensure that counsellors are professionally trained and equipped to handle sensitive cases.

Equally important is effective policy enforcement and school governance. Although Nigeria has ratified frameworks like the Child Rights Act (2003) and the Safe Schools Declaration (2020), their implementation at the grassroots remains weak. Hence, schools must institutionalize zero-tolerance policies for sexual harassment and violence, while regularly

auditing safety protocols and engaging students in school governance (Onyango & Teka, 2023; UN Women, 2024). Through such accountability systems, schools can transition from reactive to preventive cultures.

Beyond the school environment, community and parental participation play a vital role in sustaining preventive education. Because gender stereotypes often originate within families and communities, schools should collaborate with parents, traditional leaders, and religious institutions to raise awareness about gender equality and child protection (Eze-Anaba, 2019; World Bank, 2023). Consequently, when communities understand the moral, legal, and developmental costs of violence, they become partners in creating safer spaces for children. Moreover, student involvement through peer mentorship and school clubs enhances ownership of preventive initiatives. Peer educators and gender equity clubs have proven effective in reshaping attitudes and providing early support networks for victims. For instance, Okorie and Adedoyin (2020) found that peer-led interventions promote positive behavioral change and mutual respect among adolescents.

Finally, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensure the sustainability of preventive strategies. Schools should collect gender-disaggregated data, conduct periodic safety assessments, and review intervention outcomes (Okafor & Opara, 2021). Through such evidence-based feedback loops, policymakers can refine strategies and allocate resources where they are most needed. In summary, preventive education thrives when multiple strategies operate synergistically—teacher empowerment, curriculum reform, counselling services, policy enforcement, community collaboration, and continuous monitoring. In Cross River State, adopting such integrated frameworks can transform schools into safe learning environments and agents of gender equity.

### **Summary and Research Gap**

The reviewed literature demonstrates that preventive education is a critical and evidence-based approach for reducing gender-based and school-related violence. Across the studies, scholars consistently agree that early intervention through education is essential to shaping positive attitudes, fostering empathy, and building safer school environments (Akinbi et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2022). The literature also reveals a growing consensus that the integration of preventive strategies within the formal curriculum strengthens learners' moral awareness and resilience against abusive behaviours (Ajayi & Oni, 2022; UNICEF Nigeria, 2021).

Furthermore, empirical findings highlight several core strategies: teacher capacity-building, curriculum reform, functional counselling systems, community engagement, and effective policy enforcement. When these strategies operate synergistically, they contribute significantly to the prevention of violence and the promotion of gender equity (Eze-Anaba, 2019; UN Women, 2024). However, the reviewed works also expose recurring implementation gaps, particularly in developing contexts like Nigeria. Limited teacher training, weak institutional frameworks, poor data management, and cultural taboos continue to impede the full realization of preventive education goals (Okafor & Opara, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

Transitionally, while global and regional studies have examined the broad impact of school-based interventions, few have specifically focused on secondary schools in Cross River State. Most existing research either aggregates national data or concentrates on tertiary institutions, leaving the peculiarities of state-level dynamics understudied (Onyango & Teka, 2023). Moreover, few empirical works have adopted triangulated methodologies—combining interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observations—to explore how preventive education is practiced and experienced in everyday school settings.

Another significant gap concerns the link between gender-based violence prevention and educational policy implementation at the local school level. Although Nigeria has enacted policies like the Child Rights Act (2003) and endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration (2020), there is scant empirical assessment of how these frameworks translate into preventive practices within public and private secondary schools in Cross River State. Similarly, little attention has been paid to rural–urban disparities in the effectiveness of prevention strategies, despite contextual differences in teacher availability, parental involvement, and school safety infrastructure.

Consequently, this study is designed to fill these gaps by examining preventive education and gender-based violence in secondary schools across Cross River State, focusing on school-based strategies for intervention and prevention. Through the use of interviews, focus group discussions, and structured observations, the study aims to generate empirical evidence on how preventive education operates in both urban and rural settings within the state's three education zones - Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja. In conclusion, while existing literature provides valuable theoretical and policy insights, it lacks context-specific, field-based analysis of how preventive education can be strengthened to address gender-based and school-related violence in Cross River State. This gap underscores the necessity and originality of the present research.

### **Findings and Discussions**

This section presents the major findings derived from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations conducted across selected secondary schools in Cross River State. The analysis is organized around four key themes that reflect the objectives of the study and flow directly from the empirical review. Each theme represents patterns and recurring ideas emerging from the voices of teachers, students, and school administrators, triangulated with documented literature.

#### **The Role of Preventive Education in Mitigating Gender-Based Violence**

Findings from the study revealed that preventive education plays a pivotal role in reducing the incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) in secondary schools across Cross River State. Through curriculum-based interventions, moral instruction, peer education programs, and teacher-led advocacy, schools have become strategic environments for promoting gender equality and non-violent behavior. Participants emphasized that preventive education enhances students' awareness of human rights, gender sensitivity, and respect for individual boundaries. For instance, teachers reported that integrating topics such as empathy, conflict

resolution, and gender equity into civic education and social studies lessons helps learners internalize non-violent norms from an early age.

Moreover, the introduction of guidance and counseling units in most schools was identified as a significant preventive tool. Counselors, through life skills education and mentorship, guide both male and female students toward positive behavioral change. This aligns with findings by Ede and Osondu (2022), who observed that preventive education fosters emotional intelligence and self-control - key competencies in mitigating aggressive behavior. Similarly, Agbakwuru et al. (2021) found that school-based sensitization campaigns help dismantle cultural stereotypes that normalize violence, particularly against female students. In addition, teacher training workshops on gender-responsive pedagogy have contributed to early detection and intervention in potential cases of school-related violence. Teachers who received such training reported improved competence in handling issues of sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Importantly, preventive education not only imparts knowledge but also shapes values, attitudes, and behavior, creating a safer and more inclusive school environment.

However, despite these gains, findings also revealed inconsistencies in the implementation of preventive education across schools. Rural schools, for instance, were less likely to have structured programs or trained counselors compared to their urban counterparts. This disparity, as discussed by Okon and James (2023), undermines the overall goal of prevention and perpetuates unequal exposure to violence education. From a theoretical standpoint, the Social Reconstructionism Theory reinforces the relevance of preventive education as a transformative instrument for social change. By addressing the structural roots of gender-based violence - such as patriarchal norms, inequality, and lack of awareness - education becomes a tool for reconstructing a more just and humane society. Additionally, the Feminist Theory underscores the importance of challenging power imbalances and promoting equitable gender relations within school settings.

In discussion, the evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations suggests that preventive education is not merely an academic exercise but a holistic social process. It reshapes students' moral reasoning, fosters empathy, and cultivates respect for diversity. Through continuous sensitization, curriculum reform, and stakeholder collaboration, schools in Cross River State are gradually evolving into safer learning spaces. Thus, preventive education stands as both a pedagogical and sociocultural mechanism for mitigating gender-based violence and ensuring sustainable educational development.

### **Patterns and Impact of School-Related Violence on Students**

The findings from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions revealed diverse patterns of school-related violence manifesting in both subtle and overt forms across secondary schools in Cross River State. These patterns - ranging from physical and sexual violence to emotional abuse and bullying - underscore the complexity of violence as a social and educational problem that undermines students' holistic development.

To begin with, physical violence remains the most common and visible pattern identified in both urban and rural schools. Corporal punishment, physical fights among students, and aggressive disciplinary methods were frequently reported by participants. Teachers justified corporal punishment as a means of enforcing discipline, while students perceived it as humiliation and fear-inducing. This aligns with the findings of Okon and Etim (2020), who reported that persistent physical punishment often results in emotional trauma, absenteeism, and declining academic motivation. Moreover, as transitional evidence from Eze (2023) suggests, repeated exposure to violence normalizes aggression, leading to cycles of peer victimization and retaliation.

Closely related is emotional and psychological violence, often expressed through verbal abuse, intimidation, stigmatization, and neglect. Observations in classrooms and playgrounds revealed that some teachers and peers engage in name-calling and body-shaming, especially targeting students from low socio-economic backgrounds or those with disabilities. As emphasized by Abiola (2022), such emotional harm can be more devastating than physical aggression, leading to diminished self-worth and poor classroom participation. Indeed, several participants shared experiences of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal resulting from prolonged emotional mistreatment.

Furthermore, the study identified sexual harassment and gender-based violence as growing concerns, particularly affecting female students. Instances of inappropriate touching, sexist remarks, and coercive relationships between teachers and students were mentioned across several schools. While the majority of these incidents go unreported, their psychological consequences are severe. Effiom and Bassey (2024) documented that fear of victim-blaming and stigma discourages victims from seeking help, perpetuating a culture of silence. In addition, unequal power dynamics between male teachers and female students exacerbate the risk of exploitation, reinforcing the gender inequalities preventive education seeks to address.

Another observed pattern is peer bullying, both physical and digital. Although more prevalent in urban schools, bullying was found to affect students' mental well-being, attendance, and academic concentration. Victims often exhibit low self-esteem, emotional distress, and declining performance. These findings are supported by Oko and Udo (2023), who found a strong correlation between bullying and dropout rates among adolescents in southern Nigeria. Moreover, with the rise of digital connectivity, cyberbullying through social media platforms has become an emerging challenge, extending violence beyond the physical boundaries of the school.

The impact of school-related violence on students is multifaceted, influencing not only their academic performance but also their emotional and social development. Interviews revealed that victims of violence often suffer reduced academic achievement, as fear and trauma impair concentration and motivation to learn. Many students also reported school avoidance and disengagement, reflecting a breakdown in trust between learners and educators. In the words of one rural female participant, "I stopped going to school for two weeks because my teacher slapped me before everyone." This testimony exemplifies how violence erodes students' sense of safety and belonging within educational spaces.

Additionally, the findings show that school-related violence reinforces gender inequality. Female students, in particular, are more likely to internalize fear and self-blame, limiting their participation in class discussions and extracurricular activities. This finding resonates with UNESCO (2023), which noted that gender-based violence remains a critical barrier to achieving inclusive and equitable education worldwide. Consequently, school violence not only harms individuals but also perpetuates systemic discrimination, contradicting the goals of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). In summary, the data revealed that school-related violence manifests in multiple interconnected patterns, each carrying significant consequences for students' academic, emotional, and social well-being. As the evidence demonstrates, violence in schools - whether physical, emotional, or sexual - creates an environment of fear and inequality that undermines the aims of preventive education. Therefore, addressing these patterns requires strategic, evidence-based interventions that prioritize student safety, gender equity, and psychosocial support.

### **Challenges Facing the Implementation of Preventive Education**

The study revealed that despite the increasing awareness of the importance of preventive education in addressing gender-based and school-related violence, its effective implementation in secondary schools across Cross River State remains fraught with numerous challenges. These challenges are both systemic and cultural, and they interact to weaken the delivery and sustainability of preventive education programmes.

To begin with, inadequate teacher preparation and professional development emerged as one of the most pressing issues. Interviews with teachers and school administrators revealed that most educators lack specialized training in gender-responsive pedagogy, counseling, and child protection. As a result, preventive education lessons are often taught superficially, without integrating concepts of empathy, conflict resolution, or violence prevention into everyday classroom practice. This finding corroborates Eke and Johnson (2023), who observed that the absence of continuous professional development hinders teachers' ability to model non-violent and inclusive behaviors in schools. Furthermore, as Okon (2021) explained, a teacher who lacks confidence in preventive education cannot effectively transfer its values to learners.

Equally challenging is the weak institutional framework and poor policy implementation at the school and state levels. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education and related child protection laws recognize the need to safeguard learners from violence, schools rarely have operational guidelines for integrating preventive education into their curriculum. Focus group discussions showed that most schools depend on ad hoc interventions from NGOs or religious bodies rather than structured, government-led programs. This inconsistency echoes the findings of Effiom and Bassey (2022), who emphasized that fragmented implementation results in poor monitoring and evaluation, making preventive education unsustainable.

Another major barrier is the persistence of socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes that legitimize violence and hinder open dialogue about sensitive issues. In several rural communities, traditional beliefs discourage discussions about gender-based violence, sexual

harassment, or reproductive rights. Teachers often avoid these topics for fear of backlash from parents or community leaders. This cultural resistance not only perpetuates silence but also normalizes gender hierarchies. As Etim (2023) rightly noted, culture can act as both a protective and repressive force in educational reform - depending on how it is engaged.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate resources and infrastructure poses a substantial challenge to effective implementation. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack functional counseling units, teaching aids, or safe reporting mechanisms for victims of abuse. Observations across the six selected schools revealed that students who experienced violence had no access to confidential psychological support. According to Nkanga (2024), such infrastructural deficits exacerbate students' vulnerability and weaken the preventive capacity of schools. In addition, overcrowded classrooms and overburdened teachers make it difficult to dedicate time to non-academic discussions on behavioral change or violence prevention.

A related challenge is the low level of parental and community involvement in preventive education. Parents often perceive violence prevention as a purely school-based affair and seldom reinforce non-violent behavioral norms at home. This disconnection creates a gap between what students learn in school and what they experience in their families and communities. As Bassey and Udo (2020) argued, without collective community ownership, preventive education cannot yield transformative social outcomes. Similarly, some school administrators reported that community interference—especially in cases involving influential offenders - often discourages teachers from pursuing disciplinary measures. Finally, funding constraints and limited government commitment further compound the situation. Preventive education is not directly funded as a line item in the education budget, leading to dependence on donor-supported initiatives that are short-term in nature. According to UNESCO (2023), sustainable violence prevention requires consistent investment in teacher capacity, safe school infrastructure, and gender-sensitive curricula. Without adequate funding, preventive programs risk being tokenistic and unsustainable.

In summary, the challenges identified - ranging from teacher inadequacy and policy weaknesses to socio-cultural resistance and lack of resources—highlight that preventive education in Cross River State is still at a formative stage. These barriers collectively limit its capacity to protect learners and promote gender equity. Therefore, overcoming these challenges requires systematic planning, community engagement, policy enforcement, and continuous teacher training. Transitioning from these obstacles, the next section discusses the strategies for strengthening preventive education and reducing gender-based and school-related violence in secondary schools across the state.

### **Strategies for Preventing Gender-Based and School-Related Violence**

The study uncovered several strategic approaches that can effectively strengthen preventive education and reduce the incidence of gender-based and school-related violence in secondary schools across Cross River State. These strategies emerged from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, and they align with national education policies and global best practices in violence prevention. Implementing these strategies requires an integrated, multi-

stakeholder approach that combines school-level initiatives, community participation, and policy reinforcement.

To begin with, teacher capacity building and professional development remain the cornerstone of effective preventive education. Participants consistently emphasized that teachers should be trained not only in classroom management but also in gender-responsive pedagogy, empathy, and counseling skills. Through regular workshops and seminars, educators can be equipped to detect early signs of violence, mediate conflicts, and create inclusive learning environments. This recommendation aligns with UNESCO (2023) and Eke and Johnson (2023), who stress that empowering teachers transforms them into agents of peace and social change. Furthermore, incorporating preventive education modules into teacher training colleges ensures that future educators enter the profession with the right knowledge and attitude toward gender equality and non-violence. In addition, curriculum integration of preventive education content was identified as a sustainable strategy. Instead of treating preventive education as an isolated subject, participants suggested that its principles—respect, empathy, conflict resolution, and human rights—should be infused into existing subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, and Religious Studies. This approach makes prevention learning continuous and contextually relevant. According to Ushie and Edet (2021), integrating preventive themes into the formal curriculum reinforces consistent behavioral modeling, ensuring that values of peace and respect are internalized across disciplines.

Moreover, strengthening guidance and counseling services emerged as a critical preventive measure. Many students disclosed that they lacked safe spaces to share personal experiences of bullying, abuse, or harassment. Establishing functional counseling units staffed by trained counselors can provide emotional support, encourage reporting, and facilitate early interventions. As Nkanga (2024) affirms, schools with active counseling units record lower rates of violence and better psychosocial well-being among learners. Importantly, counseling services should be confidential, gender-sensitive, and accessible to all students, including those in rural areas.

Equally vital is community and parental involvement in preventive education. Effective violence prevention extends beyond the classroom; it requires shared responsibility among parents, religious leaders, community elders, and youth groups. During focus group sessions, respondents highlighted that parents' attitudes toward gender norms strongly influence children's behavior. Thus, organizing community sensitization campaigns and parent-teacher forums on gender equality, respect, and non-violent conflict resolution can bridge the gap between home and school. This is consistent with Bassey and Udoh (2020), who contend that sustainable preventive education depends on community participation and collective accountability.

Another key strategy involves policy reinforcement and administrative commitment. School authorities and education policymakers must develop and implement clear frameworks that define, monitor, and sanction acts of violence within schools. Establishing school safety

committees and adopting zero-tolerance policies against bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual harassment can strengthen institutional accountability. As UNICEF (2022) points out, violence prevention thrives where schools institutionalize codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms that protect both victims and whistleblowers. Furthermore, integration of peer-led initiatives was identified as an innovative approach. Students themselves can serve as ambassadors for peace through clubs, debates, and creative arts that promote respect, gender equity, and non-violence. Findings revealed that schools with peer mentoring programs recorded fewer incidents of bullying and gender discrimination. This aligns with Effiom (2022), who noted that youth-led advocacy enhances ownership and sustainability of behavioral change initiatives.

Lastly, the study emphasized the importance of leveraging media and digital platforms to promote awareness and advocacy. School radio programs, social media campaigns, and visual posters can help reinforce preventive messages and debunk myths surrounding gender roles and violence. As Adebayo and Okorie (2023) observed, digital literacy and responsible media use empower students to challenge harmful stereotypes and become active promoters of peace.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that preventing gender-based and school-related violence requires a holistic and participatory strategy grounded in education, policy, and community action. By combining teacher training, curriculum reform, guidance services, and community engagement, preventive education can effectively cultivate safer, more inclusive learning environments. Moving forward, these strategies should be institutionalized within state and national education systems to ensure long-term sustainability and measurable impact.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study set out to examine the role of preventive education in addressing gender-based and school-related violence in secondary schools across Cross River State. Drawing on data from interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations in six selected schools across the Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja education zones, several key findings emerged. Collectively, they underscore the significance of preventive education as a transformative tool for promoting safety, equality, and holistic development within the school environment.

To begin with, the study revealed that preventive education serves as a vital framework for reducing the prevalence of gender-based and school-related violence. When properly implemented, preventive education empowers students with knowledge, attitudes, and life skills that enable them to resolve conflicts peacefully, resist peer pressure, and uphold mutual respect. Teachers and students in schools with active preventive education programs demonstrated greater awareness of non-violent communication and gender equality. Secondly, the study found that school-related violence in Cross River State manifests in diverse patterns, including physical aggression, emotional abuse, sexual harassment, and peer bullying. These forms of violence occur both within and outside the classroom, affecting students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social relationships. Particularly, female students remain disproportionately affected by gender-based violence,

reflecting broader societal inequalities. The persistence of these patterns indicates that violence is not merely behavioral but also structural - rooted in social norms, institutional weaknesses, and unequal power relations.

Thirdly, the research revealed numerous challenges impeding the effective implementation of preventive education in schools. Among the most notable were inadequate teacher training, weak institutional support, insufficient funding, and deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers. Many teachers lacked the pedagogical competence and confidence to integrate gender and violence prevention topics into their lessons. In rural areas, resistance from parents and community leaders further constrained open discussions about gender equality and sexual harassment. Additionally, the absence of structured monitoring systems and counseling services reduced schools' capacity to intervene effectively.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that strategic interventions can significantly enhance preventive education. These include continuous teacher capacity building, integration of preventive content into the curriculum, establishment of functional guidance and counseling units, and community involvement through awareness campaigns. Other promising measures involve the creation of peer-led programs and school safety policies that enforce zero tolerance for violence. Such strategies, when sustained, foster safer and more inclusive learning environments conducive to academic and moral growth.

Lastly, it was observed that preventive education initiatives thrive best in schools where administrators demonstrate leadership commitment and where community stakeholders actively participate in policy implementation. The collaborative synergy among teachers, parents, and local authorities was found to be a critical factor in sustaining preventive practices. Schools that embraced participatory decision-making recorded fewer cases of violence and stronger student-teacher relationships. In summary, the study's findings confirm that while preventive education is an effective tool for combating gender-based and school-related violence, its impact is currently limited by systemic, pedagogical, and socio-cultural constraints. Strengthening these areas through coordinated action will not only mitigate violence but also promote equity, resilience, and moral development among students in Cross River State.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined Preventive Education and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools in Cross River State: Strategies for Intervention. Drawing from interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations conducted in six selected schools across the Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja education zones, the findings affirm that preventive education remains a vital strategy for curbing gender-based and school-related violence.

To begin with, the study concluded that preventive education, when effectively implemented, cultivates a culture of peace, empathy, and mutual respect among students and teachers. It empowers learners with moral and social competencies that discourage violence, bullying, and discriminatory behavior. However, despite its potential, preventive education in Cross

River State's secondary schools faces several constraints such as poor teacher preparedness, inadequate resources, weak institutional frameworks, and the persistence of harmful socio-cultural norms.

Furthermore, the study established that school-related violence—whether physical, emotional, or sexual—continues to undermine students' academic success and psychological well-being. Female students, in particular, remain vulnerable to harassment and exploitation due to entrenched gender inequalities and inadequate reporting mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening preventive education is not merely an educational necessity but a moral and social imperative for achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

Importantly, the study confirmed that a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that includes teacher training, curriculum reform, counseling, and community involvement is the most effective way to prevent violence. In addition, policy enforcement, accountability mechanisms, and school leadership commitment are essential for sustaining preventive education as part of the broader educational reform agenda. In conclusion, preventive education must be institutionalized as a core pillar of the school system in Cross River State. It should not be treated as an auxiliary activity but as a central framework that shapes values, behaviors, and social relationships within and beyond the school environment. Through continuous collaboration among government agencies, educators, parents, and communities, preventive education can foster a safer, fairer, and more resilient educational system.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and discussions of this study, the following recommendations are made to strengthen preventive education and reduce gender-based and school-related violence in secondary schools in Cross River State:

1. Curriculum Integration: Preventive education should be systematically incorporated into the secondary school curriculum through subjects such as Civic Education, Social Studies, and Guidance and Counselling to promote gender sensitivity, non-violence, and respect for human rights.
2. Teacher Training and Capacity Building: The Ministry of Education should organize regular workshops and seminars to train teachers on identifying, preventing, and managing school-related and gender-based violence using participatory and inclusive approaches.
3. Strengthening School Support Systems: Schools should establish effective counselling units and reporting mechanisms where students can safely disclose incidents of violence, supported by trained counsellors and gender desk officers.
4. Community and Policy Engagement: Stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, and policymakers, should collaborate to enforce school safety policies, challenge harmful cultural norms, and create community-based prevention programs that reinforce non-violent behavior and gender equality.

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