Teacher-Perpetrated Violence, Behavioural Problems, and Prosocial Functioning Among In-School Adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria

Adebunmi O. Oyekola* (PhD) & Jane Ene Ichukwu

Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Teacher-perpetrated violence remains a significant child protection concern in Nigerian secondary schools, with potential consequences for adolescent psychosocial adjustment and relational functioning.

Aims: This study examined the prevalence and patterns of teacher violence and their associations with emotional, behavioural, and prosocial functioning among in-school adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria.

Method: A descriptive correlational survey was conducted among 300 Senior Secondary School One (SSS1) students (43.7% male; Mage = 14.37 years, SD = 1.36) selected from six public secondary schools using multistage random sampling. Teacher violence was assessed using the Teacher Violence Scale (TVS), while psychosocial adjustment was assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-tests, and hierarchical multiple regression.

Results: Overall, 74.0% of participants reported exposure to at least one form of teacher violence. Accusing/humiliating violence (59.7%) and physical violence (54.7%) were the most prevalent forms. Teacher violence was significantly associated with externalising behavioural problems ($r = .128$, $p = .027$) and negatively associated with prosocial behaviour ($r = -.217$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater violence exposure corresponded with reduced empathy, cooperation, and positive social functioning. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that sexual violence uniquely predicted behavioural problems beyond demographic factors and other violence dimensions. Male adolescents reported significantly higher exposure to teacher violence than females. No significant association emerged between overall teacher violence and internalising problems.

Conclusion: Teacher-perpetrated violence constitutes an important developmental and child protection concern within Nigerian secondary schools. Beyond behavioural dysregulation, its association with reduced prosocial functioning suggests broader implications for adolescent relational development and classroom climate. Findings highlight the need for trauma-informed pedagogy, non-violent disciplinary practices, and school-based psychosocial support systems.

Keywords: teacher-perpetrated violence; prosocial behaviour; behavioural problems; adolescent wellbeing; child protection; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The safety and quality of the school environment exerts a powerful influence on adolescent psychological development. Schools are expected to serve as structured, nurturing spaces where young people develop cognitive capacities, social competencies, and emotional regulation skills. Teachers, as the primary architects of this environment, bear special responsibility for creating conditions that foster wellbeing and discourage harm. Yet, substantial evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and beyond consistently documents that teachers themselves are significant perpetrators of violence against students through corporal punishment, verbal abuse, public humiliation, and coercive oppressive practices (Meinck et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021).

In Nigeria, estimates suggest that 70%–85% of secondary school students have experienced some form of teacher-perpetrated violence, with physical and emotional abuse being most prevalent (Elendu et al., 2025). Such practices are frequently rationalised as legitimate disciplinary tools, despite longstanding evidence that they undermine rather than reinforce prosocial development. The Child Rights Act (2003) and multiple state-level ordinances formally prohibit corporal punishment in Nigerian schools; enforcement, however, remains inconsistent (Fakunmoju, 2021).

The psychosocial consequences of exposure to teacher-perpetrated violence among adolescents are multidimensional. Internalising sequelae including anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and low self-worth have been documented alongside externalising outcomes such as conduct problems, defiance, aggression, and truancy (Adewuya et.al. 2026; Suryaningrat et al., 2020). Importantly, the pathways between teacher-perpetrated violence and these outcomes are shaped by students' developmental stage, gender, family context, and available coping resources, producing heterogeneous effects across samples. Studies from the Nigerian context report that male students bear a disproportionate burden of physical punishment (Sherr et al., 2017), while emotional and verbal violence affect students across gender lines (Nkuba et al., 2018).

Although existing literature demonstrates associations between school violence exposure and adverse adolescent mental health outcomes, important gaps remain within African and Nigerian research. Much of the available evidence focuses primarily on corporal punishment, with limited attention to emotionally degrading forms of teacher-perpetrated violence such as humiliation, taunting, oppression, and sexual misconduct (Khumalo, 2025; Lumadi, 2024). In addition, many Nigerian studies rely on single-item or investigator-developed measures of violence and frequently emphasize academic outcomes rather than validated psychosocial indicators of emotional and behavioural adjustment (Adewuya et.al. 2026). Empirical evidence from Southwest Nigeria simultaneously examining multiple dimensions of teacher-perpetrated violence and their differential associations with adolescent emotional and behavioural problems remains particularly limited. Furthermore, teacher-perpetrated violence continues to be under-examined within developmental psychopathology and child protection frameworks in African contexts. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the prevalence and patterns of teacher-perpetrated violence and their associations with emotional and behavioural problems among adolescents attending public secondary schools in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. Specifically, the study explores whether different forms of teacher-perpetrated violence are differentially associated with adolescent psychosocial adjustment.

The present study was guided by two theoretical perspectives. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; 1982) emphasizes the importance of emotionally safe relationships with significant adults during development. It holds that teachers function as secondary attachment figures in the school setting. Consequently, when these figures respond with violence or humiliation rather than sensitivity, they reinforce negative internal working models of self and others, heightening vulnerability to internalising difficulties and disrupting trusting relationships. Trauma Theory (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014) further proposes that chronic, relational trauma particularly by authority figures dysregulates the neurobiological stress response, producing fight-or-flight patterns that manifest behaviourally as defiance, aggression, or hypervigilance. Together, these frameworks predict that sustained exposure to teacher-perpetrated violence will be associated with elevated internalising and externalising psychopathology, and with the erosion of prosocial behavioural repertoires.

The study addressed three research questions: (1) What is the prevalence of teacher-perpetrated violence among in-school adolescents in Ibadan? (2) What patterns of teacher-perpetrated violence are most salient? (3) What are the levels of behavioural problems and prosocial functioning among in-school adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis? Two hypotheses were tested: (H1): Greater exposure to teacher-perpetrated violence will be associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment, reflected in higher internalising and externalising difficulties and lower prosocial behaviour. (H2): Male adolescents will report greater exposure to teacher-perpetrated violence than females.

METHOD

Design

A descriptive correlational survey design was employed. This approach is appropriate for examining naturally occurring relationships between variables without experimental manipulation, and for generating prevalence estimates within defined populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised public secondary school students in the Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, three local government areas (LGAs) Ibadan North-East, Ibadan South-West, and Ibadan North-West were randomly selected from the five LGAs within the metropolis. In the second stage, two public secondary schools were randomly selected within each LGA, yielding six schools. In the third stage, 50 students were randomly selected from the Senior Secondary (SS1) cohort within each school, producing a total sample of N = 300.

The final sample comprised 131 males (43.7%) and 169 females (56.3%), with ages ranging from 12 to 18 years (M = 14.37, SD = 1.36). The majority (65.3%) fell in the 14–16 year age range. Most participants lived with both parents (78.7%), and 87.7% reported their parents as currently married. Parental educational attainment was diverse: the modal category for both fathers and mothers was secondary school completion (SSCE; fathers 27.7%, mothers 27.3%).

Measures

Teacher violence Scale (TVS). The TVS (Pişkin et al., 2014) is a 36-item student-report instrument assessing five dimensions of teacher-perpetrated violence: Physical Violence (11 items), Accusing/Humiliating Violence (8 items), Taunting (5 items), Oppressing (6 items), and Sexual Violence (6 items). Each item is rated on a six-point frequency scale (0 = never to 5 = almost every day). Higher total and subscale scores indicate greater violence exposure. The TVS demonstrates excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's α coefficients ranging from .85 to .96 across subscales and .96 for the full scale (Pişkin et al., 2014). Exposure was operationalised as any response above 0 on a given subscale (i.e., at least one incident reported).

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ (Goodman, 1997) is a widely validated 25-item psychosocial screening tool for individuals aged 11–16 years. Items are rated on a three-point scale (0 = Not True, 1 = Somewhat True, 2 = Certainly True). Five subscales of five items each assess Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Hyperactivity/Inattention, Peer Relationship Problems, and Prosocial Behaviour. For this study, two composite variables were computed: an Internalising composite (Emotional Symptoms + Peer Problems subscales; range 0–20) and an Externalising composite (Conduct Problems + Hyperactivity subscales; range 0–20), reflecting the established internalising–externalising distinction in child psychopathology (Achenbach, 1991). The SDQ Total Difficulties score (sum of four problem subscales; range 0–40) was also computed; scores of 0–15 indicate low need, 16–19 borderline, and ≥20 high need. The SDQ has demonstrated sound reliability and validity across diverse African samples (Adewuya & Ola, 2005).

Procedure

Data collection took place between January and March 2026. Study procedure was approved by the University of Ibadan, Social Science and Humanities Research Ethics Committee (reference number UI/SSHREC/2026/007). Prior to data collection, ethical and administrative approval was obtained from the Ministry of Education and presented to the principals of the selected schools to facilitate institutional participation. Parents or guardians received information sheets explaining the purpose, procedures, and scope of the study. To enhance comprehension across varying literacy levels, the information sheets were written in accessible language, with Yoruba translations provided upon request. Written informed consent was obtained from parents on behalf of participating students. Data collection was conducted during school hours on scheduled dates agreed upon with school authorities. Trained research assistants administered the paper-and-pencil

questionnaires to students whose parents had provided consent and who assented to participate in the study. The questionnaires were administered in English and required approximately 15 minutes to complete. Research assistants provided reading support for students who experienced language-related difficulties during questionnaire completion.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to describe the prevalence and patterns of teacher-perpetrated violence and the psychosocial profile of the participants. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine associations between teacher-perpetrated violence dimensions and psychosocial adjustment indicators, including internalising problems, externalising problems, and prosocial functioning, in line with Hypothesis 1. Independent-samples t-tests were used to examine gender differences in teacher-perpetrated violence exposure and externalising problems in relation to Hypothesis 2. Externalising problems were specifically examined because behavioural dysregulation emerged as the principal psychosocial outcome associated with teacher-perpetrated violence within the present study. Cohen's d was computed to estimate effect sizes for gender comparisons. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was further conducted to determine the unique contributions of the five teacher violence dimensions to externalising (behavioural) problems after controlling for demographic variables (age and gender). Preliminary diagnostic analyses were performed to assess multicollinearity, independence of residuals, and other regression assumptions. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$ for all analyses

RESULTS

Prevalence of Teacher-perpetrated violence (Research Question 1)

Table 1 presents exposure prevalence across the five TVS dimensions. Overall, 74.0% (n = 222) of participants reported exposure to at least one form of teacher-perpetrated violence. Accusing/humiliating violence was the most common subtype (59.7%), followed by physical violence (54.7%), oppressing (39.0%), taunting (33.0%), and sexual violence (14.0%). The relatively lower prevalence of sexual violence notwithstanding, its presence (14.0%) among secondary school students warrants serious concern given the severity and long-term consequences of sexual victimisation.

Table 1 Prevalence of Teacher-perpetrated violence among In-School Adolescents (N = 300)

TVS Subscale	Not Exposed n (%)	Exposed n (%)	Total n (%)
Physical Violence	136 (45.3)	164 (54.7)	300 (100)
Accusing/Humiliating Violence	121 (40.3)	179 (59.7)	300 (100)
Taunting	201 (67.0)	99 (33.0)	300 (100)
Oppressing	183 (61.0)	117 (39.0)	300 (100)
Sexual Violence	258 (86.0)	42 (14.0)	300 (100)
Overall Teacher-perpetrated violence	**78 (26.0)**	**222 (74.0)**	**300 (100)**

Patterns of Teacher-perpetrated violence (Research Question 2)

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the five TVS subscales. Physical violence recorded the highest mean score (M = 10.44, SD = 11.64; range 0–55), though large standard deviations across all subscales indicate substantial individual variability. Accusing/humiliating violence was the second most severe pattern on average (M = 8.69, SD = 9.11), followed by oppressing (M = 5.07, SD = 6.20), taunting (M = 4.15, SD = 5.56), and sexual violence (M = 1.81, SD = 4.42). The notable right skew and high maximum values (physical violence

max = 55, total score max = 165) indicate a subgroup of students experiencing intense, frequent violence, a pattern consistent with the targeted victimisation documented in the broader literature (Meinck et al., 2021).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Teacher-perpetrated violence Subscales (N = 300)

TVS Subscale	M	SD
Physical Violence	10.44	11.64
Accusing/Humiliating Violence	8.69	9.11
Oppressing	5.07	6.20
Taunting	4.15	5.56
Sexual Violence	1.81	4.42
Total Teacher-perpetrated violence	**30.17**	**30.03**

Behavioural and Prosocial Adjustment (Research Question 3)

Table 3 presents SDQ subscale means alongside composite scores. The Total Difficulties score (M = 16.74, SD = 5.02) indicated that the sample as a whole falls in the borderline range. Specifically, 40.6% of participants scored in the low-need range (≤15), 32.6% in the borderline range (16–19), and 26.8% in the high-need range (≥20), meaning that approximately 59.4% of the sample exhibited psychological difficulties warranting clinical attention. Hyperactivity/Inattention (M = 5.17, SD = 1.75) and Peer Problems (M = 5.09, SD = 1.80) recorded the highest subscale means, while prosocial behaviour was relatively intact (M = 7.74, SD = 2.19). The internalising composite (Emotional Symptoms + Peer Problems; M = 8.87, SD = 3.24) and externalising composite (Conduct + Hyperactivity; M = 7.89, SD = 2.80) both demonstrated moderate levels of difficulty across the sample.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for SDQ Subscales and Composite Scores (N = 300)

SDQ Subscale / Composite	M	SD	N
Emotional Symptoms	3.78	2.30	300
Conduct Problems	2.73	1.92	299
Hyperactivity/Inattention	5.17	1.75	299
Peer Problems	5.09	1.80	300
Prosocial Behaviour	7.74	2.19	300
Total Difficulties Score	**16.74**	**5.02**	**298**
Internalising Composite (Emo + Peer)	8.87	3.24	300
Externalising Composite (Conduct + Hyp)	7.89	2.80	298

Note. SDQ Total Difficulties scoring: 0–15 = low need; 16–19 = borderline; ≥20 = high need. Internalising and Externalising composites are researcher-computed SDQ sub-domain aggregates consistent with the internalising–externalising distinction (Achenbach, 1991).

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Teacher-perpetrated violence and Psychosocial adjustment: H1 was partially supported. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that total teacher-perpetrated violence was not significantly associated with internalising problems (r = .065, P = .27; N = 300). However, total teacher-perpetrated violence was significantly associated with higher externalising (behavioural) problems (r = .128, P = .03) and lower prosocial behaviour (r = −.217, P < .001), indicating that greater violence exposure corresponded with poorer behavioural and relational adjustment. Exploratory subscale analyses further showed that sexual violence was significantly associated with both internalising (r = .115, P = .047) and externalising difficulties (r = .198, P < .001), while taunting violence was positively associated with externalising problems (r = .136, P = .018) and demonstrated a marginal association with internalising difficulties (r = .110, P = .057). The full correlation matrix is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Pearson Correlation Matrix for Teacher-Perpetrated Violence Dimensions and Psychosocial Outcomes (N = 298–300)

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Total Teacher perpetrated violence		—					
2.Internalising Problems		.065	—				
3.Externalising Problems		.128*	.412**	—			
4. Prosocial Behaviour		−.217**	−.184**	−.296**	—		
5. Taunting Violence		.721**	.110†	.136*	−.166**	—	
6. Sexual Violence		.472**	.115*	.198**	−.128*	.271**	—

Note. Internalising Problems = Emotional Symptoms + Peer Problems composite. Externalising Problems = Conduct Problems + Hyperactivity/Inattention composite. TV = Teacher Violence. † P < .10. P < .05. P < .01 (two-tailed).

H2: Gender Differences in Teacher-perpetrated violence and Key Behavioural Outcomes Table 5 presents the independent-samples t-test results for gender differences in teacher-perpetrated violence exposure and externalising problems. Male adolescents reported significantly higher overall teacher-perpetrated violence exposure than female adolescents (Mmale = 38.77, SD = 33.29; Mfemale = 23.50, SD = 25.40; t(236.50) = 4.357, P < .001, d = 0.53), representing a medium effect size. In contrast, no significant gender difference emerged in externalising (behavioural) problems (Mmale = 8.05, SD = 2.65; Mfemale = 7.76, SD = 2.92; t(296) = 0.891, P = .373, d = 0.10), indicating that male and female adolescents displayed comparable levels of behavioural difficulty despite differing significantly in violence exposure.

Table 5 Gender Differences in Teacher-perpetrated violence and Externalising Problems

Variable	Gender	n	M (SD)	Df	T	P	d
Teacher-perpetrated violence (Total)	Male	131	38.77 (33.29)	236.50	4.357	< .001	0.53
	Female	169	23.50 (25.40)				
Externalising Problems	Male	130	8.05 (2.65)	296	0.891	.373	0.10
	Female	168	7.76 (2.92)				

Note. Welch's correction applied for Teacher-perpetrated violence (unequal variances). d = Cohen's d (pooled SD).

Preliminary analyses indicated moderate positive intercorrelations among the teacher violence subscales (r = .27–.72, all P < .01). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.42 to 2.84, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Regression diagnostics further indicated acceptable independence of residuals (Durbin-Watson = 1.75) and no substantial violations of regression assumptions.

Table 6 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Behavioural Problems from Teacher-perpetrated Violence Dimensions (N = 298)

Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**β**	**T**	**P**	**sr²**
	Step 1: Demographic Controls				Step 2: + TVS Dimensions	
Step 1: Demographic Controls						
Age (mean-centred)	.184	.119	.089	1.543	.124	.004
Gender (Male = 1)	.292	.327	.052	.893	.373	.003
Step 1: R^2 = .011, Adj. R^2 = .004, F(2, 295) = 1.590, p = .206						
Step 2: Teacher Violence Dimensions						
Age (mean-centred)	.136	.119	.066	1.147	.252	.004
Gender (Male = 1)	.004	.337	.001	.012	.990	.000
Physical Violence	−.009	.019	−.036	−.452	.651	.001
Accusing/Humiliating Violence	−.013	.030	−.043	−.442	.659	.001
Taunting Violence	.078	.045	.156	1.735	.084†	.010
Oppressing Violence	−.026	.038	−.058	−.682	.496	.002
Sexual Violence	.124	.043	.196	2.880	.004**	.027
Step 2: R^2 = .054, Adj. R^2 = .031, F(7, 290) = 2.363, P = .023 ΔR^2 = .043, $\Delta F(5, 290)$ = 2.654, P = .023						

Note. B = unstandardised coefficient. SE B = standard error of B. β = standardised coefficient. sr^2 = squared semi-partial correlation (unique variance explained). Behavioural Problems = SDQ Conduct Problems + Hyperactivity/Inattention composite (range 2–18). TVS subscales entered simultaneously in Step 2. † p < .10. * P < .05. ** P < .01 (two-tailed). VIF range: 1.42–2.84 (no multicollinearity concern). Durbin-Watson = 1.75 (no

serial autocorrelation). Residual distribution: SW = .984, P = .002 (mild non-normality; acceptable for n = 298, CLT applies).

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine the unique contributions of teacher violence dimensions to the prediction of behavioural problems, after accounting for demographic covariates (age and gender). In Step 1, age and gender were entered as demographic controls. The model was not statistically significant ($F(2, 295) = 1.590$, $P = .206$), accounting for only 1.1% of the variance in behavioural problems ($R^2 = .011$, Adj. $R^2 = .004$). Neither age ($\beta = .089$, $t = 1.543$, $P = .124$) nor gender ($\beta = .052$, $t = 0.893$, $P = .373$) significantly predicted behavioural problems at this step, consistent with the t-test findings reported earlier.

In Step 2, the five TVS subscales were entered simultaneously. The overall model reached statistical significance ($F(7, 290) = 2.363$, $P = .023$), with the full model explaining 5.4% of the variance in behavioural problems ($R^2 = .054$, Adj. $R^2 = .031$). The addition of the TVS dimensions produced a statistically significant increment over the demographic-only model ($\Delta R^2 = .043$, $\Delta F(5, 290) = 2.654$, $P = .023$), indicating that the violence dimensions collectively accounted for a meaningful increment beyond demographic characteristics alone.

Inspection of the individual predictors within Step 2 revealed that only sexual violence emerged as a unique and statistically significant predictor of behavioural problems ($B = 0.124$, $SE = 0.043$, $\beta = .196$, $t(290) = 2.880$, $P = .004$; $sr^2 = .027$), uniquely explaining 2.7% of variance in behavioural problems. Taunting violence showed a marginal positive trend ($\beta = .156$, $P = .084$), consistent with a theoretically plausible association but not reaching conventional significance. Neither physical violence, accusing/humiliating violence, nor oppressing violence contributed unique variance once shared variance among the TVS subscales was partialled out, indicating that the bivariate associations of these dimensions with behavioural problems are largely attributable to their co-occurrence with other forms of teacher-perpetrated violence, particularly sexual and taunting violence, rather than to distinct, additive contributions.

Gender and age were no longer significant in Step 2 (both $P > .25$), suggesting that the association between demographic characteristics and behavioural problems was not appreciably modified by the introduction of violence dimensions, and that the variance these controls might otherwise explain is largely independent of violence exposure in this sample.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to a growing body of Nigerian and West African literature on teacher-perpetrated violence and adolescent psychosocial wellbeing. Three broad observations merit detailed discussion: the alarmingly high prevalence of violence, the differential associations with internalising versus externalising outcomes, and the consistent gender asymmetry in exposure.

High Prevalence and Salience of Non-Physical Violence

Three in four adolescents in this sample (74.0%) reported exposure to at least one form of teacher-perpetrated violence; a rate consistent with national estimates of 70%–85% (Elendu et al., 2025) and with regional data showing high rates across Oyo State public schools (Omeiza & Agokei, 2022; Meinck et al. 2015). What is particularly noteworthy is the pattern: accusing/humiliating violence was the most prevalent subtype (59.7%), marginally exceeding physical violence (54.7%). This replicates findings by Aluede et al. (2012), who documented verbal humiliation and public shaming as common disciplinary repertoires in Southwest Nigerian schools, and extends that evidence base with a validated multidimensional instrument.

These findings carry important theoretical significance. Trauma Theory posits that relational harm by authority figures constitutes a form of developmental trauma distinct from and in some respects more insidious than physical injury, because it attacks the developing self-concept of the adolescent at a period of heightened identity formation (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014). Repeated experiences of public humiliation communicate to students that they are unworthy of dignity and respect, a message that consistent with attachment theory, may become encoded as a negative internal working model: a schema of the self as inadequate and of authority figures as dangerous (Bowlby, 1969; 1982; Sroufe, 2005). The high prevalence of accusing/humiliating violence in this

study suggests that the most common form of teacher aggression in Nigerian classrooms is precisely the kind that is most theoretically linked to disrupted self-concept and relational mistrust.

The 14.0% prevalence of sexual violence while lower than other subtypes is deeply concerning given its severity and the strong cultural silencing mechanisms surrounding sexual victimisation in Nigerian schools (Sherr et al. 2017). Sexual violence was the only TVS subscale to demonstrate significant associations with both internalising problems ($r = .115$, $p = .047$) and externalising problems ($r = .198$, $p < .001$) and with hyperactivity ($r = .183$, $p < .001$), suggesting its particularly broad psychological impact. Underreporting, which is common in studies of sexual victimisation in sub-Saharan Africa, suggests that the actual prevalence may exceed reported estimates (Meinck et al., 2018, Oyekola et.al, 2020).

Violence, Externalising Outcomes, and Prosocial Erosion

H1 was partially supported: the association between total teacher-perpetrated violence and internalising (emotional) problems was positive but non-significant ($r = .065$, $P = .265$). This finding appears, at first, counterintuitive. Theoretical accounts grounded in Attachment Theory and Trauma Theory predict that relational harm by authority figures should amplify internalising distress. Several explanations merit consideration.

First, the SDQ Emotional Symptoms subscale captures trait-like internalising tendencies (sadness, anxiety, somatic complaints) that may be more strongly influenced by family adversity, temperament, and broader community stressors than by school-based violence per se, particularly in a population where the majority of students live with both parents in relatively intact family structures (78.7% in this sample). Unmeasured contextual variables, including family adversity and broader environmental stressors, may partly account for the weak association observed. Second, the social desirability concerns inherent in self-reported internalising symptoms particularly among adolescent males in a patriarchal cultural context may attenuate observed associations (Villatoro et al., 2022; Sheikhan et al., 2023). Third, cross-sectional designs cannot capture the time-lagged accumulation of internalising symptoms: longitudinal studies from Nigeria (Devries et al. 2014) and elsewhere (Meinck et al., 2021) document that teacher-perpetrated violence predicts depressive symptoms up to one year later, effects that a single-wave survey may miss.

What the data do show clearly is a significant positive association between teacher-perpetrated violence and externalising (behavioural) problems ($r = .128$, $P = .027$), with conduct problems specifically most strongly implicated ($r = .199$, $P = .001$). This pattern is theoretically coherent: Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) predicts that students who routinely observe authority figures using aggression to assert control will model these behaviours in their own interpersonal repertoire. Trauma Theory similarly predicts that chronic threat activation produces hyperarousal and reactive aggression, the fight component of the fight-flight-freeze response particularly in students who lack sufficient protective factors to buffer the stress (Cook et al., 2005; van der Kolk, 2014). Taunting violence also demonstrated significant associations with externalising outcome, a finding that aligns with evidence that ridicule and contempt from teachers produces shame-based aggression which is a behavioural response to perceived public humiliation (Tangney et al., 2007).

The developmental significance of the externalising findings warrants particular attention. Externalising behaviours during adolescence including aggression, defiance, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and conduct problems are not merely transient behavioural difficulties but important developmental risk indicators associated with school disengagement, peer conflict, delinquency, substance use, and later psychosocial maladjustment (Achenbach, 1991; Moffitt, 2018). Within developmental psychopathology frameworks, persistent externalising behaviours may reflect maladaptive responses to chronic relational stress and emotionally unsafe environments. Exposure to teacher-perpetrated violence may therefore contribute to behavioural dysregulation by normalising aggression, undermining emotional regulation capacities, and reinforcing adversarial interpersonal patterns. Over time, these behavioural patterns may disrupt academic engagement, weaken prosocial peer relationships, and increase vulnerability to broader adjustment difficulties across adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Equally important is the finding that teacher-perpetrated violence negatively predicted prosocial behaviour ($r = -.217$, $P < .001$). Prosocial functioning encompassing empathy, cooperation, helping behaviour, consideration for others, and positive peer engagement represents a critical developmental asset during adolescence and is

strongly associated with healthy peer relationships, classroom adjustment, academic engagement, and long-term social competence (Oberle et al., 2020). The finding that higher exposure to teacher-perpetrated violence corresponded with lower prosocial functioning suggests that violent and humiliating teacher practices may erode adolescents' relational capacities and weaken the social foundations necessary for healthy classroom functioning. Hence, reduced prosocial functioning may undermine classroom cohesion, peer support, cooperative learning, and students' sense of safety within the school environment. From an Attachment Theory perspective, adolescents learn relational norms partly through repeated interactions with authority figures. Consequently, environments characterised by humiliation, coercion, and intimidation may normalize adversarial interpersonal dynamics while reducing opportunities for empathy development and cooperative social learning. Developmentally, the erosion of prosocial behaviour is particularly concerning because diminished empathy and social connectedness during adolescence are associated with peer conflict, school disengagement, aggression, and later psychosocial maladjustment. Thus, teacher violence may not only produce immediate distress but also weaken the interpersonal competencies necessary for positive developmental adaptation.

Gender, Violence Exposure, and Behavioural Outcomes

Male adolescents in this sample reported significantly higher exposure to total teacher-perpetrated violence than female adolescents (d = 0.53, a medium effect). This replicates a well-documented pattern across Nigeria (Sherr et al. 2017; Afolayan & Adepoju, 2015) and sub-Saharan Africa (Meinck et al., 2021) boys are disproportionately subjected to physical disciplinary practices, reflecting gendered expectations in which male students are perceived as requiring firmer control and less emotional sensitivity. Within Trauma Theory's framework, this differential exposure is consistent with a higher cumulative trauma load for male students, which, paradoxically, has been hypothesised to produce greater emotional avoidance and externalisation rather than internalization; a pattern sometimes called the "gender paradox" of trauma (Briere & Scott, 2014).

Despite their significantly higher violence exposure, male and female adolescents in this sample did not differ significantly in externalising (behavioural) problems (P = .373, d = 0.10). This gender equivalence in outcome, despite gender asymmetry in exposure, is noteworthy. It may indicate that the relationship between violence and externalising behaviour is moderated by factors that affect both genders comparably; for instance, school climate quality, peer support, or individual-level coping. Alternatively, it may reflect measurement constraints: the SDQ Conduct subscale, drawn from a general psychosocial tool, may not be sufficiently sensitive to gender-differentiated expressions of violence-related behavioural adaptation (e.g., relational aggression, social exclusion) more common in girls (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Future studies should incorporate gender-sensitive measures of both externalising and internalising outcomes.

Teacher-Perpetrated Violence and Behavioural Adjustment

The regression findings offer two theoretically coherent insights. First, the overall model while statistically significant explains a modest proportion of variance (5.4%), which is consistent with the expectation that behavioural problems in adolescence are multiply determined (temperament, family environment, peer relationships, school climate) and that school-based violence represents one contributing factor among many. This modest effect size reinforces the importance of multi-level ecological models rather than single-factor explanatory accounts.

Second, the unique predictive salience of sexual violence independent of all other TVS dimensions is a finding of both statistical and clinical significance. Sexual victimisation by teachers constitutes a profound breach of the attachment relationship between students and authority figures (Bowlby, 1982). Trauma Theory predicts that such experiences activate hyperarousal and threat-detection responses that manifest behaviourally as conduct problems, defiance, and dysregulation (van der Kolk, 2014; Cook et al., 2005) precisely the externalising profile captured by the SDQ Conduct and Hyperactivity subscales. The fact that this association persists when physical, emotional, taunting, and oppressing violence are held constant emphasizes that sexual violence constitutes a categorically distinct harm: it is not reducible to a more severe instance of general teacher aggression, but rather a qualitatively different relational trauma with specific behavioural sequelae. This finding should be considered in school safeguarding policies and in teacher accountability frameworks in Nigeria, where sexual violence by school personnel remains significantly under-prosecuted.

The marginal contribution of taunting violence (β = .156, P = .084) warrants attention despite its failure to reach conventional significance. Theoretical accounts of shame-based aggression (Tangney et al., 2007) predict that public ridicule and contemptuous humour by teachers elicit shame responses that, when unprocessed, convert to externalising anger and conduct disruption. Although taunting violence did not reach conventional significance, the observed positive trend suggests a potentially meaningful association warranting further investigation in larger and more diverse samples. Future research should therefore retain taunting as a theoretically motivated predictor rather than exclude it on the basis of the present marginal result.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The high prevalence and broad psychosocial impact of teacher-perpetrated violence documented in this study carry several urgent practical and policy implications.

First, teacher training programmes in Oyo State and across Nigeria must systematically incorporate non-violent discipline techniques, emotional intelligence development, and trauma-informed pedagogy. Teachers with unresolved personal stressors and poor affect regulation are documented to resort to violence as a classroom management strategy (Suryaningrat et al., 2020); pre-service and in-service training should therefore address teacher wellbeing alongside classroom management competencies. Second, school administrations must establish accessible, anonymous reporting mechanisms for students who experience violence, coupled with robust anti-retaliation policies. The culture of silence surrounding teacher-perpetrated violence, particularly sexual violence can only be disrupted when students trust that disclosure will be met with protection rather than punishment (Moloto, 2024). Third, given the significant association between violence exposure and externalising behaviour, and the erosion of prosocial functioning, Nigerian secondary schools urgently need professionally trained school counsellors not only for career guidance but for individual and group-based psychosocial support, trauma debriefing, and behavioural intervention. Fourth, at the systems level, the Oyo State Ministry of Education should conduct regular, independent school safety audits and implement a structured enforcement mechanism for the existing prohibition of corporal punishment, ensuring that policy commitments translate into observable practice change (UNESCO, 2021).

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations constrain the scope of these findings. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference and limits the detection of cumulative or time-lagged effects of violence on mental health. The sample comprised exclusively SSS1 students from public schools in Ibadan Metropolis; findings may not generalise to private schools, junior secondary students, or adolescents in rural or peri-urban settings, where violence patterns and psychosocial outcomes may differ substantially. Self-report data are susceptible to social desirability bias and recall limitations, particularly for sensitive items involving sexual violence; teacher-perpetrated violence and psychosocial outcomes were both assessed from the student perspective without observer or teacher corroboration. The absence of measures for key moderating variables such as family violence, parental mental health, individual coping style, school climate quality limits the interpretive depth of the correlation findings. Future research should address these gaps through mixed-method, longitudinal, and multi-informant designs.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that teacher-perpetrated violence is a highly prevalent and multidimensional phenomenon within public secondary schools in Ibadan Metropolis, with accusing/humiliating and physical violence emerging as the dominant patterns. Exposure to teacher violence was significantly associated with behavioural dysregulation and reduced prosocial functioning, while sexual violence demonstrated particularly harmful associations across psychosocial outcomes. Although overall internalising difficulties were not significantly associated with total teacher violence, the findings suggest that school-based violence may exert stronger effects on adolescents' behavioural and relational functioning.

The erosion of prosocial behaviour associated with teacher violence is developmentally significant because prosocial competencies such as empathy, cooperation, and positive peer engagement are foundational to healthy adolescent adjustment and emotionally supportive classroom environments. Violent and humiliating disciplinary

practices may therefore undermine not only individual wellbeing but also the broader relational climate necessary for effective teaching, learning, and social development. These findings underscore the urgent need for trauma-informed teacher training, strengthened school safeguarding systems, non-violent disciplinary approaches, and accessible psychosocial support services within Nigerian secondary schools. Protecting adolescents from teacher-perpetrated violence is essential for fostering emotionally safe educational environments that support healthy psychosocial and developmental outcomes.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to provide deeper insights into the developmental consequences of teacher-perpetrated violence and to clarify the temporal pathways through which such experiences influence adolescent behavioural and relational outcomes. Incorporating multiple informants, including teachers, parents, and school administrators, would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the individual, familial, and institutional factors that sustain violent disciplinary practices within school settings. Additionally, comparative studies across public and private schools, as well as across diverse geographical and cultural contexts within Nigeria, would enhance the generalisability of findings and identify contextual factors that may shape both the prevalence and impact of teacher-perpetrated violence. Such efforts would contribute to the development of more targeted and contextually responsive prevention and intervention strategies

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Competing Interests

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist**.**

Authors' Contributions

Author AO conceptualisation, data collection, data analysis and writing. Author JI data collection and data analysis.

Consent

All authors declare that written informed consent was obtained from the parents or other approved parties on behalf of participating students. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the editorial office/chief editor/editorial board members of this journal**.**

Ethical Approval

All authors hereby declare that study procedure was examined and approved by the University of Ibadan, Social Science and Humanities Research Ethics Committee (reference number UI/SSHREC/2026/007) in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki

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