Extent of Early Childhood Educators Awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law in Public Primary Schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State

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Abstract

The study was on the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study. The research adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all the 110 early childhood educators in public primary schools in Orumba South Local Government Area. The entire population was used because it is not too large. The instrument for data collection was a 16 item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Early Childhood Educators' Awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law Questionnaire (ECEAVAPPLQ)". The Instrument was face validated by three experts. To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha was used and a reliability coefficient of 0.73, 0.75 and 0.78 was obtained for the three clusters with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.76 obtained for the entire instrument. Data collected were analyzed using the mean score. The findings showed that the extent to which early childhood educators are aware of and implement Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State were to a low extent. Findings also revealed that lack of awareness/enlightenment campaign and non-inclusion of teachers in workshops, seminars on VAPP Laws among others were the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that government should organize public enlightenment campaigns to educated the teachers and the public on the existence and scope of the VAPP law and government should organize seminars, workshop for teachers and other stakeholders on the VAPP law.

Key words: Violence, early childhood educators, prohibition, awareness, law

Introduction

The quality of care and stimulation given to a child determines to a great extent, the level of physical, cognitive, social and emotional development that the child can attain even in later life. An enabling environment devoid of violence is needed for overall and healthy development of the child. The learning environment should therefore be safe. One of the factors that is of the best interest and needed for the child to develop optimally is safety. Safety according to Gina (2018), refers to the condition of being safe either psychologically or emotionally and freedom from danger, risk, or injury. In this study, safety is defined as the psychological, emotional, and physical conditions of persons who are located in an

environment that is not dangerous. The safety of a child is paramount in early childhood settings. It is therefore important that conditions in the environment are made conducive for the learners to achieve educational goals. The responsibility for making sure that children are safe and their needs are met is shared between the families, the general community, professionals working with children, law enforcement agents and government. The protection of children is not only an individual issue, but a community concern as well. Educators are an integral part of the community and as such can lead the community effort to combat violence against the child. The educator as a professional that works with children is charged with the duty of creating an enabling environment devoid of violence for overall and healthy development of the child.

Every individual who is involved with children has the obligation of knowing how to protect children from harm. The place of the childhood educator in creating such violence-free environment for the child is pivotal. To attain this appreciable level of development, there is need for educators to engage in developmentally appropriate practices for the best interest of the child. Best interest is a child rights principle which derives from article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2012), which states that in all actions concerning children whether undertaken by public or private, social welfare institutions, courts of law, administration, authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration. Kiprotich and Ong'ondo (2013), noted that it is extremely important that adults-especially parents, teachers, health workers and the general public who handle and interact with children - know about children's rights.

Article 19, Section 1 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (2012) advocates that state parties must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence and abuse. In this perspective, the Federal Ministry of Education (2016), points out that violence against children is a major threat to global development as well as the attainment of the millennium development goals. To combat this menace, therefore, requires a multi-stakeholder approach. This approach entails the involvement of all stakeholders in the education sector such as the educator in the protection of the child from violence. The educator is a major stakeholder in the education of the child, therefore, educators have a chance to see changes in their appearances and behaviors.

Today children are faced with a lot of violence that is affecting them physically, socially, mentally and health wise. Violence can be defined as any mean or harmful behaviour that is meant or intended to kill or hunt somebody. According to Center for Disease Control and Prevention, violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury or harm. Violence as defined by Violence Against Person's Prohibition (VAPP) Act is any act or attempted act which causes or may cause any person physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, emotional or economic harm whether this occurs in private or public life, in peace time or in conflict situation. Violence Against Children (VAC) has many faces and forms. According to the World Health Organization (2016), Violence Against Children include all forms of violence against persons under 18 years old. It includes physical, psychological violence such as insults and humiliation, discrimination, neglect and maltreatment by parents, caregivers, teachers and authority figures, most often in homes but also in settings such as schools. These acts of abuse or violence affect emotional development of the child adversely. Panksepp, as cited in National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2014), noted that the emotional health of young children or the absence of it is closely tied to the social and emotional characteristics of the environments in which they live, which include not only their parents but also the broader context of their families, schools and communities**.**

Young children who grow up in homes that are troubled by parental mental-health problems, substance abuse, or family violence face significant threats to their own emotional development. The experience of chronic, extreme, and/or uncontrollable maltreatment has been documented as producing measurable changes in the immature brain (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014). Kelly (2018), affirms that children have been exposed to many undesirable events such as abuse, trafficking, cultism, violence, injuries and other security issues. When these offences go unreported it affects the education of the child adversely. In the school, the childhood educator is considered to be among those who are well placed for the detection and prevention of these anomalies. The educator deals with children at this stage when a child's health, intellect, personality, character, emotional stability is molded. It is imperative therefore; that the childhood educator as much as possible is involved in practices that are to the best interests of the child and are in consonance with child rights.

In recent times, violence against the child has taken centre stage, the need to protect children from abuse and violence has become a pressing need. The prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional violence against children is high in Nigeria. Most children never tell anyone what has happened to them and few children ever get the help they need to recover. Violence during childhood has long lasting negative effects on mental and physical health and perpetuates the cycle of violence, with victims more likely to become perpetrators themselves. These current realities in Nigeria aroused the need to take steps to enact child friendly laws. The pressing need to protect women and children from violence led to the enactment and adoption of the Violence Against Person's Prohibition (VAPP) Law in Nigeria. VAPP is an act to eliminate violence in private and public life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons and to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders, and for related matters.

The Centre for Ethics Law and Development (CHELD, 2015) reports that on the 25th of May, 2015 the former President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan signed the Violence Against Persons Prohibition bill into law. The Act was as a result of agitation for protection of persons against the different forms of violence. Violence, both at the home front and the larger society is fast becoming a trend in the recent day Nigeria. It was the need to protect citizens from violence such as these that led to the enactment of the VAPP Act 2015. The VAPP provides a legislative and legal framework for the prevention of all forms of violence against vulnerable persons. It also intends to eliminate violence in private and public life and provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims of violence, and punishment of offenders. This law is an offshoot of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations (UN) and its attendant ratification by the African Union (AU). The AU adopted its African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (ACRWC) also known as the African Charter because member states of the AU believed that the CRC missed some important socio-cultural and economic realities particular to Africa. Nigeria is a signatory to the CRC and the African charter and as a member country of the UN and AU is expected to domesticate these conventions in order to implement them. The Federal Government of Nigerian VAPP Act of 2015 is an example of the various steps taken to domesticate these international conventions and implement them.

Anambra state, a state in Nigeria recognizes the priority of children issues in its political and socio-economic agenda and embraces its duties and responsibilities towards ensuring the well-being of all its children hence the ratification of the Nigerian VAPP law as Anambra State VAPP law (2018). This law came into effect in March, 2018 signed by the incumbent Governor Dr. Willie Obiano. Anambra state VAPP law is a law enacted to eliminate violence in private and public life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons. It is intended to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders and for related matters. The law in effect prohibits all forms of violence against persons and particularly for the purpose of women and children. The preliminary part of the Anambra State of Nigeria, (VAPP) law, is the interpretation of terms. This section also mentioned emotional, verbal and psychological abuse to mean repeated insults, ridicule and name calling, repeated threats to cause emotional pain. It also interpreted harassment as a pattern of conduct that induces fear of harm or impairs the dignity of a person. Physical abuse was interpreted as acts of physical aggression towards any person such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating. All the terms as mentioned above are punishable according to the stipulations of the VAPP law.

The VAPP law concerns the childhood educator as a mandated reporter of violence. A mandated reporter is one who is required by law to report reasonable suspicions of abuse. Childhood educators in schools have the need to know the interpretation of certain actions taken in class, at home and in various spheres of life and how it affects the child and the teachers themselves. They should also be on the watch out to discover when a child is abused or in danger of violence. Denham as cited in National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2014), posits that young children who have experienced significant maltreatment exhibit an early childhood equivalent of post-traumatic stress disorder. Their emotional repertoires have expanded dramatically and now include such feelings as pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment - all of which influence how individuals function as contributing members of a society.

It is necessary for now that the law has been enacted to ensure that it is not merely words on paper, in other words, that it is implemented. At this time, one key aspect of achieving the purpose of the act is awareness. According to Onyemelukwe and Okekeogbu (2015), awareness of the law is critical and the wheel of justice can only start turning if a

case of violence is reported to the appropriate authority. The child is among a group of person regarded as vulnerable. Therefore, educators as mandated reporters of violence against the child require a sound knowledge of VAPP laws in operation in their domains in order to navigate successfully in their fields of endeavor. According to Sathiyaraj and Jayaraman (2013), educators' knowledge of Child Rights will lead to a better life for all children, and it is important that more teachers know about this issue. There is need for teachers to be aware of these facts and their implications to the educational system and also their responsibilities to the abused child as stipulated by the law.

Section 30, subsection 4 of the VAPP law (2018), stipulates that applications for protection orders may be brought by police officers, accredited service provider, social worker or a teacher who has interest in the well-being of the child. According to Nwazuoke (2016), a protection order is an official legal document, signed by a judge that restrains an individual or state actors from further abusive behavior towards a victim. This is so because a child in the basic school is a minor, and the VAPP law empowers the teacher to apply for protection orders on behalf of a violated child. Knowledge of this law is of utmost importance to childhood educators as it will guide and direct them for effective and competent discharge of their duties. Against this backdrop therefore, the researchers tend to determine the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

The educator has a vital role in the identification, treatment, and prevention of violence especially against the child. Violence against persons is an international concern and National priority hence the enactment of the VAPP law in Nigeria and its attendant ratification in Anambra state. Under this law, the teacher is a mandated reporter who can file protection orders for a minor. They have a responsibility not only to report suspected abuse but to intervene. Regrettably most educators have little knowledge on how important their role could be. They seem not to be aware of the existence of the VAPP law and their role as stipulated by this law. It is against this backdrop that the researchers embarked on this study to investigate the extent of educators' awareness of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition

(VAPP) law and knowledge of the stipulated role of educators under the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. determine the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.
2. ascertain the extent of the roles played by early childhood educators' in the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.
3. determine the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. To what extent are early childhood educators' aware of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?
2. To what extent do early childhood educators play the role of implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?
3. What are the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

Method

The study was on the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA

of Anambra State. three research questions guided the study. The research adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all the 110 early childhood educators in public primary schools in Orumba South Local Government Area. The entire population was used because it is not too large. The instrument for data collection was a 16 item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Early Childhood Educators' Awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law Questionnaire (ECEAVAPPLQ)". The Instrument was face validated by three experts. To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha was used and a reliability coefficient of 0.73, 0.75 and 0.78 was obtained for the three clusters with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.76 obtained for the entire instrument. Data collected were analyzed using the mean scores. The level of extent of the items for research questions 1 and 2 was determined in relation to the boundary limits as indicated in the four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 3.50 – 4.00, High Extent (HE) = 2.50 – 3.49, Low Extent (LE) = 1.50 – 2.49 and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1.00 – 1.49. For research question 3 a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 were used to answer research question 3. The criterion mean was set at 2.50. Any item scoring 2.5 and above were regarded as agree while any item scoring below 2.5 were regarded as disagree.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent are early childhood educators' aware of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean scores of respondents on the extent of early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

S/N	Teachers awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools	X	Decision
1	I am aware of the existence of Violence Against Persons Prohibition law	2.47	Low Extent
2	I am aware of the contents of the document protecting the child from violence of any sort	2.40	Low Extent
3	I display a positive attitude towards the awareness of such law	1.76	Low Extent
4	I encourage the spread of the VAPP law in my school	1.50	Low Extent
5	I inform parents and community leaders about the VAPP law	1.40	Low Extent
	Cluster Mean	**1.90**	**Low Extent**

Table 1 above shows the extent to which early childhood educators are aware of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. All the items showed low extent. This shows that the extent to which early childhood educators are aware of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State are to a low extent. This can be attested to the grand mean for all the respondents which shows a mean of 1.90 which is of low extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent do early childhood educators play the role of implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean scores of respondents on the extent of the role played by early childhood educators on the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

S/N	Teachers role on the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools	X	Decision
6	I report cases of violence against children to appropriate authorities	2.15	Low Extent
7	I support in reintegrating children who have been violated	1.63	Low Extent
8	I Create an enabling environment free of violence for the child	3.39	High Extent
9	I ensure the consciousness of VAPP law when dealing with pupils	1.84	Low Extent
10	I collaborate with social welfare workers in dealing with defaulters of the VAPP law	1.40	Low Extent
11	I bring violence-related issues into class discussions	2.41	Low Extent
	Cluster Mean	**2.13**	**Low Extent**

Table 2 above shows the mean response of early childhood educators on their roles played on the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. items 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 are of low extent while item 8 is of high extent. This shows that the extent of the role played by early childhood educators on the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State are to a low extent. This can be attested to the grand mean for all the respondents which shows a mean of 2.13 which is of low extent.

Research Question 3: What are the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

Table 3: Mean scores of respondents on the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

S/N	factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools	X	Decision
12	Lack of awareness/ enlightenment campaign	3.39	Agree
13	Non-inclusion of teachers in workshops, seminars on VAPP Laws	3.65	Agree
14	Lack of governmental support in financing campaigns	3.06	Agree
15	Non-implementation of punitive measures by authorities	3.14	Agree
16	Educators lack of knowledge of their roles according to the VAPP law	3.79	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.40**	**Agree**

Table 3 above shows the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. All the items listed have mean scores of above 2.50. This shows that the items so listed are the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. This can be attested to by the grand mean score of 3.40 which is above the bench mark of 2.50.

Discussion

The findings in Table 1 showed that the extent to which early childhood educators are aware of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State are to a low extent. The results from the table shows that many teachers are not aware of the VAPP law, therefore do not conform to the stipulations of the VAPP Law. The attendant consequence is that the child is exposed to violent acts. The findings of this study are in line with that of Sathiyaraj and Jayaraman (2013), educators' knowledge of Child Rights will lead to a better life for all children, and it is important that more teachers know about this issue. Also, the finding of this study is in consonance with that of Kelly (2018), who posits that children have been exposed to many

undesirable events such as abuse, trafficking, cultism, violence, injuries and other security issues.

Findings in Table 2 also showed that the extent of the role played by early childhood educators on the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State are to a low extent. Finding revealed that teachers did not contribute much towards the implementation of the VAPP law. This is not a healthy development because teachers are key participants in the development of the child. Teacher's failure to contribute to implementation of the VAPP law can be traced to lack of awareness and knowledge of the basic provision of the act. These findings are in consonance with that of Onyemelukwe and Okekeogbu (2015), who posits that awareness of the VAPP act is critical and the wheel of justice can only start turning if a case of violence is reported to the appropriate authority.

Findings in table 3 equally revealed that lack of awareness/enlightenment campaign and non-inclusion of teachers in workshops, seminars on VAPP Laws among others are the factors that hinder early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. The above findings therefore, implies that teachers are not very much aware of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law of which they can be of help when a child is involved in any violence. This is as a result of not involving teachers through workshops, seminar and conferences on certain things like this law that will help them in handling children under their care. It is when teachers are aware of this law that its proper implementation will take place. The finding is in line with that of Kiprotich and Ong'ondo (2013), who posits that it is extremely important that adults, especially parents, teachers, health workers and the general public who handle and interact with children know about children's rights.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that teachers awareness of the VAPP law is to a low extent; the implementation of the law is also to a low extent. This situation is deplorable because the childhood educator is among the people who are well placed for the detection and prevention of violence against children. However, to surmount the factors that hinders

early childhood educators' awareness of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law in public primary schools, there is need for teachers to be open-minded, knowledgeable and aware of their responsibilities toward the protection of the child from violence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should organize public enlightenment campaigns to educate the teachers and the public on the existence and scope of the VAPP law.
2. Government should organize seminars, workshop for teachers and other stakeholders on the VAPP law.
3. Teachers should be drilled on how to report cases of violence against children should the need arise and also give them adequate protection as they carry out this duty.
4. Childhood Educators should be trained and motivated to go through this law in order to enable them successfully navigate.

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