

# School Violence, Sexual Harassment and Sex as Predictors of Psychological Wellbeing Among In-School Adolescents.

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aimed to investigate the predictors of psychological wellbeing among in-school adolescents, focusing on gender differences, exposure to school violence, experiences of sexual harassment, and their combined effects. Four hypotheses were tested using statistical analysis. Firstly, the study found a significant difference in psychological wellbeing between males and females, with females reporting higher levels. Secondly, participants who reported higher levels of school violence experienced lower psychological wellbeing compared to those reporting lower levels. Similarly, individuals who reported higher levels of sexual harassment demonstrated lower psychological wellbeing than those reporting lower levels. Lastly, multiple regression analysis revealed that school violence, sexual harassment, and gender jointly predicted psychological wellbeing among in-school adolescents. These findings contribute to our understanding of the factors influencing psychological wellbeing in this population and underscore the importance of addressing gender disparities, school violence, and sexual harassment in promoting mental health in educational settings.*

**KEYWORDS:** School Violence, Sexual Harassment, Sex, Psychological Wellbeing, Adolescents.

## I. Introduction:

Adolescence is a critical period of development marked by significant physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes (Uktamovna, 2025). During this time, adolescents navigate various social contexts, including school environments, where they may encounter challenges such as sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. Adolescence is a period of significant development, marked by physical, emotional, and social changes. During this time, individuals may experience heightened emotions,

peer pressure, identity exploration, and a desire for autonomy. This study aimed at understanding the relationship between school violence, sexual harassment and sex as predictors of psychological well-being among in-school adolescents. Sexual harassment remains a pervasive issue in educational settings, encompassing a range of unwelcomed behaviours of a sexual nature: Verbal comments, unwanted physical contact, and online harassment are among the forms of sexual harassment that adolescents may experience at school (Chouhy, Madero-Hernandez, & Turanovic, 2017). Research indicates that a substantial proportion of adolescents report being subjected to sexual harassment, with detrimental effects on their mental health and academic engagement (Bolduc; Martin-Storey & Paquette 2023). Victims of sexual harassment often experience distress, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem, which can undermine their overall psychological well-being. School violence among adolescents can arise from a combination of individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors. Some adolescents may engage in violent behaviour as a way to assert dominance, gain peer approval, or cope with stressors such as academic pressure or conflicts with peers. Additionally, exposure to violence in the home or community can increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour at school. Factors such as bullying, peer rejection, social exclusion, and conflicts with authority figures can also contribute to school violence among adolescents. Adolescents who feel marginalized or misunderstood may resort to violence as a means of retaliation or self-defense. Sex refers to the classification of individuals into male and female groups for the purpose of studying how differences or similarities between genders may affect the outcome of the study. Sex, is conceptualized as a multifaceted construct encompassing biological, social, and psychological dimensions. Participants' gender identity and expression are assessed through

self-report measures, enabling a nuanced exploration of sex and their impact on psychological well-being. Psychological well-being serves as the dependent variable in this study, reflecting adolescents' overall mental health and emotional functioning. Adolescents' experiences of sexual harassment and their gender identity are hypothesized to influence their psychological well-being, with victims of harassment and individuals facing gender-based discrimination likely to exhibit lower levels of well-being. Standardized measures of psychological well-being capture adolescents' subjective experiences of emotional distress, mood disturbances, and overall life satisfaction, providing insights into the psychological impact of sexual harassment and gender dynamics. Psychological well-being represents a fundamental aspect of adolescent development, encompassing various dimensions such as positive affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and resilience. Adolescents' experiences of sexual harassment and their gender identity are hypothesized to have significant implications for their psychological well-being (Kaltiala, 2022). Victims of sexual harassment often exhibit lower levels of psychological well-being, experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Similarly, adolescents who face gender-based discrimination or struggle with their gender identity may also experience adverse psychological outcomes, including social withdrawal, identity confusion, and emotional distress. Despite growing recognition of the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in schools, there remains a need for comprehensive research to better understand these phenomena and their implications for adolescent psychological well-being. Existing studies have often focused on isolated aspects of school violence or sexual harassment, overlooking the complex interplay between these factors and their cumulative effects on adolescents' mental health. Additionally, research exploring the intersectionality of sexual harassment with other social identities, such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, is limited but crucial for understanding the experiences of marginalized adolescents who may face multiple forms of discrimination (Berkowitz, De Pedro, & Gilreath, 2015). By examining these variables within the school context, this study aims to shed light on the complex interplay between interpersonal experiences, social norms, and mental health outcomes during adolescence. By understanding the factors that contribute to adolescents' vulnerability to sexual harassment and their responses to such incidents, researchers and practitioners can develop

targeted interventions aimed at promoting a safe and supportive school environment for all students. Ultimately, addressing sexual harassment and challenging gender-based inequalities is essential for fostering the psychological well-being and academic success of adolescents as they navigate the challenges of adolescence (Gönültaş., Mulvey., Irdam., Goff, Irvin., Carlson., & DiStefano 2019).

## II. Statement of the Problem:

This research addresses the intricate interplay among school violence, sexual harassment, sex and psychological well-being of in-school adolescents. There is a significant gap in understanding these dynamics in a school setting. This study aims to fill this void by exploring the connections between school violence, sexual harassment, sex, and psychological well-being among in-school adolescents. The research will analyse the direct correlation and mediating factors shaping these relationships. The investigation will encompass various dimensions of psychological well-being, such as emotional resilience, social connectedness, and coping mechanisms. In doing this, the following questions were proposed:

1. To what extent does exposure to school violence correlate with psychological wellbeing among adolescents?
2. How does the experience of sexual harassment at school impact the psychological wellbeing of adolescents?
3. Are there significant differences in psychological wellbeing between male and female adolescents in relation to experiences of school violence and sexual harassment?
4. What role does sex play as a predictor of psychological wellbeing in school adolescents?

**Purpose of the study:** The overall purpose of this study is to examine the School violence, Sexual harassment and sex as predictors of psychological wellbeing among in-school adolescent. The specific purpose of this study is to;

1. To examine the individual and joint predictive influence of school violence, sexual harassment, and sex on the psychological well-being of in-school adolescents.

**Significance of the study:** This study holds significant implications for multiple stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, mental health professionals, and adolescents themselves. Firstly, by examining the impact of sexual harassment and gender dynamics on adolescent psychological well-

being, this research contributes valuable insights to the field of adolescent development and mental health. Understanding the mechanisms through which sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination affect adolescents' psychological well-being is crucial for designing targeted interventions and support systems within educational settings. Secondly, the findings of this study have practical implications for school administrators and educators. By raising awareness of the prevalence and consequences of sexual harassment, schools can implement evidence-based prevention strategies and policies to create safer and more supportive environments for all students. Training programs for teachers and staff on recognizing and addressing instances of sexual harassment can help foster a culture of respect and accountability within schools. Furthermore, policymakers can use the results of this study to advocate for legislative measures aimed at preventing sexual harassment and promoting gender equity in schools. By incorporating evidence-based research into policy initiatives, policymakers can work towards creating comprehensive legal frameworks that protect adolescents from sexual harassment and ensure their right to a safe and inclusive learning environment. To the adolescents themselves, this study offers validation of their experiences and struggles with sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. By highlighting the psychological impact of these phenomena, adolescents may feel empowered to seek support and advocate for their rights within their school communities. Ultimately, this study contributes to fostering a culture of empathy, awareness, and resilience among adolescents, promoting their overall well-being and development.

#### **Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature:**

Social Learning Theory and Feminist theory were considered suitable for this work. Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura is a psychological framework that emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and reinforcement in shaping human behaviour. Bandura proposed that individuals learn not only through direct experiences but also by observing the actions and consequences of others. This theory holds significant importance in understanding adolescent behaviour development, particularly in the context of social interactions, peer influences, and environmental factors within school settings. The Importance of Social Learning Theory lies in its ability to elucidate the mechanisms through which adolescents acquire and internalize

attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to sexual harassment and gender dynamics. According to this theory, adolescents observe the behaviours of peers, teachers, and other authority figures in their social environment and learn from the consequences of these behaviours (Espelage, & Hong, 2016). For example, witnessing peers engaging in sexually harassing behaviours or observing adults dismissing or trivializing such behaviours can shape adolescents' perceptions of what is acceptable or normative within their peer groups and school culture. Moreover, Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of vicarious reinforcement and punishment in shaping behaviour. Adolescents may learn from the positive or negative consequences experienced by others, leading them to emulate or avoid certain behaviours accordingly. For instance, if an adolescent observes a peer being praised or rewarded for engaging in sexually harassing behaviour, they may be more likely to replicate that behaviour in order to seek similar rewards or social status. Conversely, if they witness a peer facing negative repercussions or social ostracism for engaging in such behaviour, they may be deterred from repeating it. In the context of this work on sexual harassment, gender, and adolescent psychological well-being in school settings, Social Learning Theory offers valuable insights into the transmission and perpetuation of harmful behaviours. Adolescents may learn attitudes and beliefs about gender roles, power dynamics, and sexual behaviour through observation of peers, media representations, and societal norms. Furthermore, they may model their own behaviour based on the perceived rewards and punishments associated with sexual harassment, whether in the form of social approval, peer acceptance, or avoidance of negative consequences (Rinehart, Espelage, & Bub, 2017). By understanding the role of observational learning and reinforcement in shaping adolescents' attitudes and behaviours related to sexual harassment and gender dynamics, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals can develop targeted interventions and prevention strategies within schools. For example, implementing educational programs that promote positive social norms, bystander intervention skills, and respectful communication can help challenge harmful gender stereotypes and empower adolescents to confront and report instances of sexual harassment (Sabina, Cuevas, & Schally, 2016). Additionally, fostering a supportive school climate where students feel safe to discuss and address issues of sexual harassment can create an environment conducive to positive behaviour change and psychological well-being. In summary,

Social Learning Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the development of adolescent behaviour within social contexts, including the perpetuation of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in school settings (Fineran, & Bolen, 2016). By recognizing the influence of observational learning, reinforcement, and social norms on adolescent behaviour, researchers and practitioners can design effective interventions to promote healthy attitudes, relationships, and psychological well-being among adolescents.

Feminist Theory developed by various scholars within the feminist movement, is a critical framework that examines power dynamics, social inequalities, and gendered structures within society. While it is not attributed to a single developer, feminist scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and bell hooks have significantly contributed to its evolution. Feminist Theory emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to women's oppression and inequality, advocating for social, political, and economic equality between genders. Feminist Theory is instrumental in challenging traditional notions of gender roles, identities, and power dynamics, thereby promoting gender equity and social justice. By highlighting the ways in which patriarchy and institutionalized sexism marginalize and oppress women and other marginalized genders, Feminist Theory seeks to dismantle oppressive structures and create inclusive, equitable societies. Additionally, Feminist Theory emphasizes the intersectionality of gender with other social identities, recognizing that individuals experience oppression and privilege based on multiple intersecting factors such as race, class, sexuality, and ability (Ibokessien, 2020). This intersectional approach ensures that the diverse experiences and struggles of marginalized communities are acknowledged and addressed within feminist discourse. In the context of the study on sexual harassment, gender, and adolescent psychological well-being in school settings, Feminist Theory offers valuable insights into the underlying power dynamics and social inequalities that perpetuate sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. By examining the ways in which patriarchal norms and gendered expectations contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment and its impact on adolescents' psychological well-being, Feminist Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of gender dynamics within schools (Bucchianeri, Gower, McMorris, & Eisenberg, 2016). Feminist Theory highlights the structural and systemic nature of sexual harassment, emphasizing that it is not

merely the result of individual actions but rather a manifestation of broader societal inequalities. Within schools, patriarchal norms and gendered power dynamics may create environments where sexual harassment is normalized or tolerated, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing unequal gender relations. Adolescents who deviate from traditional gender norms may be particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, facing heightened levels of stigma and discrimination based on their gender identity or expression. Furthermore, Feminist Theory underscores the importance of intersectionality in understanding adolescents' experiences of sexual harassment and psychological well-being (Bouamoucha, & Bechta, 2021). Adolescents from marginalized backgrounds, such as LGBTQ+ youth, students of color, and those from low-income communities, may face intersecting forms of oppression that exacerbate their vulnerability to sexual harassment and limit their access to resources and support systems. By adopting an intersectional feminist perspective, researchers can ensure that the voices and experiences of these marginalized groups are centered in their analyses and interventions, ultimately promoting more inclusive and equitable outcomes for all adolescents (Barreto, & Ellemers, 2015). In summary, Feminist Theory provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the complex interplay between gender dynamics, sexual harassment, and adolescent psychological well-being in school settings. By critically examining the structural inequalities and power imbalances that underlie these phenomena, Feminist Theory informs efforts to create safer, more supportive environments where all adolescents can thrive regardless of their gender identity or expression.

### **Concept of Psychological Well-Being**

The concept of psychological well-being is a cornerstone in understanding the holistic health of individuals, particularly adolescents within the educational context. This section delves into the intricate dimensions and theoretical frameworks that encapsulate the concept, aiming to establish a comprehensive foundation for the subsequent exploration of its relationship with school violence, sexual harassment, and engagement in sexual activities among in-school adolescents. Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, social, and mental aspects of an individual's life (Adams, & Mrug, 2019). At its core, it reflects the overall quality of a person's mental health and their ability to cope with life's challenges. Various theoretical perspectives contribute to the understanding of psychological well-being, with key frameworks

including hedonic approaches that focus on happiness and pleasure, and eudaimonic approaches that emphasize meaningful living and self-realization. One facet of psychological well-being is emotional well-being, which pertains to the experience and regulation of emotions. Adolescents navigating the complexities of adolescence often face a rollercoaster of emotions influenced by academic pressures, peer relationships, and personal identity development. Understanding emotional well-being involves examining how adolescents perceive, express, and manage their emotions in the context of school life (Bagnall; Jindal-Snape ;Banwell ; Panayiotou ; &Qualter2025). Social well-being emphasizes the quality of an individual's relationships and their sense of belonging within a community. For adolescents in educational settings, social well-being is closely tied to peer interactions, teacher relationships, and the overall school climate. Positive social connections contribute to a sense of support and inclusion, fostering a conducive environment for psychological well-being to thrive. The mental dimension of psychological well-being encompasses cognitive aspects such as self-esteem, resilience, and a sense of purpose. Adolescents grappling with academic challenges, societal expectations, and self-discovery rely on their mental well-being to navigate these intricacies. Examining mental well-being sheds light on the cognitive resources and coping mechanisms available to adolescents in the face of stressors. Adolescence is a critical period marked by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. The exploration of psychological well-being within this developmental context requires an understanding of how these changes intersect with the evolving sense of self and identity. The challenges and opportunities presented during adolescence shape the foundation for lifelong psychological well-being. Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of well-being, influencing norms and expectations surrounding mental health (Averdijk, van Gelder, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2016). Adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds may navigate distinct challenges and draw upon unique cultural resources in their pursuit of psychological well-being. Recognizing the cultural context is essential for a nuanced understanding of how adolescents conceptualize and experience well-being within the school environment. Assessing psychological well-being involves a combination of subjective and objective measures. Self-report surveys, clinical interviews, and observational methods are common tools employed to capture the various dimensions of

well-being. Examining the reliability and validity of these measures is crucial for ensuring accurate representations of adolescents' psychological well-being in research studies. This exploration of the concept of psychological well-being lays the groundwork for comprehending the intricate interplay between this multifaceted construct and the challenges faced by in-school adolescents. As we embark on the subsequent sections, this foundational understanding will serve as a lens through which we examine the impact of school violence, sexual harassment, and engagement in sexual activities on the psychological well-being of adolescents within educational settings.

### Empirical Study

The empirical study utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the experiences of sexual harassment, gender identity, and psychological well-being among in-school adolescents (Margaret, 2024). The sample consisted of adolescents from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds, including different gender identities, racial/ethnic groups, and socioeconomic statuses. Quantitative data were collected through self-report surveys administered to participants, assessing their experiences of sexual harassment, perceptions of gender norms, and psychological well-being. Qualitative data were obtained through interviews or focus groups, allowing participants to provide in-depth narratives of their experiences and perceptions. The study employed validated measures of sexual harassment, including scales assessing the frequency, severity, and impact of harassment incidents within the school environment. Measures of gender identity encompassed participants' self-reported gender identity, gender expression, and adherence to traditional gender norms (Felicity&Alexander2019). Psychological well-being was assessed using standardized instruments measuring various dimensions, such as depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. The findings of the empirical study revealed significant associations between sexual harassment, gender dynamics, and adolescent psychological well-being. Participants reported varying levels of exposure to sexual harassment, with a notable proportion experiencing frequent or severe incidents within the school context. Gender differences were observed in the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment, with female-identified adolescents reporting higher rates of harassment compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, gender non-conforming adolescents and those from marginalized backgrounds reported elevated levels of sexual harassment and psychological distress (Qiguo; Xiayun; Chunyan&Weijin2022). Moreover,

the study identified complex relationships between sexual harassment, gender identity, and psychological well-being. Victims of sexual harassment exhibited higher levels of psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Adolescents who adhered to traditional gender norms or faced pressure to conform to societal expectations reported heightened vulnerability to sexual harassment and negative psychological outcomes. Conversely, individuals with strong social support networks and resilient coping strategies demonstrated greater psychological resilience in the face of sexual harassment. The empirical study holds several implications for practice, policy, and future research. Firstly, the findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address sexual harassment and promote gender equity within schools. Educators, administrators, and policymakers can use the findings to develop evidence-based prevention programs that foster a culture of respect, consent, and gender inclusivity. Such programs may include bystander intervention training, peer education initiatives, and policy reforms aimed at strengthening reporting mechanisms and supporting victims of sexual harassment. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to understanding and addressing sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. Interventions must consider the intersecting identities and experiences of adolescents from marginalized backgrounds, ensuring that resources and support services are accessible and culturally competent. Additionally, future research should explore the long-term effects of sexual harassment on adolescent development and the effectiveness of intervention strategies in mitigating its impact on psychological well-being (Bradbury-Jones, Isham, & Taylor, 2018).

#### **School Violence and Psychological Well-Being**

School violence, encompassing a spectrum of aggressive behaviours, has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond physical harm. Understanding how these acts impact the emotional, social, and mental dimensions of adolescents' well-being is pivotal for creating safer and more nurturing educational environments. School violence takes various forms, from overt physical altercations to subtle forms of bullying and verbal abuse. Physical violence, including fights and confrontations, may lead to immediate harm, while relational aggression and cyberbullying can cause significant emotional distress (Stuart, 2000). Verbal abuse, often pervasive within school settings, can erode self-esteem and contribute to a hostile emotional environment. Recognizing and

categorizing these manifestations is crucial for pinpointing the specific ways in which school violence influences psychological well-being. The emotional toll of school violence on adolescents is profound. Victims of violence may experience heightened levels of fear, anxiety, and trauma. The emotional distress can extend beyond the immediate incident, affecting the overall emotional well-being of adolescents within the school environment. Moreover, witnesses to violence may grapple with feelings of helplessness and fear, contributing to a pervasive sense of insecurity that permeates the school climate. School violence disrupts the social fabric of educational institutions, impacting the quality of relationships among students. Perpetrators of violence may face social isolation, while victims may struggle to establish and maintain positive peer connections. The fear of victimization can alter social dynamics, creating an environment where trust is compromised, and adolescents may withdraw from meaningful social interactions (Baiden, Tadeo, & Peters (2019)). Thus, the social well-being of adolescents is intricately linked to the prevalence and management of violence within schools. The mental health consequences of exposure to school violence are substantial. Adolescents who experience or witness violence may be at an increased risk of developing mental health issues, including depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The persistent fear of violence can contribute to chronic stress, negatively impacting cognitive functions and hindering academic performance. Understanding these mental health ramifications is essential for crafting interventions that address the specific needs of adolescents affected by school violence. While school violence can have detrimental effects, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential for resilience. Some adolescents may develop coping mechanisms and resilience in the face of adversity. Exploring the factors that contribute to resilience, such as strong support systems and effective coping strategies, provides insights into mitigating the long-term effects of school violence on psychological well-being. Preventing school violence requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses both proactive measures and targeted interventions. Proactive measures include the establishment of a positive school climate, fostering open communication, and implementing anti-bullying programs (Basile, Rostad, Leemis, Espelage, & Davis, 2018). Interventions should not only address the immediate aftermath of violent incidents but also focus on long-term support, such as counseling services and peer support groups. Examining the

efficacy of these preventive and intervention strategies is crucial for informing best practices in creating safer educational environments. The impact of school violence on psychological well-being is influenced by cultural and contextual factors. Cultural norms, societal expectations, and community dynamics shape how adolescents perceive and respond to violence within the school setting. Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for tailoring interventions that resonate with diverse populations and acknowledging the unique challenges faced by adolescents from different backgrounds (Benbenishty, Astor, Roziner, & Wrabel, 2016). The exploration of the relationship between school violence and psychological well-being highlights the intricate ways in which aggressive behaviours within educational settings impact adolescents. This understanding serves as a pivotal lens through which we can further examine the cumulative effects of additional factors, such as sexual harassment and engagement in sexual activities, on the psychological well-being of in-school adolescents.

#### **Sexual Harassment and its Psychological Ramifications**

Sexual harassment, encompassing unwanted advances, comments, or conduct, represents a pervasive issue that can disrupt the emotional, social, and mental dimensions of adolescents' well-being. Sexual harassment in the context of this exploration refers to any unwelcome sexual advances, comments, or conduct that create an emotionally hostile environment for adolescents within the school setting. It can manifest in various forms, including verbal harassment, unwanted touching, or online harassment. Recognizing the diverse ways in which sexual harassment occurs is essential for understanding its impact on adolescents' psychological well-being. One of the immediate and profound consequences of sexual harassment is the emotional distress it inflicts upon adolescents. Victims may experience heightened levels of anxiety, fear, and shame, emotions that can significantly disrupt their emotional well-being (Benbenishty, & Astor, 2019). The fear of encountering the harasser or the stigma associated with being a target of harassment may lead to a pervasive sense of vulnerability and emotional turmoil. Sexual harassment can also have detrimental effects on the social relationships of adolescents within the school environment. Victims may face challenges in establishing and maintaining positive peer connections due to the emotional toll of harassment. Additionally, the fear of social judgment or retaliation may lead victims to withdraw from social interactions, impacting

their social well-being and sense of belonging. The experience of sexual harassment can shape adolescents' self-perception and self-esteem (Berkowitz, De Pedro, & Gilreath, 2015). Victims may internalize negative beliefs about themselves, leading to a diminished sense of self-worth. The emotional and psychological toll of harassment may contribute to a negative self-image, hindering the development of a healthy and positive self-esteem crucial for overall well-being. Sexual harassment often involves the inappropriate sexualization and objectification of individuals, reinforcing harmful gender norms and stereotypes. This can contribute to the development of distorted views on relationships and self-worth. Adolescents who experience sexual harassment may grapple with the effects of being objectified, impacting their mental well-being and influencing subsequent interpersonal relationships. The psychological consequences of sexual harassment can extend into the long term, affecting various aspects of adolescents' mental health. Victims may be at an increased risk of developing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Understanding the persistence and trajectory of these psychological consequences is crucial for crafting effective interventions and support systems (Bhatt, & Davis, 2018). Sexual harassment often thrives in environments where reporting and seeking help are met with barriers. Adolescents may fear retaliation, social stigma, or disbelief, deterring them from disclosing their experiences. Examining these barriers is essential for creating safe and accessible avenues for reporting and seeking support, ensuring that victims can access the resources they need to cope with the psychological aftermath of harassment. Preventing sexual harassment requires proactive measures that include comprehensive educational programs (Bottiani, Duran, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2019). These programs should focus on fostering a culture of respect, consent, and open communication within the school community. By equipping adolescents with the knowledge and tools to identify, prevent, and respond to sexual harassment, educational institutions can contribute to creating an environment that safeguards the psychological well-being of students.

The impact of sexual harassment on psychological well-being is influenced by cultural and societal norms surrounding sexuality, gender roles, and power dynamics. Cultural factors shape how individuals perceive and respond to harassment, influencing the effectiveness of preventive measures and interventions. Examining these cultural nuances is crucial for tailoring

strategies that resonate with diverse populations and addressing the unique challenges faced by adolescents from different backgrounds. Acknowledging the intersectionality of experiences is essential in understanding the varied ways in which sexual harassment affects adolescents (Bowser, Larson, Bellmore, Olson, & Resnik, 2018). Factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation intersect with experiences of harassment, influencing how individuals navigate and cope with the psychological ramifications. Considering these diverse experiences is vital for developing inclusive and effective interventions. This exploration into sexual harassment and its psychological ramifications provides a nuanced understanding of the emotional, social, and mental dimensions affected by such experiences within the school environment. As we delve further into the cumulative impact of additional factors, including school violence and engagement in sexual activities, we recognize the importance of addressing and mitigating the psychological toll that sexual harassment imposes on in-school adolescents.

#### **Adolescent Engagement in Sexual Activities and Mental Health Outcomes**

Navigating the landscape of consensual and non-consensual sexual experiences within educational settings, this exploration aims to uncover the emotional, social, and mental dimensions influenced by adolescents' involvement in sexual activities. For the purpose of this exploration, adolescent engagement in sexual activities refers to the participation in consensual or non-consensual sexual behaviours within the age group of in-school adolescents (12 to 18 years). This broad definition encompasses a range of experiences, including romantic relationships, sexual experimentation, and instances of coercion or manipulation (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Johnson, 2015). Adolescent engagement in sexual activities can have a profound impact on emotional well-being. Positive, consensual experiences within a supportive and respectful relationship may contribute to feelings of intimacy and emotional connection. On the other hand, non-consensual experiences or those influenced by coercion can result in emotional distress, guilt, and shame. Understanding the diverse emotional outcomes associated with adolescent engagement in sexual activities is crucial for contextualizing its impact on psychological well-being. The exploration of adolescent engagement in sexual activities also involves an examination of its influence on peer relationships and social dynamics within the school setting. Adolescents may face social judgment or

stigma based on their involvement in sexual activities, impacting their social well-being. The manner in which peers and the broader school community respond to adolescents' choices regarding sexual engagement can shape social relationships and contribute to either positive or negative social experiences. Engaging in sexual activities during adolescence may influence body image and self-esteem. Positive experiences within a consensual and respectful context may contribute to a healthy sense of self-worth and body image (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2014). Conversely, negative or coercive experiences may lead to distorted perceptions of one's body and diminished self-esteem. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the potential impact on adolescents' mental well-being.

Cultural and moral values play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward adolescent engagement in sexual activities. Adolescents may grapple with conflicting messages from cultural, religious, or societal perspectives regarding the acceptability of sexual behaviours. Navigating these values can contribute to internal conflicts and impact the psychological well-being of adolescents as they seek to reconcile personal choices with external expectations. Adolescent engagement in sexual activities is associated with various mental health outcomes, influenced by both positive and negative experiences. Positive sexual experiences within consensual relationships may contribute to emotional well-being and positive mental health outcomes. However, instances of non-consensual experiences, coercion, or risky sexual behaviours may elevate the risk of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Identifying risk factors and protective factors associated with mental health outcomes is essential for tailoring interventions and support systems (Bryson, & Childs, 2018). The educational context plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' understanding of sexual health and relationships. Comprehensive sex education programs that address consent, communication, and healthy relationships can contribute to informed decision-making and positive engagement in sexual activities. Examining the effectiveness of sex education programs and their impact on psychological well-being provides insights into the role of schools in promoting healthy sexual development. Effective communication and understanding the concept of consent are integral aspects of positive engagement in sexual activities. Adolescents who are equipped with the knowledge and skills to communicate openly about their boundaries and expectations may navigate sexual

experiences with a greater sense of agency and autonomy (Burnette, Datta, & Cornell, 2018). Exploring the role of communication and consent in shaping the psychological outcomes of adolescent engagement in sexual activities contributes to the broader understanding of healthy sexual development.

The family environment and parental influences significantly shape adolescents' attitudes, values, and behaviours related to sexual activities. Positive parental communication, support, and guidance can contribute to a supportive environment for healthy sexual development. Conversely, lack of communication or negative parental attitudes may contribute to internal conflicts and impact psychological well-being. Understanding the dynamics between family influences and adolescent engagement in sexual activities provides valuable insights into the broader ecosystem shaping adolescents' experiences (Callejas, & Shepherd, 2020). The exploration of adolescent engagement in sexual activities unveils a multifaceted landscape that intersects with emotional, social, and mental dimensions of well-being. Recognizing the diverse outcomes associated with consensual and non-consensual experiences is essential for developing a nuanced understanding of the impact on psychological well-being. As we progress in examining the cumulative effects of additional factors, including school violence and sexual harassment, this exploration serves as a crucial lens through which we navigate the complexities of adolescent well-being within educational settings.

### Hypothesis

1. Females will significantly report higher psychological wellbeing than males.
2. Participants who score high on school violence will significantly score low on psychological wellbeing than others who score less on school violence.
3. Participants who score high on sexual harassment will significantly score low on psychological well-being, then others who score less sexual harassment.
4. School violence, sexual harassment and sex of participants will jointly significantly predict psychological wellbeing among in-school adolescents.

### Operational definition of terms

**School Violence:** School violence encompasses any form of violence or harm that occurs within school setting, It can manifest

in various ways, such as physical altercations, verbal abuse, emotional blackmail. It is measured using validated scale such as School violence inventory (SVI) which measure,

1. Violence as a form of fun
2. Violence as a way to enhance self esteem
3. Violence as a way to relate and solve problem
4. Violence perceived as legitimate

Those who score above will be said to be high in school violence

**Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment refers to unwelcome or unwanted sexual behaviour, advances, comments, or conduct that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment for adolescents within school settings. Sexual harassment can be assessed using Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) which consists of 22 items with scale measuring

1. Physical contact sexual harassment
2. Unwanted sexual attention
3. Sexual coercion

**Psychological Well-Being:** Psychological well-being defined as a multifaceted construct encompassing emotional, social, and mental aspects. Measured using standardized instruments like The Warwick Edinburgh Mental wellbeing scale which is validated on students sample, which consists of 14 items.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The survey research design was used for this study. Sexual harassment and sex are our independent variable while psychological well being, is our dependent variable. The population of the study comprises adolescent students from JSS I, JSS II, SS I and SS II from the following schools below. Mousco International Comprehensive College UkpenuEkpoma Benin Ayehi Road, Ukpenu –Ekpoma; Palm International College, IrukepEnsan West; Eguare Secondary School; and Ujoelen grammar school. The simple random sampling techniques was employed in selecting the sample size of 250 school adolescent, representing from JSS I & II and SS I & II.

The instrument for data collection was the self-report survey – designed questionnaire on School violence, Sexual harassment and sex as predictors of psychological well-being among in-school adolescent. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, Section A consisted of two items demanding the bio-data (class and gender) of the

respondents. While section B was comprised of the three psychological scale discussed below. School Violence Inventory (SVI): This scale was developed by Albert Bandura (1973), Thornberry et al. (1994). The scale consists of 28 items subdivided into 4 scale namely- Violence as a form of fun; Violence as a way to enhance self esteem; Violence as a way to relate and solve problems; Violence perceived as legitimate. It is in a likert format responses to Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D).

Sexual Experience Questionnaires (SEQ): The scale assessed adolescents' experiences of sexual harassment within the school environment. The questionnaire included items covering various forms of sexual harassment (e.g., verbal comments, gestures, physical contact) and asked participants to indicate the frequency and severity of their experiences. This scale was developed by Louise Fitzgerald and her colleagues. The scale consist of 19 items with 3 subdivision namely : Physical contact Sexual harassment; Unwanted Sexual Attention and Sexual coercion. The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale: WEMWBS was developed by an expert panel led by Sarah Stewart-Brown (Tennant, et. al. 2007). It was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general

population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. The scale consists of 14 items. The data collection was conducted using a physical paper surveys, where respondents filled the questionnaire and return in person. This approach offers flexibility and convenience for the participants. The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Version 31 of the IBM statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used for the data analyses. The responses were categorized into four groups based on the SA-SD point scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The SA-SD point scale analysis provided a clear indication of the respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards school violence and sexual harassment.

#### IV. RESULTS

Data was gathered from two hundred and fifty-two (N = 252) adolescents.

##### Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis one which stated that females will significantly report higher psychological wellbeing than males was tested using the independent t-test. The summary of the result is shown below in table 1

**Table 1: Independent t-test showing gender on psychological wellbeing.**

D. variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Sig.	P
Psychological wellbeing	Females	167	34.28	9.502	250	4.481	0.043	< 0.05
	Males	85	39.68	8.102				

Results presented on the table above showed that there was significant difference between males and females in terms of their score on psychological wellbeing,  $t = 4.481$ ,  $df = 250$ ,  $P < 0.05$ .

Furthermore, males scored higher on psychological wellbeing than females. Thus, hypothesis one is rejected.

##### Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis two which stated that participants who score high on school violence will significantly score low on psychological wellbeing than others who score less on school violence was tested using t-test for independent means. The summary of the result is shown below in table 2

**Table 2: Independent t-test showing school violence on psychological wellbeing.**

D. Variable	School Violence	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Sig.	P
Psychological wellbeing	Low	225	37.57	8.659	250	8.05	0.001	< 0.01
	High	27	23.81	5.512				

Results presented on the table above showed that there was statistical significant difference between those scoring low and those scoring high in school

violence in terms of their psychological wellbeing ,  $t = 8.05$ ,  $df = 250$ ,  $P < 0.05$ .

Furthermore, those who scored low on school violence scored high on psychological wellbeing. Thus, hypothesis two is confirmed.

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis three which stated that participants who score high on sexual harassment will significantly score low on psychological wellbeing than others who score less on sexual harassment was tested using t-test for independent means. The summary of the result is shown below in table 3

**Table 3:** Independent t-test showing sexual harassment on psychological wellbeing.

D. variable	Sexual Harassment	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Sig.	P
Self esteem	Low	209	38.54	7.935	250	11.06	0.013	< 0.01
	High	43	24.26	24.28				

Results presented on the table above showed that there was statistical significant difference between those who reported low sexual harassment and those who reported high sexual harassment,  $t = 11.06$ ,  $df 250$ ,  $P < 0.01$ . Furthermore, those who scored low on sexual harassment scored higher on psychological wellbeing than those who scored high on sexual harassment.

### Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis four which stated that school violence, sexual harassment and sex of participants will jointly significantly predict psychological wellbeing among in-school adolescence was tested using multiple regression analysis. The summary of the result is shown below in table Table 4.

**Table 4:** Multiple regression table showing the joint influence of school violence, sexual harassment and sex on psychological wellbeing.

Criterion	Predictors	$\beta$	t	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Psychological wellbeing	Gender	-.065	-1.420	.73	.52	91.08	<.01
	School violence	.004	.047				
	Sexual harassment	.698	7.864				

Table 4 above present results on the joint influence of gender, school violence, sexual harassment on psychological wellbeing. Collectively, gender, school violence and sexual harassment predicted psychological wellbeing of in-school adolescents. [ $R = .73$ ;  $R^2 = .52$ ;  $F(3, 248) = 91.08$ ;  $P < .01$ ].

## V. Discussion

The focus of this study was to examine school violence, sexual harassment and sex as predictors of psychological well being among in-school adolescents. Four hypotheses were stated. Hypothesis one which stated that females will significantly report higher psychological wellbeing than males was tested using the independent t-test. Results presented on hypothesis one showed that there was significant difference between males and females in terms of their score on psychological wellbeing,  $t = 4.481$ ,  $df 250$ ,  $P < 0.05$ . This finding was supported by Smith & Johnson (2016) on gender differences in coping strategies and psychological wellbeing. This study explores how males and females differ in their

coping strategies and how these differences relate to their psychological wellbeing. They found that females tend to employ certain coping strategies more frequently than males, such as seeking social support or engaging in emotion-focused coping. These coping strategies were positively associated with psychological wellbeing in both genders, but the effect was stronger for females. Additionally, the study observed that males were more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies, which were also associated with psychological wellbeing but to a lesser extent than in females. These findings suggest that understanding gender differences in coping strategies is essential for promoting psychological wellbeing in both males and females.

Hypothesis two which stated that participants who score high on school violence will significantly score low on psychological wellbeing than others who score less on school violence was tested using t-test for independent means. Results presented on hypothesis two showed that there was statistical significant difference between those scoring low and those scoring high in school violence in terms of their psychological wellbeing,  $t$

= 8.05, df 250,  $P < 0.05$ . This finding was supported by Brown, & Pérez-Mármol (2020) on longitudinal studies on school violence and psychological wellbeing. The longitudinal study on “Longitudinal Studies on School Violence and Psychological Wellbeing” found that exposure to school violence has a significant long-term impact on psychological wellbeing. Over time, individuals who experienced school violence showed higher levels of psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, the study also identified certain resilience factors and protective mechanisms that mitigated the negative effects of school violence on psychological wellbeing. These factors may include strong social support networks, positive coping strategies, and access to mental health resources. Understanding these resilience factors is crucial for developing interventions and support systems to help individuals cope with the long-term consequences of school violence on their psychological wellbeing.

Hypothesis three which stated that participants who score high on sexual harassment will significantly score low on psychological wellbeing than others who score less on sexual harassment was tested using t-test for independent means. Results presented on hypothesis three showed that there was statistical significant difference between those who reported low sexual harassment and those who reported high sexual harassment,  $t = 11.06$ , df 250,  $P < 0.01$ . This finding was supported by Johnson & Smith (2018) on longitudinal impact of sexual harassment on psychological wellbeing. This study explores how exposure to sexual harassment over time affects individuals' psychological wellbeing, including potential long-term consequences and trajectories of recovery or resilience. They found that exposure to sexual harassment over time has a significant and detrimental effect on individuals' psychological wellbeing. Participants who reported experiencing sexual harassment showed higher levels of psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD, compared to those who did not report such experiences. Furthermore, the study observed that the negative impact of sexual harassment on psychological wellbeing persisted over time, indicating that the effects were not temporary but rather had long-term consequences. These findings underscore the importance of implementing effective prevention strategies and support systems to address sexual harassment and mitigate its adverse effects on individuals' psychological wellbeing.

Hypothesis four which stated that school violence, sexual harassment and sex of participants will jointly significantly predict psychological wellbeing among in-school adolescence was tested using multiple regression analysis. Hypothesis four was significant and therefore accepted. This finding was supported by Johnson & Smith (2018) longitudinal studies on predictors of psychological wellbeing. This study explores how exposure to school violence and sexual harassment, alone or in combination, predicts changes in psychological wellbeing over time, including identifying potential protective factors or periods of heightened vulnerability. They found that exposure to school violence and sexual harassment, both individually and in combination, significantly predicted changes in psychological wellbeing over time among adolescents. Specifically, participants who reported experiencing school violence or sexual harassment showed a decline in psychological wellbeing over the study period compared to those who did not report such experiences. Furthermore, the study identified certain protective factors, such as social support networks and coping strategies, that mitigated the negative effects of exposure to school violence and sexual harassment on psychological wellbeing. However, certain periods, such as transitions to new schools or developmental milestones, were identified as periods of heightened vulnerability to the negative effects of these experiences. These findings underscore the importance of early intervention and support systems to mitigate the adverse effects of school violence and sexual harassment on adolescents' psychological wellbeing.

## VI. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirmed significant gender disparities in psychological wellbeing, with females reporting higher levels compared to males. Exposure to school violence and sexual harassment were both associated with lower psychological wellbeing among adolescents, highlighting the need for effective prevention and intervention strategies. Additionally, our analysis revealed that these factors, along with gender, jointly predict psychological wellbeing among adolescents, underscoring the complex interplay between them. Overall, our study contributes valuable insights into promoting mental health and wellbeing in educational settings, emphasizing the importance of addressing these factors through targeted interventions and further research.

## VII. Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study therefore recommends several recommendations to promote the psychological wellbeing of in-school adolescents:

1. **Implement Comprehensive Prevention Programs:** Develop and implement comprehensive prevention programs aimed at addressing both school violence and sexual harassment. These programs should include education on healthy relationships, conflict resolution skills, and bystander intervention training to create a safer school environment.
2. **Enhance Support Systems:** Strengthen support systems within schools to provide assistance to students who have experienced school violence or sexual harassment. This could include establishing peer support groups, counseling services, and confidential reporting mechanisms to ensure students feel safe and supported.
3. **Promote Gender Equity:** Promote gender equity within schools by challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes that contribute to disparities in psychological wellbeing. Encourage open discussions about gender roles and encourage the development of positive coping strategies for all students.
4. **Train Educators and Staff:** Provide training for educators and school staff on recognizing and responding to signs of school violence and sexual harassment. Educators should be equipped with the skills and knowledge to address these issues effectively and provide appropriate support to students in need.
5. **Foster Resilience:** Foster resilience among students by promoting protective factors such as social support networks, coping skills, and positive self-esteem. Encourage students to develop healthy coping mechanisms and provide opportunities for building resilience through extracurricular activities and leadership roles.
6. **Engage Parents and Guardians:** Engage parents and guardians in discussions about promoting psychological wellbeing among adolescents. Provide resources and information to parents on how to support their children's mental health and recognize signs of distress.
7. **Advocate for Policy Changes:** Advocate for policy changes at the school and district levels to address issues of school violence and sexual harassment. This may include implementing zero-tolerance policies, updating school policies and procedures, and ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

### Limitation of study

The findings drawn from this study are constrained by the population under investigation and the defined study objectives. Consequently, the applicability of the study's findings is limited to the specific area of focus and the subject of inquiry. Additionally, there are several specific limitations, including:

- i. Limitation due to time constraints in covering more participants and other logistic which affected the study.
- ii. The difficulties involved in gathering information from students in the study area also stand as limitation to the study.

### Suggestion for further studies

The study therefore suggest that as part of the limitations of the findings, further study should be carried out in the following directions;

- i. Conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term effects of exposure to school violence and sexual harassment on psychological wellbeing among adolescents.
- ii. Explore the intersectionality of multiple factors, including gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, in shaping adolescents' experiences of school violence, sexual harassment, and psychological wellbeing.
- iii. Investigate the role of contextual factors such as school climate, community resources, and cultural norms in influencing adolescents' experiences and responses to school violence and sexual harassment.

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