



Tackling School-based Violence in Secondary Schools in Cameroon: A Stakeholder Approach

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Abstract: School-based violence in Cameroonian secondary schools has escalated into a pervasive crisis, undermining the educational environment, student well-being, and broader socio-economic development. Despite existing governmental policies, incidents of bullying, physical altercations, and psychological abuse remain rampant. This qualitative study explores the dynamics of school-based violence from a stakeholder perspective, theoretically grounded in General Strain Theory and Procedural Justice Theory. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 key education stakeholders including teachers, principals, and administrative delegates in the Buea region. Thematic analysis of the data revealed profound concerns regarding the disruption of the teaching-learning process, deteriorating mental health, and the proliferation of substance abuse among students. The predominant forms of violence identified were physical assault, psychological/verbal abuse, and bullying, driven by intersecting individual, familial, school, and socio-cultural factors. To effectively mitigate this crisis, stakeholders strongly recommended a multi-tiered intervention strategy consisting of: cultivating a positive and inclusive school climate, forging robust school-family-community partnerships, curtailing access to alcohol and illicit substances, and implementing comprehensive, school-wide behavioral support policies. The findings underscore that tackling school violence necessitates a coordinated, holistic approach to safeguard the physical and moral integrity of the educational system in Cameroon.

Keywords: School-based violence, secondary education, stakeholder intervention, General Strain Theory, qualitative research, school climate;



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Introduction

Recent literature and media reports provide compelling evidence of severe incidents of school-based violence in Cameroonian secondary schools. These occurrences, previously considered isolated anomalies, have escalated to a level where they can no longer be viewed as random events. The underlying psycho-social triggers that prompt adolescents to react aggressively and antisocially are frequently overlooked. For instance, many students who perpetrate significant acts of school violence report profound feelings of alienation from their peers. Furthermore, there is

insufficient discourse on how educational institutions, organizations, and communities can collaboratively implement strategies focused on violence prevention. At a minimum, educators and community leaders must foster environments where adolescents experience structured routines, receive adequate emotional support, and understand clear behavioral expectations alongside the consequences of unacceptable conduct. Crucially, adults must model constructive values that guide youth toward becoming healthy, balanced, and productive individuals.

Despite the formulation of policies by the Ministry of Secondary Education in Cameroon aimed at mitigating school violence, empirical evidence indicates a deteriorating situation. Consequently, addressing the rising incidence of school violence is an urgent priority, especially given that a significant portion of a child's developmental years is spent within the school environment. The necessity of focusing on school-based violence is underpinned by three primary justifications: the imperative to protect children's fundamental human rights to a safe education; the mitigation of severe social repercussions and the promotion of societal cohesion; and the critical role of education in securing the developmental capacity and economic future of the nation.

The first justification relates to the necessity of ensuring that every child has access to all of his or her human rights. Children's rights to an education can be seriously harmed by violence in schools. Perezniето et al. (2010) found that children who study in hostile environments tend to perform worse academically than their non-hostile counterparts. Additionally, academic achievement of bullied children often declines sharply and they become reluctant to participate in school activities. Violence in schools has an adverse effect that extends beyond the children who are directly harmed by it. Furthermore, it has an insidious effect on students who witness it, cultivating a fearful and uneasy environment that is not conducive to learning. Ultimately, violence or the threat of violence may be such that students abandon their education or guardians withdraw them from the institution out of concern. As a result, it adversely affects their chances of escaping poverty.

The social repercussions of this phenomenon and, conversely, the potential for violence-free schools to significantly improve social cohesion are the subject of the second justification for concentrating on school violence. Violence in schools both fuels and is fueled by violence in society at large. Where the social and physical environment of the community is hostile, the school environment is unlikely to be spared, as noted by Pinheiro (2006) in his UN Study on Violence Against Children. Violence in the home, the classroom, and the community actually flow into one another on a continuum. It is possible to create a new continuum if schools are transformed into violence-free environments, as stated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) in its General Comment no. 8, which states that "addressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools, and other settings, is not only a duty of States Parties under the Convention on the Rights of the Child; it is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies." (Antonowicz et al., 2019).

The third argument for decisive action to end school violence is related to the question of the development capacity of the country and the crucial importance of education to improve the lives of citizens, children, adults, and future generations. Students who experienced bullying at school were twice as likely as those who did not to have any formal education, employment, or training, and they also had lower wages at ages 23 and 33, according to Ellery et al. (2010). In addition, young men who are not in school work or training are three times more likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to be punished. Such statistics have a great impact on the economies of countries. Enrolling and keeping girls in school is particularly important from the point of view of the country's development. For example, Antonowicz et al., (2019) revealed that failure to educate boys and girls costs Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria \$974 million, \$301 million, and \$1,662 million annually, respectively. One of the key causes of girls' underrepresentation in the educational setting is violence in schools. Furthermore, research by Perezniето et al., (2010), shows that "lower educational attainment rates have

generational impacts: for instance, low female education is correlated with higher fertility rates, lower health rates for themselves and their children, and a worse overall household economy.”

Ending violence in schools is therefore essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda, which targets violence against children and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes the significance of human rights knowledge and skills and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence (target 4.7), as well as the provision of child, gender, and disability sensitive facilities and safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all. Other international conventions and commitments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires states to ensure that children are protected from violence, also require states to take action to address school violence and bullying.

International initiatives like the United Nations Millennium Declaration are undermined by the prevalence of violence in schools (Plan-International, 2010). In the year 2000, 189 countries ratified this declaration. International treaties and conventions have been signed in an effort to combat violence (United Nations, 2007). According to Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, everyone has the right to education (Organization of African Unity, 1981; United Nations, 1948). Article 20 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organization of African Unity, 1990), both of which declare education to be a fundamental right of children, further uphold this right. Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 16 of the African Charter on the Rights of a Child both require member states to protect children from violence by implementing administrative, legislative, educational, and social measures (Organization of African Unity, 1990; United Nations, 1989). Since Cameroon's government ratified the aforementioned conventions, it is required to enact laws that shield its citizens from all forms of violence. It should also raise awareness and develop educational initiatives that support nonviolent behavior (Save the Children Sweden, 2005). Consistent with international conventions, Cameroon has adopted laws that are intended to address violence, among others. Accordingly, the constitution of the Republic of Cameroon in reaffirming its faith in fundamental human rights, in Article 5, that no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (The Republic of Cameroon, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

Education stakeholders in Cameroon have committed to enacting robust legislation aimed at protecting all aspects of the educational environment to ensure instruction is entirely free of violence. Consequently, the 1998 Law of Cameroon National Educational Guidelines explicitly guarantees the physical and moral integrity of students within the educational system. The use of physical force including corporal punishment is strictly forbidden, alongside discrimination and the distribution or consumption of illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Nevertheless, despite these legislative measures, school-based violence remains a pervasive crisis in Cameroonian secondary schools.

Violence manifests in various insidious and overt forms, including verbal abuse, intimidation, gang violence, theft, physical altercations, and vandalism. The most tragic manifestation of this crisis occurred on January 14, 2020, with the fatal stabbing of a mathematics teacher at Government High School Nkolbisson by a student. Further severe incidents include a student suffering organ damage following a physical assault by a teacher at Government Technical School Ambam, and a fatal peer-on-peer stabbing at Government Bilingual High School Deido in March 2019, reportedly triggered by academic mockery. While the literature extensively documents the psychological, medical, and social outcomes of bullying and victimization, there remains a critical gap in understanding the precise contextual predictors of school violence in Cameroon and the most efficacious policy interventions. Against this background, this study seeks to address the epidemic of school-based violence in Cameroonian secondary schools by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of stakeholder perspectives and intervention strategies.

Objectives of the study

The main goals of the study were to investigate the level of concern surrounding school-based violence, the understanding and management of violence by key stakeholders, the perceived causes of violence, and the recommendations of the stakeholders for necessary interventions to stop violence.

Research questions

To better address the aim, the following research questions have been generated:

1. Is school-based violence a matter of concern to the school community?
2. What are the various forms of school-based violence and their perceived causes?
3. What measures can be put in place by stakeholders for necessary interventions to stop school-based violence?

Theoretical framework

The General Strain Theory (GST) and the Procedural Justice Theory, which contend that students are more likely to engage in violent behavior when they perceive unfairness in school policies or teacher treatment, serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. According to General Strain Theory, or GST, there is a greater chance of delinquent behavior, including in-school violence, among adolescents who feel that they are being treated unfairly at school. Although criminological theory also suggests a relationship between teacher and rule fairness and school violence, empirical research finds that these relationships are significant deterrents to school violence. This theory hasn't been used much to explain the connection between school violence and fairness. According to GST, delinquency is positively correlated with facing stressors (i.e., strains) in the lack of useful coping mechanisms (Agnew, 1992). "Relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated" is how Agnew (1992) describes strain. He continues by classifying strain into three categories: the absence of positively valued stimuli, the presence of negative stimuli, and the inability to accomplish positively valued objectives. Stresses could be interpreted as unpleasant school experiences. Stress, according to GST, causes unfavorable feelings like rage and frustration, which can lead to delinquent behavior. Agnew (2001) notes that not every strain has the same propensity to result in criminal activity. In fact, he contends that delinquent behavior is not always the result of a build-up of small, daily stresses. Rather, Agnew (2006) asserts that unfavorable experiences that are thought to be unfair are especially prone to inspire criminal activity. Actually, as opposed to objective strain measurements, recent advances in the GST tradition point to the significance of subjective assessments of strains (Arter, 2007; Froggio & Agnew, 2007). It is noteworthy that Agnew (2001) suggests that perceived injustice is one of the traits of criminogenic strain. Agnew (2001), specifically contends that because subjective stresses like perceived injustice arouse negative emotions, especially anger, they are especially likely to precipitate criminal activity. Anger and perceived injustice are known to be related (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). According to recent GST research, the relationship between stress and crime may also be mediated by other negative emotions that result from perceived injustice. These unfavorable feelings include anxiety (Hollist et al., 2009), depression (Hollist et al., 2009; Jang & Rhodes, 2012), and frustration and fear (Ganem, 2010). Studies have also consistently shown that criminal behavior and negative emotions are related (Berkowitz, 1993; Piquero & Sealock, 2000). According to Agnew (2001), fury in particular impairs cognitive functions that could be used to recognize a different, non-criminal response to stress. Additionally, anger "energizes the individual for action," which increases the likelihood of criminal reactions to stress (Agnew, 2001). Furthermore, criminal tendencies are further mobilized by the desire to directly or indirectly rectify a perceived injustice.

We look to procedural justice theory for insights into a more nuanced understanding of injustice (Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Lind, 1992). According to the theory of procedural justice, people care about how fairly groups and their members are treated in terms of policies and practices.

According to the group-value model of procedural justice, people are concerned about procedural fairness because it shows that they are valued members of the group when they are treated fairly (Lind & Tyler, 1988). According to both theories, criminal behavior is correlated with perceived fair treatment. Tyler (1990), for instance, demonstrates that when people reported that they had received fair treatment from law enforcement, they were more likely to follow the law. Procedural justice theory differs from GST in that it (1) explains why people care about procedural fairness and (2) explains the elements of such fair treatment, even though both theories make similar predictions about the relationship between perceived injustice and crime. The group-value model of procedural justice developed by Lind and Tyler (1988; Tyler, 1990) places special emphasis on the significance of treating those in positions of authority fairly. They contend that individuals perceive unfair treatment as a sign that they are not appreciated and that people expect those in positions of authority to treat them fairly in the legal system. Procedural fairness is defined by Tyler and Lind (1992) in terms of neutrality, standing, and trust.

Standing shows consideration for others and acknowledges their worth. When authorities behave in an impartial and truthful manner, they attain neutrality. People's perceptions of the goodness, justice, and reason of authorities are reflected in their level of trust. From the perspective of procedural justice theory, fair treatment by teachers embodies the concept of standing. That is, respectful treatment by authorities is one way that students perceive fair treatment. Welsh (2001) uses data from middle schools in Philadelphia to find support for the idea that students' perceptions of respect from teachers and authorities in the classroom are linked to lower rates of offending and school disorder.

Agnew (1992) makes the argument that while stressors (such as feeling unfair rules or teachers) may contribute to criminality, they are not always the cause. There are some things that can make someone less likely to commit a crime after going through a difficult time. Agnew (2006) contends that the relationship between stress and delinquency is influenced by a number of conditioning factors (coping resources and social control, for example). In this instance, the conditioning element in the link between stress and violence is social support. Agnew proposes, based on Hirschi's (1969) control theory, that traditional social ties act as a social support system for the individual, thereby mitigating the positive correlation between stress and delinquency. Having this social support makes it easier to handle the pressure. It informs people that there is a network of emotional support available to them (Cobb, 1976; Thoits, 1995; Vaux, 1988).

Understanding Violence and School-based Violence

Violence

Depending on how it affects people and communities and the factors that led to its emergence, various definitions of violence have been developed. According to Budak (2003), violence is the overt and destructive manifestation of hostility and rage toward people and things. Violence is defined by Ögülmüş (2006) as the act of using one's power to hurt or deprive another person of their rights. Injuring people, causing harm, or intimidating people using violence or threats are all examples of violence, according to Hamburg (1998). According to Hollin (1993), using physical force against others constitutes violence. Physical violence is the first type of violence that comes to mind when thinking about violence in daily life. Because using physical force to demonstrate authority and power is one of the most common methods (Özdemir, 2014). It should be remembered, though, that focusing only on the physical aspects of violence will lead to a disregard for its psycho-social components. This mentality results in the explicit exclusion of other willful harmful behaviors like verbal abuse, social exclusion, and gossip-spreading (Underwood, 2002). Physical violence is easier to observe than verbal or emotional violence, which gives it a concrete understanding and facilitates measurement. However, violence should be considered in the context of mistrust and being threatened (Smith, 2006). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is the intentional use of physical or psychological force to hurt, kill, hinder, or rob another person, group, or a community (Krug et al., 2002).

Violence is a public health problem that affects all areas of human life. Violence is known to occur for personal, cultural, and socioeconomic reasons. Personal reasons can be described as the inability to solve problems and cope with stressors, the inability of individuals to use violence as a substitute for expressing their reactions, and the inability to adequately manage anger (Esen & Aykal, 2020). Cultural causes include intergenerational transmission of violence, children's modeling of domestic violence through social learning, cultural change, and social tolerance of violence (Vidom & Wilson, 2015). Socioeconomic causes include rapid urbanization, fragmented families, poverty, unemployment, immigration, low levels of education for women and men, and large numbers of children (Casique-Casique & Furegato 2006; Fawole, 2008).

There are five different types of violence that are described as emerging for reasons that are personal, psychological, cultural, and socioeconomic. The first is physical violence, which includes acts like pushing, striking with a stick, shaking, pulling, kicking, burning with boiling water, tying, and stabbing (Gözütok, et al., 2006). The second type of violence is psychological-emotional violence, which encompasses all attitudes and actions that cause someone to feel oppressed and threatened, upset, hurt, shaken, and negatively impacted (Follingstad, 2007; Shorey et al., 2015; Ureña et al., 2015). The third type of violence is verbal, which includes attitudes and actions like insulting, swearing, embarrassing, unrelenting criticism, making fun of others, using nick names, and humiliating others in public (Roth, 2004). The fourth type of sexual violence includes rape, early or forced marriage, verbal abuse, coercing sexual activity through physical or emotional violence, etc. (Basile & Smith, 2011). The fifth type of violence is economic violence, which includes attitudes and actions like making it difficult for people to work, enforcing labor laws, restricting business activities, impeding career advancement, seizing wages, assets, and income, giving small amounts of money, and restricting the ability to spend money freely (Can-Gürkan & Coşar, 2009).

The intentional and behavioral dimensions are the two main facets of violent behavior, according to Anderson and Bushman (2002). The intentional dimension, also referred to as instrumental violence, describes premeditated acts of violence that are carried out solely for the aggressor's own benefit and do not require any prior provocation (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Estévez et al., 2008). On the other hand, the behavioral aspect, also referred to as hostile violence, is an impulsive action that is motivated by rage and typically takes place in response to provocation. Damage-causing is the primary goal of hostile violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Estévez et al., 2008).

Different forms and functions of violence are also differentiated in additional classifications of violent behavior (Little, Brauner, et al., 2003). Between direct and indirect forms of violence, there are divisions made. Direct forms of violence take place when the aggressor approaches the victim directly with the intent to harm them; as a result, such behaviors can manifest as pushing, threatening, beating, and insulting behaviors (Little, Brauner et al., 2003). In contrast to direct forms of violence, which involve the victim and the perpetrator coming face to face, indirect forms of violence aim to cause harm to the victim's sense of identity within a social group or their own perception of belonging to that group. Instead, the harm-doer will spread rumors that will cause the victim to be rejected and excluded from social situations (Little, Brauner et al. 2003; Little, Henrich, 2003). In addition, the purposes of violence have been divided into reactive and proactive purposes. In reactive violence, the offender responds violently to the actions of others because they view it as threatening or provocative (Merk, et al., 2005). Because of their propensity to become violent when they perceive a behavior as threatening, perpetrators of this function of violence frequently struggle with low self-control, anger, and impulsivity issues (Little, Brauner et al., 2003). Intentional behavior with the goal of intimidating, dominating, or leading to the possession of rights or objects, proactive violence is a reinforcement-shaped function of violence (Merk et al., 2005; Little, Brauner et al., 2003). This type of behavior is often associated with antisocial behavior, criminal issues, leadership abilities, and high levels of social competence because those who exhibit it view violence as a suitable means of achieving their goals (Merk et al., 2005; Little, Brauner et al., 2003).

School Violence

With the exception that it occurs in primary or secondary schools and the perpetrators are typically children or adolescents, school violence is composed of the general characteristics of violence as they were referred to above (Estévez et al., 2008). However, parents and coworkers have also been mentioned as violent offenders when violence is directed towards teachers, though this is less frequent (Lokmić, Opić, & Bilić, 2013). When discussing school violence, it's important to distinguish between the idea of a "school" as a place where actual violence takes place and has roots in the local community and the idea of a "school" as a system that creates or exacerbates problems for individuals while they are enrolled in school. When students or other people bring up issues (e.g. bringing negative emotions or attitudes (such as those resulting from a fight with a friend or family member) into the school building that were formed outside of class and are unrelated to their academic experience (Furlong & Morrison, 2000). This is typically seen in upper secondary education, where community influence tends to be more pronounced when it comes to violence. The second, on the other hand, is more frequently seen in middle school (lower secondary education), where school environments have a greater impact on violence, particularly when it comes to violence committed by students against teachers (Furlong, & Morrison, 2000).

Having said that, violence at schools typically manifests itself in the form of students who disobey the rules of the school, and more specifically, in the form of those who are in charge of watching the interactions (e.g. by employing punitive behaviors toward reactive or proactive violence) in the classroom and the school setting (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998). In these circumstances, school environments may unintentionally foster social norms for informal violence, where students use hostile behavior to uphold or improve their social status (e. g. by being noticed for their actions, address perceived injustices (e.g. by imposing their own rules and social norms, they can exert control over other students, engage in risky behavior, and question authority (e.g. by refusing to abide by the laws as they are (Fagan, & Wilkinson, 1998). In this situation, schools could also present chances for violent behavior to emerge as a result of interactions with delinquent peers (Dishion, et al., 1994).

Dynamics of School-Based Violence

Learner on teacher violence

Only a few studies (Ewen, 2007; Özdemir, 2012) have centered on understanding school violence as experienced by teachers. In this regard, a survey of secondary school teachers in Germany reveals that teachers may be the targets of various types of violence committed against them by students (Ewen, 2007), including strong verbal attacks, threats, object damage, and physical assault by students. In Turkey, secondary school teachers experience more violence than their elementary school counterparts, according to a study by Özdemir (2012) of elementary and secondary school teachers. According to a study by West (2007) in Australia, violence experienced by teachers can have a wide range of negative effects, such as the desire to leave the teaching profession, anger, a loss of confidence, fear, and anxiety over not having the support of peers. However, it appeared that the teachers were hesitant to report such violent incidents (West, 2007). According to a survey conducted in Belgium with 487 teachers across 24 secondary schools, student violence against teachers has negative effects (Galand et al., 2007). Teachers wanted to leave teaching because of the bullying in schools and the absence of supportive systems. Nevertheless, teachers who had the backing of their principals and coworkers were able to deal with school violence (Galand, et al., 2007).

Additionally, in Cameroon, students will physically harm teachers. Singh (2006) distinguishes between insidious and physical violence when dividing learner-on-teacher forms of violence. Insidious acts of violence include arguments and back-chat, haughty refusal to comply with orders, undermining of authority, intimidation of people based on their sexual orientation, use of foul language, personal insults, racist remarks, rude or obscene gestures, and repeated behaviors that are tolerable individually but combined are meant to intimidate. She defines physical forms of violence as including actual, attempted, verbal, and written threats of violence. Both the media

and the students' community appear to take subtle forms of violence for granted. Teachers frequently ignore these acts of violence, while the media pays little attention to them. Physical violence, however, may have several causes, one of which may be the failure to respond to violent incidents that are deemed minor. The disrespect shown to teachers by students is obvious. Ineffective measures to warn offending students, the ban on corporal punishment, media emphasis on students' rights, inadequate parental involvement in student discipline, and a shortage of school counselors are the root causes of the rise in disrespectful behavior among students.

Further research by Singh (2006) revealed that disadvantaged schools experience more teacher violence than advantaged schools. The study's findings on the effects of violence include, among other things, a rise in teacher absenteeism, ineffective classroom management, as well as elevated levels of stress, annoyance, and depression. De Wet (2010) found that violence between students and teachers is widespread in a qualitative study that was conducted in three primary and four secondary schools. Participants in this study included teachers who had witnessed student-on-teacher violence as well as principals, HoDs, and teachers. According to the study's findings, teachers are frequently the targets of violence committed by their own students. Within the school grounds, various locations host this violence. Some students talk among themselves and ignore the teacher during class, which disrupts the lesson. The teachers are made fun of and degraded. While writing on the chalkboard, they hurl objects at the instructor. The results also demonstrate that, at one point, while they were in their offices, the principals who took part in the study were threatened and held captive by students. Also targeted by students are teachers' belongings. They damage and cut the tires on teachers' cars. Some educators choose to ignore students who misbehave due to the detrimental effects of violence against them. Others quit teaching in places where there seems to be more violence. Older educators also claim that they want to retire early (De Wet, 2010).

Teacher on learner violence

The use of corporal punishment on students is one of the most frequent forms of violence by teachers. In the past, this kind of punishment was tolerated and accepted (Hayman & Perone, 1998). Article 35 of the Law of Cameroon National Educational Guidelines No. 98/004 (1998), which forbids all forms of violence, declares corporal punishment illegal in schools. According to the Criminal Procedural Code of 2005, the Penal Code, and the Constitution, corporal punishment is not permitted as a form of punishment in the criminal justice system. According to Straus and Yodanis (1996), corporal punishment is "the use of physical force with the intention of causing pain but not injury for purposes of correction or control." Dunne and Leach (2007) discovered that in most schools, boys are more frequently subjected to corporal punishment than girls in Botswana and Ghana.

Boys in Botswana are occasionally subjected to extremely violent corporal punishment, including beatings with broomsticks and electric cords and having their heads bashed against walls (Dunne & Leach, 2007). One of the most common forms of violence perpetrated by teachers against learners is corporal punishment. This type of punishment was historically tolerated (Hayman & Perone, 1998). Corporal punishment is unlawful in schools under Article 35 of the Law of Cameroon National Educational Guidelines No. 98/004 (1998), which prohibits all forms of violence. In the penal system, corporal punishment is unlawful as a sentence for crime under the Criminal Procedural Code (2005), the Penal Code, and the Constitution. Straus and Yodanis (1996) define corporal punishment as "the use of physical force with the intention of causing pain but not injury for purposes of correction or control." Dunne and Leach (2007) discovered that more boys than girls receive corporal punishment in most schools in Botswana and Ghana. Boys in Botswana are sometimes subjected to extremely violent forms of corporal punishment, including beatings with electric cords and broomsticks, as well as head bangings against walls (Dunne & Leach, 2007).

Although it is forbidden in secondary schools in Cameroon, corporal punishment is still a contentious topic. According to one theory, some academics connect school violence with

corporal punishment. Burton (2008) asserts in a study that looked into the causes of youth violence in South Africa that schools that use corporal punishment frequently socialize students into violent behavior. Soneson (2005) supports this point of view and claims that using corporal punishment on kids is equivalent to teaching them to use violence as a form of conflict resolution. Additionally, it implies that kids learn that it is acceptable for a powerful person to act violently toward a helpless person. The Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), which concurs with these sentiments, acknowledges that students who experience corporal punishment at home and at school are more likely to turn to violent means of problem-solving (MINESEC, 2001). According to Burnett (1998), educators use violence as a powerful tool for social control over their students. Additionally, using physical punishment erodes the mutual respect and tolerance that exist between educators and students. It has detrimental effects on students, such as causing them to have negative attitudes toward learning, a lack of confidence, and low self-esteem. Students might feel like getting even. It causes absenteeism and a high dropout rate (MINESEC, 2001). According to Hayman and Perone (1998), students who experience corporal punishment may become irate, hostile, and violent toward their teachers, classmates, and school grounds.

From a different angle, it appears that some teachers are unhappy with the ban on corporal punishment in schools because they feel that it has diminished their authority and given students license to act out (Hunt, 2007). For instance, according to teachers, students are disruptive, noisy, abusive verbally and nonverbally, question authority, and engage in acts of vandalism (Hunt, 2007). For a variety of reasons, corporal punishment seems to be a preferred form of discipline for some teachers. While alternative approaches require skills, patience, and time that, regrettably, teachers may not have, corporal punishment is quick and easy to use. There is a misconception that some students can only be disciplined through physical punishment. Some teachers believe that because corporal punishment did not harm them as students, it is unreasonable to claim that it might harm the current class of students.

Additionally, teachers have sexually violent behavior against students. In this regard, a study conducted by Human Rights Watch (2001), revealed that schoolgirls are the victims of various types of sexual violence committed against them by boys, male teachers, and other male staff members in the schools. Particularly, the teachers abuse the schoolgirls sexually by using their position of authority. To force the girls to submit to their sexual demands, they either employ punitive measures like threats of physical punishment or reward them with money or higher grades (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Prinsloo, 2006). The results also show that boys sexually abuse girls in a variety of locations, including restrooms, hostel rooms, empty classrooms, and any other locations designated as "no go areas" (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Girls who experience sexual violence suffer long-lasting effects. Girls may drop out, become pregnant, or contract HIV/AIDS as a result of sexual violence (Mpina, 2011).

Learner on learner violence

The most frequent form of violence in secondary schools in Cameroon appears to be between students. Burton makes a connection between the reasons for student aggression and, among other things, the violent tendencies of families and the neighborhood surrounding the school. Students who experience violence at home or in their community are more likely to act violently in class. The findings of Virasamy (2004), which show that schools located in lower socioeconomic communities seem to experience more violence than schools situated in areas where middle class communities live, support the idea that violent communities influence the violent behavior of learners. Although they are surrounded by a violent community, effective school leadership has the potential to manage and lead schools in a way that results in low levels of violence (Astor et al., 2009). The effects of violence on students' behavior and development, both at home and in the community, seem to be profound.

Bullying is a frequent form of student-on-student violence in many nations (De Wet, 2010; Geffner, et al., 2001; Liang et al., 2007). According to Harber (2004), "There are numerous ways that bullying can occur, such as using physical force, making threats, using derogatory language,

sarcasm, distributing rumors, persistently teasing, being excluded from a group, torturing, humiliating, and making cruel remarks. Thus, it follows that students might come across or participate in one or more of these types of bullying in a variety of settings.

As a result, bullying is characterized by an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. Boys and girls may have different bullying experiences (Olweus, 1999). According to Olweus (1999), boys were more likely than girls to engage in physical violence as a form of bullying, and boys were both victims and perpetrators of physical violence. On the other hand, girls frequently engaged in verbal violence. Girls also endured bullying from boys (Olweus, 1999). Bullying of schoolboys and girls is said to be caused by a number of factors (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002). On the one hand, girls may experience bullying primarily because other students think their appearance or the way they dress is unattractive. However, if they are viewed as being physically mature, they might also face bullying. On the other hand, boys may experience bullying if their peers believe they don't fit the stereotypical mold of a fearless man. Dupper and Meyer-Adams (2002) state that students who dress peculiarly or show other signs of dissimilarity from the majority may become targets of bullying.

Another type of violence that happens among students is physical assault. Individual students or groups of students may assault the victims of physical violence. There are many reasons why students fight one another. Teasing, arguments, stealing another learner's property without their consent, and carelessly bumping into another learner are just a few of the reasons (Burton, 2008). Shoving, slapping, smacking, and spanking are additional examples of physical violence (Dussich & Maekoya, 2007). Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009) found that physical violence did not occur frequently in secondary schools in the suburbs, but did occur occasionally in inner city schools, mostly among girls who frequently used scissors as weapons. The study, which looked at the extent of violence from four schools in Gauteng, was conducted to determine the extent of violence. According to the study's findings, relationship issues and spreading rumors that a particular girl is HIV positive are two factors that contribute to physical violence against girls. Girls used violence to resolve conflicts, according to the study's participants, because they were exposed to it at home. According to research done in some secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), students occasionally act violently under the influence of their peers. Specifically, despite not wanting to fight, the students engage in physical conflict with one another because their friends prod them to do so. Gaining acceptance and status as a member of favored groups is the driving force behind fighting (Doig, 2005).

Sexual assault is also a common form of school violence by one student against another student. According to Leach (2003), some schools socialize students into environments that promote gender violence. Leach (2003) found that female students in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi experienced various forms of sexual violence from their peers, including boys touching girls' breasts and buttocks. In some cases, boys show lewd pictures or images to make girls. Leach (2003) found that school authorities are reluctant to take action against boys who abuse girls.

In Cameroon's secondary schools, sexual assault against girls is a significant issue. Boys who attend the same schools as the girls were most often the ones who committed this type of violence. According to a study done by Haffejee (2006) for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, girls have been subjected to a variety of forms of sexual harassment, including name-calling, sexual innuendos, labeling, and unwanted touching. Girls who are touched inappropriately on their behinds and breasts by boys are being treated like sexual objects. In essence, boys use sexual assault against girls as a method of social control over the way the girls behave, move, and perceive their bodies (Haffejee, 2006). The victims of sexual assault on girls suffer harm in a variety of ways. Examples of these effects include unintended pregnancies in girls, diminished self-worth, depression, an increased risk of suicide, poor academic performance, disengagement from class, and rage (Haffejee, 2006). The use of alcohol and drugs by learners leads to violent behaviour of such learners. Drugs and alcohol are easily available in Cameroon secondary schools wherein; Learners smuggle them into the school.

Summary of Violence Forms and Causes

To synthesize the extensive literature reviewed in the preceding sections, Table 1 maps the primary forms of school-based violence against their underlying causes and risk factors. This consolidation highlights the diverse intersections of vulnerabilities that education stakeholders must address.

Table 1: Forms of School-Based Violence and Perceived Causes

Forms of Violence	Perceived Causes / Risk Factors
Physical Violence	Low self-control/impulsivity, poverty/income inequality, exposure to family/community violence, weak conflict resolution skills, peer pressure
Psychological and Emotional Violence	Poor communication with parents, lack of empathy, need for social recognition/power, discriminatory norms, interpersonal conflicts
Verbal Abuse	Social status enhancement, peer influence, exposure to mass media/violent content
Sexual Violence and Harassment	Power imbalances, teacher/authority exploitation, gender vulnerabilities, lack of protective policies
Bullying and Cyberbullying	Differences in physical appearance/behavior, peer group pressure, unstructured access to digital platforms
Corporal Punishment	Deep-rooted educational culture, lack of alternative disciplinary skills among educators, authoritarian structures

(For brevity in the revised version, the extensive literature reviews on Individual, Family, School, and Social Factors as well as detailed theoretical classifications have been synthesized into this table above to improve readability and concentrate focus on the primary qualitative findings below.)

Methodology

Study Design

The current study investigated the role of stakeholders in tackling school-based violence in Secondary schools in Cameroon. The study employed a qualitative research design by focusing on the level of concern surrounding school-based violence, the understanding and management of violence by key stakeholders, the perceived causes of violence, and the recommendations of the stakeholders for necessary interventions to stop violence. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research gives researchers greater freedom to investigate ideas as they come to mind and lets participants freely express their opinions and shape the direction of the study. This study's qualitative design allowed for the development of a thorough understanding and management of school-based violence, perceived causes and necessary recommendations to stop school-based violence in the context of Cameroon. To be more precise, this study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the role of stakeholders in tackling school-based violence in Secondary schools in Cameroon. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather qualitative narratives from stakeholders, focusing on the themes identified by the research questions of the study.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews served as the main method of gathering data. The researcher was able to incorporate a structural element thanks to the semi-structured interview protocol. The participants were given the chance to express their opinions on how they understood and perceived the causes of school-based violence as well as strategies for addressing it. As previously indicated, the primary research questions of the study, which took into account three key areas, served as the basis for the interview questions. As a result, each research question was divided into three smaller questions that each could offer more in-depth details about these topics.

Each participant received a consent form outlining the confidentiality and ethics of the interview prior to the interviews. It demonstrated their right to leave the study at any time, their freedom to answer or not answer any questions, their right to withdraw before or during the interviews, and the fact that the information gathered will only be used for the study's purposes and kept private in accordance with ethical guidelines.

The researcher conducted interviews with the participants in January and August of 2024 at convenient locations and times (schools, phone calls, etc.). Each interview lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. To help with data collection and analysis, the interviews were first recorded, and then they were transcribed. In order to ensure that the participants provided honest, trustworthy answers, the interview questions were examined by reviewers. Furthermore, when necessary, the interviewees were given further explanations during the interview process. With the assistance of seasoned English teachers, the interviews were transcribed, and the researchers later verified the accuracy of the information. In order to make sure the interview questions were relevant and to help determine the approximate duration of the interview, a pilot interview was also carried out prior to data collection.

Sample and Population

The sample of the study was selected from a population of teachers, Vice-principals, Principals, School Discipline masters, members of the School Management Boards, Parent Teacher Associations, Divisional delegates of Secondary Education, Inspectors and the Regional Delegate for Secondary Education in Buea. The study's main objective guided the selection of participants, who were chosen to provide rich information when available and appropriate for in-depth investigation. To choose the participants who met the requirements to take part in this study, criteria sampling was also used. The sample size was validated upon reaching data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from consecutive interviews. The participants consisted of 12 males and 8 females, possessing an average of 10 years of professional experience within the educational sector, ensuring a well-rounded and seasoned perspective on the issue.

There were 20 participants who gave their permission to participate and were able to provide comprehensive and in-depth data, as samples in qualitative research are typically small and dependent on information needs (Maxwell, 2005). Information was gathered from parties primarily engaged in secondary school administration. The stakeholders gave accurate and realistic information about how they manage and comprehend the causes, effects, and solutions for school-related violence. The codes used in the study to represent the participants were made up of both letters and numbers. For example, P1-P20.

Data Analysis

As a preliminary measure in data analysis, the researchers assessed the interview transcripts to ensure their validity, their contribution to the study, and to gain a thorough understanding. The researchers carefully reviewed and evaluated the 20 interview transcripts to determine their level of completeness. Thematic analysis is the most practical technique for comprehending the intricacy of the underlying meaning in texts, as suggested by Guest et al. (2014). It is also the most common method used in qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis, according to Vaismoradi et al. (2016), is a collection of approaches and procedures used to examine textual data and highlight themes. This approach is a methodical procedure that starts with coding, meaning analysis, and the description's presentation of social realities. These steps help to create a theme that characterizes and interprets the participants' points of view (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

The researcher completed the data analysis procedure by using a cogent set of approaches to analyze and interpret the collected data thematically using thematic analysis method: First, reading and diagnosing helped the researcher become acquainted with the data and comprehend the overall picture; Second, a thorough reading was carried out to begin the coding by highlighting and summarizing the frequent and common data under each question into main groups; Third, the coded data or groups were generalized and turned into themes for broader

identification; Fourth, the odd and infrequent codes, which did not benefit the study, were disregarded; Fifth, two main themes that answered each study question were generated from these codes; consequently, these themes represented and summarized the main findings of the study. Fifth, the themes that were produced were examined to make sure they accurately and effectively conveyed the intended conclusions. Sixth, in order to make the generated themes easier to understand and communicate to the reader, they were renamed and redefined. Finally, the researcher narrated and addressed these themes supported by the responses of some participants under three main sections, according to the study's three main questions, in the results section below.

Research Findings and Discussions

The first study question looked into whether the school community was concerned about school-based violence. The following themes were retrieved:

Disruption of the Teaching and Learning Process

The first theme focused on the disruption of the teaching and learning process as a major concern from issues related to school-based violence. Violence in school has an alarming impact on learning outcomes. Most of the participants raised concerns such as "it impacts negatively on the students and teachers' output". A principal recounted P3 "Additionally, an uncontrolled environment is not beneficial to the process of teaching and learning." Another participant added P18 "Violence may not be beneficial for teaching and learning because it can injure and instill fear in both teachers and students." This is corroborated by the assertions made by Meyer and Chetty (2017) and Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) that school-based violence disrupts the teaching-learning environment and leads to lower academic performance and a higher dropout rate. Students who suffer from trauma or fear for their safety find it difficult to focus on their studies, which hinders their ability to make satisfactory academic progress. According to Burton and Leoschut (2013), depression inflicted on victims of school violence impairs their ability to concentrate, which raises the likelihood that they will eventually drop out of school due to a lack of motivation. Adolescents' exposure to school-based violence is correlated with lower high school grade point averages and decreased enjoyment and interest in school (Borofsky et al., 2013).

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

The second theme which emerged on school-community concerns related to school-based violence were the potential for physical and emotional harm to students. Participant P14 reported "school-based violence has a significant impact on the mental health of students" Participant P10 added that "Violence in schools raises students' chances of experiencing social problems and acting aggressively." Participant P4 stated that "Violence in schools has been linked to an increased risk of mental health conditions like anxiety and depression." Participant P10 recounted "school-based violence may lead to substance abuse use". The results of this study are supported by Goldweber et al. (2013) and Foshee et al. (2016), who hypothesized that victims of bullying may act aggressively or in retaliation, and that bullying raises the likelihood of social problems developing. These results are in line with Evans-Lacko et al.'s (2016) study, which looked at the effects of bullying on a sizable birth cohort of 9,242 participants and discovered that those who experienced bullying as children had a higher lifetime likelihood of using mental health services, indicating the long-term effects of bullying on mental health. The results also support the claim made by Priesman et al. (2017) that bullying is linked to a higher risk of teenage substance use.

Impact on the student well-being and social disruption

The third theme which emerged on the school-community related concerns to school-based violence were the impact on the student well-being and social disruption. Participant P20 recounted "increased anxiety and depression among victims of violence." Participant P18 noted "difficulty concentrating and poor academic performance due to stress from violence." Participant P16 narrated "potential for long-term psychological trauma from violent experiences." Participant

P11 related “fear of physical harm and worries about potential weapon use in school as well as concerns about adequate security measures in schools.” Participant P15 recounted “negative impact on the overall school climate, potential to increase tension and conflict between student groups.” Participant P19 expressed concerns such as “fear that children may not feel safe at school.” The results align with previous research with Astone, et al., 2007; Evans & English, 2002; Evans, et al., 2007; Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, & Bound, 2006; that highlighted the cumulative impact of stressors such as exposure to abuse, neglect, danger, and aggression on different types of internalizing and externalizing behaviors, including depression, anxiety, distress, stress, concentration issues, safety awareness, sleep problems, and suicidal thoughts. These findings are also in agreement with Margolin et al. (2010), who reported comparable outcomes for older children. Jaffe and Juodis (2006) demonstrated that children who witness violence have higher levels of “fight or flight” hormones, leading to atrophy in brain regions responsible for emotional regulation, empathy, social skills, and other crucial aspects of healthy emotional growth. The results align with those of Flannery et al. (2001), who found that exposure to violence is positively correlated with the likelihood of committing aggression and violence.

The second study question looked at the various forms of school-based violence and their perceived causes. The themes that were recovered were as follows:

Bullying and Fighting

The first theme which emerged as the forms of school-based violence were bullying and fighting. Most of the participants agreed “bullying and fighting were the major forms of school-based violence plaguing our schools today”. Participant P18 recounted “the most common and well-known manifestation of school-based violence is bullying and fighting”. Participant P20 added “Bullying may manifest in different forms such as verbal bullying like insulting, name calling, gossiping and threatening, punching, strangling, kicking, tripping and violent assault. These results clearly indicate that bullying and fighting are serious problem and involves a large number of school children as either victims or bullies. The findings of this study are consistent with other research that found that the percentage of students who reported having experienced bullying varied significantly, ranging from 4% to 50%. Only 10% of students in Norwegian schools experienced bullying over a two-month period, according to Olweus (1999b). In Canada, the percentage increased to 21% (Bentley & Li, 1995), and in Portugal, it ranged from 20% to 22% (Tomas de Almeida, 1999). Italy had significantly higher percentages (28% for middle school students and 40% for primary school students (Genta et al., 1996). 10% of students in England said they experienced bullying at least once a week, and 22% said they experienced it at least once a month (Yates & Smith, 1989). 10% of elementary and middle school students in the United States experienced bullying at least once per week (Nansel et al., 2001). 15% to 30% of schoolchildren in Greece reported having experienced bullying (Kalliotis, 2000; Pateraki & Houndoumadi, 2001). According to a recent study conducted among high school students in Turkey, 44% of the students experienced verbal bullying, 30% experienced physical bullying, 18% experienced emotional bullying, and 9% experienced sexual bullying (Karaman-Kepenekçi & Çınkar, 2006). Amongst the perceived causes for bullying and fighting as reported by majority of the participants were discriminatory gender norms.

Physical Violence

Physical violence was the second theme that surfaced as a form of violence in schools. The majority of participants concurred that physical violence has become a defining feature of Cameroonian secondary schools. According to participant P11, “we do record cases of hitting, kicking, slapping among students on a daily basis.” Participant P17, recounted cases of use of weapons like knives and very aggressive behaviors. Participant P13 recounted cases of “verbal hostilities like sending threatening messages or making threats against someone’s life”. Participant 9, recounted a case of corporal punishment which ended in a student fighting back at a teacher. The data from this research clearly shows that physical violence is a prevalent type of violence in schools. The results of this research support the conclusions of Wodon et al. (2021),

who identified physical assault as the most prevalent type of violence in schools. The results of these findings are in line with the findings of Kim YS. et al., (2005) who investigated bullying in 1,756 secondary school students and reported 40% of physical violence. Results of this study align with the study by Savas et al. (2024) who reported the most prevalent type of violence was physical (n=96, 80%), followed by sexual (n=21, 17.5%), and psychological (n=3, 2.5%). The findings corroborate with the results of a study conducted in Australia by Owens et al., (2004), who reported physical violence occurred at a higher rate.

Psychological and Verbal Violence

Psychological and verbal violence emerged as the third theme related to the various forms of violence in schools. The participants attested to the fact that psychological and verbal violence has been a recurrent issue in most secondary schools. Participant 11, recounted cases of humiliation in the form of criticizing others. Participant 19 narrated instances of threats on regular bases in schools. Participant 17 related cases of name-calling insults, humiliation, mockery, and threats, participant 4 correlated case of yelling, shouting and insults aimed at degrading fellow schoolmates. The findings of the study highlighted psychological and verbal violence being very consistent in secondary schools. The narratives in this study further illustrate the psychological and verbal violence as forms of school-based violence. The literature has demonstrated the psychological repercussions of verbal aggression, with researchers highlighting its long-term effects on victims' mental health. The results of this study are in line with a UNICEF (2018) analysis from that found boys are more likely to experience physical aggression and threats, while girls are more likely to experience psychological bullying." The findings of this research align with those of the World Health Organization (2016), which classifies school violence into four categories: physical violence, psychological violence, social violence, and cyber violence. The results are consistent with those of Tran et al. (2003) who conducted a study on the prevalence of school violence in Hanio which showed that psychological violence is 25-36.2%, while "physical violence ranges from 11.3% to 22.5%", indicating that psychological violence is the most common form. The results of this study support the work of Nguyen (2017), which links three major forms of school violence: psychological, physical, and material violence, with psychological violence being the most prevalent. Nguyen (2017) found that students engage in school violence in multiple roles (as victims, perpetrators, and in some cases, both), with psychological violence being the most common form.

The third research question focused on what measures that can be put in place by stakeholders for necessary intervention to curb school-based violence. The following themes have been restored.

Creating a Positive School Environment

The creation of a positive school environment developed as the first theme related to measures to curb school-based violence. The participant all agreed that the school should be a safe shelter for all students. Participant 4 and 5 reported "schools should ensure respect and understanding of each to avoid violence" participant 9 and 11 emphasized "building positive relationship with student that fosters student connection" Participant 3 recounted "establishing clear goals that fosters collaboration" Participant 8 and 13 mentioned "a zero tolerance principle in school" Participant 13 recounted "monitoring, preventive and timely intervention of minor violence instances in school" The findings of this study are consistent with literature on measures to prevent school-based violence. The findings are reliable to the work Goldstein, (2005) and Čopková, (2020) who concluded a peaceful and justice-oriented environment must be created to curb school violence. The findings are consistent the results of Parker (2016) who reported a change of school structure to prevent violence thus creating a comfortable environment for student. The findings align with the work of Parker (2016) who empathized school harnessing a culture of honesty, tolerance, unity and solidarity in school reduces violence. The findings also align with the work of Munn et al., (2007) who reported creating a safe learning environment helps to reduce violence in school.

School-Family-Community Relationship

The school-family and community relationship emerged as the second theme with regards to measures to curb school-based violence from a stakeholder perspective. Participants No 5 expressed from the desire for a collaborative effective in the fight to curb school violence. Participant 9 and 12 narrated “collaboration strengthens prevention efforts leading to safe spaces and better educational outcomes for students” Participant 1 recounted “addressing school violence is a collective challenge” participant 8 related school violence isn’t a school issue; it requires broader actions”. The results show that all participants considered the involvement of stakeholders to be a crucial factor in reducing school-based violence. Notably, most participants acknowledged the important role stakeholders play in decreasing school violence. These findings align with the study by Soliman et al. (2018), which highlighted the significance of parental involvement in addressing disciplinary issues. Similarly, the results correspond with research by Song et al. (2019) and Lesneskie & Block (2017), who found that stakeholder engagement is linked or believed to be linked to lower levels of school violence. Additionally, the findings are consistent with Worthington’s (2014) study, which analyzed data from 948 middle schools across the USA, sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics 2005–2006 School Survey on Crime and Safety. This research revealed that communication between parents and schools helped reduce school violence in middle schools by providing parents with insights into their children’s academic and social lives, while enabling teachers to better understand their students’ family backgrounds. The findings correlate with the research of Jansson (2016) who confirmed that the involvement of stakeholders in a coordinated manner is an effective strategy for addressing school violence.

Reducing access to alcohol and illegal drugs

Reducing access to alcohol and illegal drugs appeared as the third theme related to the measures to mitigate school-based violence from the point of view from stakeholders. The all the participants agreed access to alcohol and drugs were strongly associated to school-based violence. Most of the participants expressed great concerns with regards to drinking habits of students. Participant 8 narrated “The use of illicit drugs and the abuse of alcohol is greatly responsible for the cause of school-based violence”. The participants all agreed for intervention measures which reduce access to alcohol or to raise its prices which will be seen as a means to reduce consumption by youths. Participant 5 expressed concerns about “enforce and ensure clear policies on drug violation and well as increase surveillance in areas such as bathrooms” Participant 2 and 9 empathized “the need for collaboration from all stakeholders to address the illegal sale of alcohol and drugs to minors near school grounds. Participant 8 related more “to community engagement, creating awareness and incorporating substance education into the curriculum” The result of this work aligns with the research of Foxcroft et al., (2000), who correlated a reduction in alcohol-related behavior is assumed to lead to subsequent reductions in alcohol-related problems (e.g., injuries or alcohol dependence), although the latter often are not measured in primary prevention studies. The findings are consistent with the work of Perry et al., (2003) and Hawkins et al., (2009) who supported that community-wide programs used evidence-based school curricula, supplemented with parental involvement, peer leadership, and community action to achieve reductions in the onset of alcohol use in early adolescence. The findings are also associated with the findings of Brewer et al., (2013) who called on prevention programs in school and Velasco et al., (2015) whose research imposed a multimodal cooperative network between parents, teachers, school administrators and counsellors.

Implement a school-wide behavioral and support policy

Instituting a school-wide behavioral and support policy originated as the fourth theme associated to measure stakeholders can put in place to curb school-based violence. Most of the participants advocated for a school behavioral management policy to prevent all forms of bully, harassment amongst students. Participant No 5 and 11 advocated for “schools to use positive discipline to antisocial behaviors” participant No17 emphasized the need for “behavioral expectations a call for all students to learn these expectations”. From the findings, schools are to adopt an approach on

multiple levels to reduce school violence through the promotion of antisocial behaviors. The findings of this research align with growing evidence that indicates the use of School Wide Positive Behavior Support is linked to a decrease in problematic behavior (Horner et al., 2009; Nelson, et al., 2008). Most recently, a randomized controlled trial conducted by Bradshaw et al. (2009) involved 37 elementary schools. Data from a five-year longitudinal study show that (a) schools successfully implemented SWPBS with high fidelity, (b) there was a reduction in office discipline referrals related to problem behavior, and (c) the number of students receiving out-of-school suspensions decreased following the implementation of SWPBS. The results align with the work of Sprague and Horner (2006), who stated that schools fostering prosocial and anticipated behaviors will experience a decrease in the number of students exhibiting serious behavioral issues and an enhancement in the overall school climate.

Conclusion

This research investigated the profound concerns surrounding school-based violence, alongside the understanding, perceived causes, and management strategies recommended by key educational stakeholders. The findings revealed that stakeholders are deeply troubled by the pervasive disruption of the teaching and learning process, deteriorating student mental health, and rising substance abuse, all of which compromise overall student well-being and social cohesion. The study further emphasized that violence manifests across multiple dimensions, predominantly through bullying, physical fighting, and psychological/verbal abuse.

Crucially, this research highlights the imperative of implementing actionable, stakeholder-driven interventions to dismantle the architecture of violence in educational settings. Drawing from the thematic analysis, there is a pressing need to cultivate positive, inclusive learning environments, forge robust collaborative partnerships between schools, families, and communities, proactively restrict access to alcohol and illicit drugs, and strictly enforce school-wide behavioral support policies. Ultimately, tackling school-based violence demands a unified, systemic effort to transform Cameroonian secondary schools into secure havens conducive to holistic academic and personal development.

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