



# TEACHER-STUDENT TRUST, RESPECT AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AS CORRELATES OF SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORTHARCOURT METROPOLIS

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined teacher-student trust, respect and effective communication as a correlate of prevention of sexual abuse among female students in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria. To achieve the objectives of the study two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The correlational study design was employed for the study. Two instruments were used for data collection title Teacher-Student trust, respect and effective communication Questionnaire (TSTRECQ) and Sexual Abuse Prevention Questionnaire (SAPQ). Content and face validity of both instruments were determined by test and guidance and counseling experts to determine its relevance for the study. The reliability of both instruments was determined using the internal consistency method with Cronbach Alpha statistics which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.68 for TSTRECQ and 0.71 for SAPQ. Data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. The results from the finding revealed that teacher-Student trust and respect and effective communication correlate strongly with sexual abuse prevention among female students, all the two variables predicted sexual abuse prevention with trust and respect as the strongest predictor. Based on the result it was recommended among others that, Teacher training programmes should be Implemented comprehensively for teachers focusing on trust and respect, effective communication, and personalized attention to students to strengthen their relationship to trust and speak out in cases of inappropriate behaviour.

**Keywords:** Care, Trust, Effective Communication, Sexual Abuse, Prevention, Female Students.

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## INTRODUCTION

The teacher-student trust, respect and effective communication play a crucial role in shaping students' emotional, social, and moral development within the school environment. A healthy teacher-student relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and effective communication not only promotes academic achievement but also creates a safe and supportive atmosphere where learners, especially female students, can freely express concerns and report inappropriate behaviours. In recent years, the increasing cases of sexual abuse in schools have drawn attention to the need for preventive measures that go beyond policy enforcement to include relational and psychosocial factors. Globally, studies have shown that where teachers maintain open and trusting relationships with their students, cases of sexual exploitation are more likely to be detected early or prevented altogether. In Nigeria, reports by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) and other civil society organizations have highlighted rising incidents of sexual harassment, molestation, and abuse among school girls, often involving individuals in positions of authority or trust, including teachers. This reality has raised concerns about the quality of relationships that exist between teachers and students in secondary schools.

In Port Harcourt Metropolis, the dynamics of teacher-student interactions vary across schools, influenced by factors such as school culture, teacher professionalism, communication style, and respect for students' dignity. When teachers foster trust and respect, students tend to feel emotionally secure and are more likely to confide in them about potential threats or inappropriate behaviour. Conversely, when communication barriers, authoritarian attitudes, or fear dominate the classroom, students become more vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to seek help. Effective communication serves as a bridge between prevention and intervention in cases of sexual abuse. Teachers who communicate empathetically and respect boundaries model appropriate interpersonal behaviour and help students understand consent, self-worth, and safety. Moreover, trust and respect strengthen the moral authority of teachers as role models, reducing the likelihood of abusive tendencies and fostering a culture of mutual accountability within the school system.

Therefore, exploring trust, respect, and effective communication as dimensions of a healthy teacher-student relationship is critical for understanding their role in the **prevention of** sexual abuse among female students. Such understanding will contribute to the development of relational strategies that promote safety, confidence, and protection for female learners in public senior secondary schools within Port Harcourt Metropolis. It is against this background this study is conceived.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing advocacy for child protection and the existence of laws against sexual abuse in Nigeria, incidents of sexual harassment and abuse of female students in schools persist. Reports from educational and social welfare authorities in Rivers State indicate that some of these cases occur within the school environment, involving teachers or other staff members who should be protectors of students. This situation questions the quality of teacher-student relationships and the extent to which teachers build trust, respect, and effective communication with their students. Many schools emphasize academic performance while overlooking the emotional safety and interpersonal dynamics that underpin student wellbeing. Where teachers are perceived as unapproachable, disrespectful, or dismissive, students especially females may

become reluctant to report experiences of discomfort or abuse. The absence of trust and poor communication thus create an enabling environment for exploitation and silence.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the relationship between trust/ respect and prevention of sexual abuse among female students of public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt metropolis?
- What is the relationship between effective communication and prevention of sexual abuse among female students of public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt metropolis?

## **Hypotheses**

The study was further guided by two hypotheses:

- There is no significant relationship between trust and respect and sexual abuse prevention among female students in public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
- There is no significant relationship between effective communication and prevention of sexual abuse among female students in public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1969) anchored the study, it elucidated how secure relationships in educational context can influence student's resilience and capacity to seek help. Teachers will therefore play a significant role in shaping students' experiences, perceptions of school, foster a sense of safety, trust, and respect that will inspire enabling environment for learning and development (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). However, a healthy Teacher-Student Relationship that is exploitative or abusive, can have a devastating consequence for students' well-being and academic achievement.

Despite the importance of the application of relationship indices in preventing sexual abuse, there is a paucity of research on this study in Nigeria, that has steered researchers to investigate the relationship between Healthy Teacher-Student Relationship and sexual abuse prevention among female students of public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The study explored the nature and quality of Healthy Teacher-Student Relationships among female students in public secondary schools and to identify strategies for promoting positive healthy Teacher-Student Relationships in preventing sexual abuse. Shakeshaft (2020) emphasized that a Healthy Teacher-Student Relationship is built on professional boundaries, trust, mutual respect and emotional safety. In her research on educator sexual misconduct, she argued that inappropriate relationships often begin where clear boundaries are lacking and that healthy ethical connections between teachers and students act as a protective factor against abuse.

Trust and respect form the foundation of healthy Teacher-Student Relationships and are key protective factors in preventing sexual abuse in schools. Empirical studies over the last

decade have consistently highlighted the role of trust and respect in reducing students' vulnerability to sexual abuse.

Furthermore, while various studies have examined the prevalence and consequences of sexual abuse in schools, few have focused on the **relational factors** that could serve as protective mechanisms. Understanding how trust, respect, and effective communication correlate with sexual abuse prevention is vital for promoting a safe learning environment and improving teacher–student interactions in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The healthy Teacher-Student Relationship is a critical factor in preventing sexual abuse in secondary schools. Although, National Policies on Sexual Abuse Prevention posits that, protecting children and vulnerable individuals from sexual abuse is a shared responsibility of families, schools, community and government but implementing this policy has been undermined by a lack of robust teacher training, inadequate monitoring systems, and cultural norms that sometimes blur the professional boundaries between teachers and students. The quality of healthy Teacher-Student Relationship where the relationship indices are implemented will stand as a protective factor, but, if mismanaged, a potential risk factor in the prevention of sexual abuse will disorganize the desired aim for this study. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how teacher-student trust, respect and effective communication relate to sexual abuse prevention among female students in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

However, Ese (2021), posited that school administrators play a crucial role in preventing and responding sexual abuse within the school system. Ese emphasized that administrators are not only responsible for academic leadership but also for ensuring the safety and protection of all students, especially vulnerable groups like female students. Ese therefore highlights the need for policy endorsement, staff supervision and accountability, creating a safe reporting environment, training and sensitization and collaboration with stakeholders to prevent sexual abuse among female students of public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. He concluded that, when administrators are proactive and committed, schools become safer and more supportive for students especially in abuse prevention efforts. The establishment of the relationship indices can be used as a tool for early detection of sexual abuse as well as strategy for intervention in the case of abuse.

A study conducted by Makuwa (2018) in Cape town, South African examined the role of trust and respect in preventing sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students emphasized that, healthy Teacher-Student Relationship fosters trust and respect which significantly reduce the likelihood of sexual abuse. The researcher conducted survey involving 500 secondary school students and found that, students who perceived their teachers as trustworthy reported lower cases of sexual abuse. The study concluded that, teachers who consistently provide emotional support, transparent communication and a safe and secure environment, help their students develop a sense of safety that discourages oppression.

A study by Kelly (2010), examined how trust and mutual respect between teachers and students contribute to the prevention sexual abuse in senior secondary schools. This study, carried out in selected public schools across South Africa, revealed that students who trusted their teachers and felt respected were more likely to report inappropriate behaviour and maintain stronger boundaries. Kelly emphasized that when teachers uphold ethical standards, maintain professionalism, and show genuine concern for student's well-being, it discourages exploitative behaviour and fosters a protective school climate. Furthermore, respectful interactions reduce fear and stigma, encouraging students to speak out against sexual abuse.

A study by National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC (2021), conducted in the United Kingdom explored the role of teacher-student trust in preventing sexual abuse in schools. The findings revealed that schools with strong cultures of trust, transparency, and mutual respect had significantly lower cases of unreported sexual abuse. According to the report, when students feel emotionally safe and respected by their teachers, they are more inclined to disclose sexual abuse or suspicious behaviours early. The study emphasized the importance of professional boundaries, empathy, and clear communication from teachers which created a protective and empowering atmosphere for students. .

Jones and Peterson (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study in South Africa to examine the impact of healthy Teacher-Student Relationships on the prevention of sexual abuse in secondary schools. The study involved 412 students and 38 teachers across six public schools. Their findings revealed that trust, emotional safety, and consistent ethical teacher behaviour significantly reduced students' vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Quantitative data showed that students who perceived their teachers as trustworthy and respectful were 48% more likely to report inappropriate behaviour early. The qualitative responses also highlighted that open communication and approachable teacher attitudes serves as a protective factor, encouraging students to speak up when boundaries were crossed.

The study supports earlier findings by Kelly (2020) and NSPCC (2021), aligning with the attachment theories emphasize on secure relationships as protective factors. The researchers recommended continuous teacher training on student protection ethics, safeguarding modules into school curriculum and establishment of clear reporting pathways. This review further confirms the significance of relational dynamics in school safety structures, especially for vulnerable groups like female students. This is the gap in knowledge this study attempts to fill.

A study by Okoro (2019) and Nwosu (2020) investigated the significance of trust and mutual respect in fostering a safe school environment for female students in public secondary schools in Southern Nigeria. The study revealed that when teachers maintained respectful boundaries, upheld professional conduct, and built trusting relationships, students felt safer and more confident to disclose incidents of discomfort or sexual abuse. Schools with higher levels of teacher-student trust reported fewer cases of sexual misconduct. Nwosu (2020) conducted a related study in urban secondary schools in Southern Nigeria and found that students who trusted their teachers were more likely to report inappropriate behaviour.

This study conducted in Lagos discovered that when a student is with a more reliable teacher, they feel safe to report sexual abuse. The study calls for a respectful and approachable safe learning environment. The study aligns with the present research by affirming that a respectful and trust-driven relationship between teachers and students acts as a preventive barrier against sexual abuse, especially among vulnerable female senior students. While the study highlighted that, teachers demonstrate consistent moral standards and respect for students' dignity, it creates an emotionally safe environment that discourage predatory behaviour.

Effective communication in Teacher-Student Relationships plays a pivotal role in fostering a positive learning environment, enhancing student engagement, and preventing issues such as sexual abuse. The review examined by Robinson (2017), on effective communication between teachers and students reduced the risk of sexual abuse. The study conducted across several secondary schools in South Africa, revealed that students who perceived their teachers as trustworthy and communicative were more likely to report inappropriate behaviour and seek help when at risk. Robinson concluded that teacher training on active listening, non-judgmental responses, and confidentiality plays a crucial role in creating protective school environments.

This study is similar to the present study, because they both address effective communication as a crucial role in preventing sexual abuse. The study focuses on effective communication as a primary tool for preventing sexual abuse. It stresses how talking openly about sexual abuse is essential for students' awareness and prevention. However, the present study integrates attachment theory to suggest a strong emotional connection between teachers and students enhances the likelihood of effective communication, thus contributing to prevent sexual abuse. The researchers view aligns with Robinson's (2017) findings that effective communication should be prioritized in Teacher-Student Relationships as key preventive mechanism.

A study conducted by Brown and Miller (2022), in a cross-national study across the U.S. and South Africa, focusing on the role of effective teacher-student communication in preventing sexual abuse in public senior secondary school. Their findings showed that when teachers used clear, open and empathetic communication, students were more likely to report abuse, understand, their rights, and trust school authorities. They emphasized the importance of non-judgmental dialogue, confidential reporting mechanisms consistent feedback channels between teachers and students which examines empirical evidence supporting the role of communication in shaping Healthy Teacher-Student Relationships. It is recommended that, the Ministry of Education and school administrators implement teacher development programmes focusing on effective communication, ethical behaviour, and building trust-based relationships. In conclusion, strengthening effective communication in schools, particularly between teachers and students, remains a powerful tool in preventing sexual abuse especially, when students feel heard, safe, and respected, they are more likely to disclose sexual abuse early. Both global and Nigerian evidences support embedding strong communication systems into school culture to build a protective environment. The existing gap in communication practices within Nigerian schools must be addressed through policy, training and monitoring programmes.

A study by Finkelhor (2023), conducted a longitudinal study across selected middle and high schools in the United States to explore how effective communication between teachers and students influences the prevention of sexual abuse. The study involved over 500 students and 60 educators and used both survey instruments and in-depth interviews. Findings revealed that schools where teachers practiced active listening, used respectful language, and created open, non-judgmental spaces for dialogue had significantly lower reports of sexual harassment or abuse. Students in these schools felt more empowered to report inappropriate behaviour and view teachers as allies and protectors.

Finkelhor emphasized that effective communication fosters trust, emotional safety, and accountability, which are essential in safeguarding students, especially girls from exploitation. The study recommended that communication training should be a core part of teacher professional development and student protection policies. This aligns with Brown Miller (2022) and Robinson (2017), who similarly highlighted the role of clear, compassionate teacher-student communication in sexual prevention.

This study focuses on effective communication as a key mechanism for early detection, reporting of inappropriate behaviours and creating a culture of accountability and support. This is the gap in knowledge this study attempts to fill. Williams and Peterson (2020) carried out a longitudinal study on sexual abuse and teacher-student communication patterns in the United Kingdom. Their research involving 200 teachers revealed that teachers who actively discussed personal safety and boundaries with their students had lower incidences of sexual abuse. The study highlighted the effectiveness of structured communication interventions in empowering children to recognize and report sexual abuse.

Smith and Jones (2015) conducted a quantitative study on how teachers' communication patterns influence students' vulnerability to sexual abuse in the United States. Their study, using a survey of 500 students, found that open and supportive communication between teachers and students significantly reduce the risk of sexual abuse. Conversely, teachers with rigid and authoritarian communication styles reported higher incidences of sexual abuse. The study concluded that effective teacher-student communication serves as a protective measure against sexual abuse by fostering trust and awareness.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a correlational research design, deemed appropriate due to the nature and objectives of the investigation. According to Creswell (2014), correlational design is used to describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables using statistical data. This study was carried out in Port Harcourt Metropolis, covering Port Harcourt and Obio-Akpo local government areas of Rivers State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which together form the urban core of the region, these two Local Government Areas are the most densely populated in Rivers State.

The population for this study comprised all female students in public senior secondary schools located within Port Harcourt Metropolis. Available statistics from the Rivers State Senior School Management Board (RSSMB) shows that there are 27,576 female students and 45 public senior secondary schools located in the metropolis. The appropriate sample size for a population of 27,756 students using Krejcie and Morgan formula (1970) is 379 female public senior secondary school students. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting the sample size. Two Instruments were used for data collection; they were developed by the researcher. The first instrument was named: "Teacher-Student Trust, Respect and Effective Communication Questionnaire" (TSTRECQ) and the second instrument was titled "Sexual Abuse Prevention Questionnaire" (SAPQ). These two instruments were used to correlate the extent to which Teacher-Student trust, respect and effective communication correlate sexual abuse prevention. Both instruments were answered on a four-point scale of 4 = Strongly Agreed, 3 = Agreed, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Validity of both instruments was established by test experts in measurement and evaluation and guidance and counselling. The reliability of both instruments was ensured through the internal consistency measure using Cronbach Alpha statistics with a reliability coefficient of 0.68 for TSTRECQ and 0.71 for SAPQ. The instrument was administered through the Direct Delivery Method (DDM) and retrieved on the same date it was administered in each school. Retrieved instruments were analyzed using Multiple Regression Analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (PPMC) to answer the research questions and test hypothesis.

## **RESULTS**

**Research Question 1:** What is the relationship between trust/ respect and prevention of sexual abuse among female students of public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between trust and respect and sexual abuse prevention.

Table 1: Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error
1	.621	.386	.383	0.462

  

ANOVA						
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	
Regression	44.289	2	22.145	51.36	.000	
Residual	70.458	376	0.187			
Total	114.747	378				

  

Coefficients of Regression						
Predictors	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig	
(Constant)	1.232	.134		9.194	.000	
Trust	.356	.072	.425	4.944	.000	
Respect	.294	.068	.398	4.324	.000	

Table 1 answered research question 1 and tested hypotheses 1, it shows that 38.6% of sexual abuse prevention is distributed to trust and respect jointly. Furthermore, the model is statistically significant ( $F(2, 376) = 51.36, p < .05$ ). Both trust ( $\beta = .425, p < .05$ ) and respect ( $\beta = 0.398, p < .05$ ) were significant predictors. Thus, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is rejected. Based on the above, the answer to research question 1 is that there is no significant relationship between trust and respect in the prevention of sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis.

**Research Question 2:** What is the relationship between effective communication and prevention of sexual abuse among female students of public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between effective communication and prevention of sexual abuse among female students in public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Table 2: Summary of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient on the relationship between effective communication and prevention of sexual abuse among female students in public senior secondary school in Port Harcourt Metropolis

(n=379)

Variables	$\Sigma X$	$\Sigma X^2$	$\Sigma XY$	r-value
Effective communication	5797	95762	103366	.78
Prevention of sexual abuse	6434	114818		

Significant at .05; critical r-ratio=.098

Table 2 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis that was conducted in order to determine the relationship between effective communication and prevention against sexual abuse among Port Harcourt Metropolis public senior secondary school female students. The calculation provided a correlation coefficient ( $r = .78$ ). This positive and strong value indicates that, with a better effective communication, female students' sexual abuse prevention also

becomes very strong. By comparing this computed correlation coefficient ( $r = .78$ ) with the critical  $r$ -value (.098) at 0.05 level of significance and 377 degrees of freedom, one can observe that the value of  $r$  obtained is much greater than the critical value. This implies that the demonstrated relationship is statistically significant. The null hypothesis, therefore, that stated "there is no significant relationship between effective communication and prevention of sexual abuse among female students in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis" is rejected. The result confirms that effective communication has a significant positive relationship with preventing sexual abuse among the students.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The first finding of this study is found on table 1a, b, c which answered research question 1 and tested hypotheses 1. The result reveals that trust and respect is found to prevent sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis. The Multi Regression Analysis obtained was  $r = .621$  with  $p = .000$ , which is less than the significance level of 0.05. the result led to the rejection of the null hypotheses ( $H_{01}$ ), suggesting that mutual trust builds a foundation for students to disclose sensitive issues like abuse. The findings align with Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969), which highlight that, secure trusting relationships with caregivers or authority figures (such as teachers) create a sense of safety and emotional stability that make student to be confident and be able to speak up when found inappropriate position.

This result is in line with the finding of Kelly (2020), who emphasized that respectful and trustworthy teacher-student relationships contribute significantly to a safe and abuse-free learning environment. Similarly, Jones and Peterson (2023) found that high levels of mutual respect between teachers and students significantly reduce the risk of boundary violations and foster an atmosphere where students are empowered to speak up against abuse.

However, the result contravenes the finding of Adeyemi and Ogundele (2017), who argued that trust and respect alone are insufficient deterrents to sexual abuse in schools. Their study, conducted in selected public secondary schools in South-West Nigeria, revealed that despite the presence of cordial teacher-student relationships, cases of abuse persisted due to systemic issues such as lack of enforcement of school policies, inadequate monitoring, and students' limited awareness of their rights.

This contrast suggests that while trust and respect are essential components, they must be reinforced with institutional safeguards, training, and reporting mechanisms to effectively prevent sexual abuse. The first finding of the study revealed trust and respect has a strong positive correlation with sexual abuse prevention among female students in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. This implies that students who perceive their teachers as trustworthy and respectful are more likely to feel secure, less vulnerable to exploitation, and more inclined to report inappropriate behavior. This result is in line with the finding of Kelly (2020), who emphasized that respectful and trustworthy teacher-student relationships contribute significantly to a safe and abuse-free learning environment. Similarly, Jones and Peterson (2023) found that high levels of mutual respect between teachers and students significantly reduce the risk of boundary violations and foster an atmosphere where students are empowered to speak up against abuse.

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This contrast suggests that while trust and respect are essential components, they must be reinforced with institutional safeguards, training, and reporting mechanisms to effectively prevent sexual abuse. Empirical studies by Jaycox (2004), supports the findings, he emphasized that respectful teacher-student relationship promotes a culture of safety and openness and students are more likely to report sexual abuse or harassment. Similarly, Makuwa (2018), emphasized that, the role of trust and respect in preventing sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students in the dynamics of Healthy Teacher-Student Relationship significantly reduce the likelihood of sexual abuse.

While this study was conducted in Port Harcourt metropolis its findings support the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC (2021), in the role trust and respect plays in preventing sexual abuse in schools. It revealed that, schools with strong cultures of trust, transparency, and mutual respect had significantly lower cases of unreported sexual abuse. On the contrary, when students do not feel emotionally safe and respected by their teachers, they are more they feel unsafe and insecure.

The study therefore, demonstrate that a respectful and approachable safe learning environment serve as a key factor in the prevention of sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis This finding revealed that trust and respect has a strong positive correlation with sexual abuse prevention among female students in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. This implies that students who perceive their teachers as trustworthy and respectful are more likely to feel secure, less vulnerable to exploitation and more inclined to report inappropriate behavior.

The second finding of the study found in table 2 and answered research question 2 and tested hypothesis 2 revealed that effective communication has a strong positive correlation with sexual abuse prevention among female students in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. This implies that when teachers maintain open, clear, and supportive channels of communication with their students, it fosters trust, confidence, and emotional security, making students more likely to report suspicious or inappropriate behaviour. It also suggests that students who experience effective communication with teachers feel more valued, respected, and safe, which can serve as a protective factor against sexual abuse.

This finding supports the work of Kelly (2020), who emphasized that consistent and empathetic communication between teachers and students significantly increases the likelihood of early disclosure and intervention in cases of abuse. Similarly, Robinson (2017) found that schools that promoted communicative openness experienced lower rates of unreported abuse.

However, the result contravenes the findings of Anderson (2017), who posited that communication, without corresponding institutional accountability and trust structures, may not be sufficient to protect students from abuse, especially in settings where fear and stigma persist.

This study, therefore, reinforces the importance of not just communication, but communication that is rooted in trust, respect, and institutional support. The second findings of this study are found on Table 2, which answered research question 2 and tested hypotheses 2. The result revealed that effective communication is found to prevent sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient obtained  $r = .78$ , with  $p = .0000$ , which is less than the

significance level of .05. This led to the rejection of the null hypotheses ( $H_{02}$ ). The result indicates that higher levels of effective communication are significantly associated with increased sexual abuse prevention among female students. The moderate strength of the correlation suggests that when teachers effectively communicate it enables students to express concerns and report inappropriate behaviour.

This finding also aligns with Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which highlights effective communication as a tool that Healthy Teacher-Student Relationship can be uttered and strengthened. Through open discussion, students advance not only trusting and respectful act but also real-world guidance on piloting dangers and protecting oneself from abusive encounters. Shakeshaft (2020) noted that communication is central to creating a safe learning environment. When teachers effectively communicate with their students, they feel more likely to express their concerns, report inappropriate behaviour, ask for help and build trust in the school environment. This supports research by National Education Association (2022), which highlighted that clear and open communication between teachers and students play a preventive role by empowering students to report harassment confidentially. Empirical studies support this outcome. Robinson (2017), found out that when teachers effectively communicate with students, it reduces the risk of sexual abuse. Similarly, Brown and Miller (2022), in a cross-national study across the U.S. and South Africa, showed that, when teachers used clear, open and empathetic communication, students are more likely to report abuse, understand, their rights, and trust school authorities.

Finkelhor (2023), conducted a longitudinal study across selected middle and high schools, he found that effective communication where teachers practiced active listening, used respectful language, and create open, non-judgmental spaces for dialogue had significantly lower reports of sexual harassment or abuse. In Nigerian, it is logical that poor communication is a major predictor of students' acquaintance to sexual exploitation among female public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis. This present study supports this assertion, showing that communication acts as a protective barrier, it is similar to the present study because they both address communication as a protective factor in preventing sexual abuse within school settings. re of accountability and support. This is the gap in knowledge this study filled.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded as follows, teacher-student trust, respect and effective communication are significantly associated with the prevention of sexual abuse among female public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis. The findings of this study therefore, emphasized the importance of promoting positive relationship within the school environment as a strategy for safeguarding students against sexual abuse.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made,

- Teacher training programmes should be implemented comprehensively for teachers focusing on trust and respect, effective communication, and personalized attention to students to strengthen their relationship.

- Policy development and enforcement of clear policies that promote teacher-Student effective communication should be outlined and procedures for reporting and addressing instances of abuse well established.

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