



Centre for Health Ethics Law and Development

# **Becoming Allies:**

## **Engaging Students of Anointed Souls School in the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence with emphasis on Digital Violence**



## Introduction

In 2021, the Centre for Health Ethics Law and Development (CHELD) conducted a pivotal study examining the role of men and boys in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) — including emerging forms such as digital violence — within Nigerian tertiary institutions. The research uncovered a significant gap in the engagement strategies used by Women’s Rights Organisations (WROs). It found that men and boys were often treated as secondary participants rather than being actively involved in designing and implementing GBV prevention initiatives. This limited engagement overlooked their crucial role in challenging harmful behaviours, both offline and online, that perpetuate violence and inequality.

A major recommendation from the study was to reframe male engagement strategies by involving men and boys more intentionally and at earlier stages of their social and educational development. The study emphasized the importance of targeting secondary schools, where young boys are still forming foundational attitudes toward gender roles, equality, respect, and responsible digital behaviour. This developmental stage offers a unique opportunity to shape positive values that discourage not only physical and emotional violence but also digital forms such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and non-consensual sharing of intimate content. The findings underscored the need for a proactive approach, one that shifts from viewing men and boys solely as contributors to the problem to recognising their potential as allies and co-creators of solutions. This transformative perspective positions male engagement as a cornerstone of GBV and digital violence prevention, capable of breaking cycles of abuse and fostering environments of mutual respect, safety, and equity across both physical and digital spaces.

In response, CHELD has prioritised the inclusion of boys and young men in its educational outreach programmes, beginning at the secondary school level. These initiatives aim to shift gender norms early, promote digital responsibility, and build a generation committed to combating all forms of violence, whether physical, psychological, or digital.

## Linking Research to Action

Building on these findings, since 2021, CHELD has embarked on four (4) outreach programmes to extend GBV education to secondary schools, so far reaching over 3500 secondary students in seven (7) secondary schools in Lagos. The rationale for focusing on secondary schools included the following considerations:

1. Early Intervention: Adolescents are at a critical developmental stage where beliefs and attitudes toward gender roles are shaped. Intervening early can disrupt the cycle of socialisation that perpetuates GBV.
2. Foundation for Future Engagement: Educating secondary school students lays the groundwork for their continued involvement as allies in GBV prevention efforts at higher education levels and beyond.
3. Potential for Community Impact: Students serve as catalysts for change within their families and communities, spreading awareness and challenging harmful norms.

## Programme Implementation

This year, CHELD continued its outreach as part of a series of events to mark the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV campaign. The outreach took place on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025, at Anointed Souls schools, Badore, Ajah area of Lagos State where a total of 300 (200 females and 100 male) students attended. Additionally, 7 staff including the school administration, took part in the programme.

The programme was held from 11:30 AM to 12:40 PM.

The objectives of the outreach were to:

1. Educate the students on the different forms and effects of GBV.
2. Dispel popular myths and misconceptions that perpetuate both physical and digital forms of GBV, emphasizing that harmful behaviour online is as serious as offline abuse.
3. Promote the use of respectful, inclusive, and non-violent language and behaviour when interacting with women and girls, both in person and on digital platforms.
4. Encourage students especially the male students to act as allies and proactive bystanders in preventing GBV.
5. Foster empathy, accountability, and emotional intelligence among boys to challenge harmful gender norms and reduce tolerance for any form of violence.
6. Raise awareness about the legal and social consequences of digital violence, helping students understand their responsibilities and the importance of maintaining safe online spaces.

### Key Areas of Teaching During the Sessions

The sessions focused on delivering a structured and engaging curriculum to help the students understand gender-based violence (GBV), the concept of digital violence, dispel harmful myths, and recognise their roles as advocates and allies in prevention. Through interactive discussions, practical examples, and relatable scenarios, the sensitisation was designed to connect with the students on a personal level.

Below are the key areas of focus during the sessions, supported by examples of questions and discussions.

- **Understanding Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** The sessions began with introducing the concept of GBV, providing clear definitions, and breaking it down into its various forms. Physical violence, such as hitting and slapping, was explained alongside emotional violence, which includes intimidation and constant belittling. Sexual violence was addressed with examples of inappropriate touching or coerced activities. In contrast, digital violence was illustrated through situations encompassing online harassment, cyberstalking, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Facilitators explained that gender-based violence (GBV) happens when power is not evenly distributed and deeply held social beliefs are in place. This knowledge helps students see how common GBV is and how bad it is for communities. They also stressed that these patterns continue in digital spaces, where digital violence like online harassment, stalking, and abuse reflects and reinforces the same inequalities.
- **Dispelling Myths and Misconceptions:** A major focus of the outreach was to challenge and correct harmful myths surrounding gender-based violence (GBV). One persistent misconception was the belief that a woman's clothing can provoke violence. Facilitators firmly rejected this notion, emphasizing that violence is always a conscious decision made by the perpetrator. Another misconception addressed was the idea that only women and girls experience GBV. Facilitators clarified that men and boys can also be victims, reinforcing that GBV affects individuals of all genders. The discussion also extended to digital violence, highlighting how similar myths and victim-blaming attitudes appear online through cyberbullying, online harassment, and non-consensual sharing of images demonstrating that technology can also be used to perpetuate gender-based harm.

- **Impact of GBV on individuals:** The sessions examined the far-reaching effects of gender-based violence (GBV), fostering empathy and understanding among students toward survivors. Discussions covered physical health impacts such as injuries and chronic conditions, as well as mental health consequences, including trauma, anxiety, and depression. Economic repercussions were also explored, highlighting how stigma, discrimination, and abuse can lead to loss of education or employment opportunities. In addition, facilitators addressed digital violence as an emerging dimension of GBV, explaining how online harassment, cyberstalking, and non-consensual sharing of personal content can cause severe emotional distress, reputational harm, and social isolation. Through these discussions, students gained a deeper awareness of how GBV—both offline and online—damages individuals, fractures families, and undermines community stability.
- **Encouraging Appropriate Language and Behaviour:** Promoting respectful communication with women and girls was a central focus of the sessions. Facilitators emphasized the importance of using appropriate and considerate language, illustrating how harmful words and expressions can perpetuate discrimination and emotional harm. They highlighted those respectful interactions start with everyday speech and behaviour, fostering a culture of dignity and equality. The discussion also extended to digital spaces, where students learned how online comments, messages, and posts can contribute to digital violence through harassment, bullying, or degrading language. By promoting mindful communication both offline and online, the sessions encouraged students to help create safer, more respectful communities.
- **Your Role as an Ally and Bystander:** Students were encouraged to view themselves as active allies in preventing gender-based violence (GBV). The sessions emphasized the vital role of bystanders, urging them to intervene safely and responsibly when witnessing harmful behaviour. Facilitators challenged the misconception that simply avoiding violence absolves one of responsibility, reinforcing that silence can enable abuse to continue. They also discussed the importance of acting in digital spaces, where bystanders can help prevent and respond to digital violence such as online harassment and cyberbullying. Speaking up both offline and online was highlighted as a powerful way to protect victims, promote accountability, and foster a culture of respect and safety.



## Key Findings and Observations

- **Awareness and Understanding:** The sessions revealed that many students were familiar with the term "gender-based violence" and other forms of GBV including digital violence.
- **Dispelling Myths:** One of the most challenging myths addressed was the belief that an individual's appearance or online expression could provoke digital violence. This notion echoed by some students, including a female student who claimed that "posting revealing photos invites harassment" and a male student who had asked "what then should we do when someone shares revealing content online? The facilitators challenged these views by emphasizing that digital violence or any form violence is never justified and is the sole responsibility of the perpetrator, not the victim's clothing or digital presence.
- **Bystander Intervention and Reporting GBV:** The students were provided with practical tips on becoming bystanders against GBV. While some students expressed concerns about being bystanders to GBV, especially in the digital space and the risks involved in reporting it. To address these fears, the facilitators shared practical strategies for safe intervention such as reporting to the school authority and reporting to law enforcement agencies.
- **Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes:** The students actively participated in discussions and demonstrated a clear understanding of the topics by the end of the sessions. During the Q&A session, many students were able to articulate what they had learned, showing progress in their comprehension of GBV and their role in preventing it. While some asked some very sensitive questions that struck concern and immediate intervention.
- **Role of the Staff:** The Staff and school administrators were proactive and committed to continuing educational interventions on GBV. Their cooperation was instrumental in the success of the programme.

## Feedback

At the conclusion of the programme, the students were given opportunity to approach the facilitators to ask questions or discuss issues they didn't want addressed in the open session.

The questions revealed the necessity of engaging students at this level to create a safe space for the survivors or willing allies of SGBV.

A sample of the questions asked are:

1. **Abuse by family members:**
  - a. What if the person abusing you is your stepbrother?
  - b. What if the abuse is from your stepdad and he tells you in a threatening manner not to inform any person about his abuse?
2. **Abuse by religious person:**
  - a. In a case where you are being sexually harassed by an uncle who also doubles as your guardian who is a pastor.
3. **Abuse by trusted person:**
  - a. What if someone close to you is sexually abusing you, what should I do to stop it?
4. **Sex/Relationship in exchange for money gifts:**
  - a. In case of a situation where my family is poor and there is a man willing to help but requires sexual favours. Having told my mom about it, she instead encourages it because there is no one to feed the family.
  - b. A male asked me for a kiss in exchange for money to buy an item required by the school

**5. Emotional abuse by family member:**

a. I am emotionally damaged by the people I am staying with, and I feel like running away.

**6. Rejection met by threat of violence:**

a. A guy I once rejected has come back to wooing me again after a gap period and this time he is threatening violence

**7. How to intervene on behalf of another:**

a. A guy has approached my sister, and he is insistently asking her to date him against her wish. What can I do as her brother.

b. A Keke rider who is also a married man with children, is disturbing my friend by asking her to date him. What I can do I intervene.

**Impact and Achievements**

The outreach programme has made a significant impact in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) with focus on digital violence, successfully achieving its goals of education, empowerment, and galvanize sustainable change. Students have demonstrated substantial growth in their comprehension of digital violence, moving from a basic understanding to confidently recognizing its diverse forms, underlying causes, and far-reaching consequences. Beyond knowledge, they embraced action, pledging to model respect, challenge harmful stereotypes, and promote equality within their schools and communities. This shift reflected not only learning but a genuine commitment to building safer, more inclusive environments for all.

The school administrators expressed their sincere appreciation for the programme, recognising its transformative impact on students and the broader school community. They committed to to attentive to incidences of gender-based violence (GBV) among the students and to provide support for any survivor. The outreach also underscored the vital role of collaboration engaging parents, teachers, and staff to create a united front in addressing GBV and fostering a culture of respect, safety, and equality across the school environment



## Next Steps

To build on the successes of this outreach, CHELD proposes the following:

- 1. Sustained Engagement:** Adopt the school (Anointed Souls School) to help deepen their knowledge on GBV with critical intervention. While the current outreach has made significant strides, there is still a wide gap in the understanding of GBV especially in the digital space, among secondary school students.
- 2. Follow-up Interventions:** Follow-up interventions are essential to sustain the impact of school outreach on gender-based violence (GBV). They include ongoing involvement through peer-led projects that reinforce lessons about safety, respect, and equality. Regular monitoring and feedback help assess behavioural changes and identify emerging challenges, including digital violence. Collaboration with teachers, parents, and community leaders ensures a supportive environment where students remain empowered to prevent GBV and promote positive, respectful relationships both offline and online.
- 3. Parental Workshops:** Given that parents play a pivotal role in shaping the beliefs and behaviours of their children, it is crucial to engage them in the conversation around GBV. It is recommended to develop dedicated workshops for parents to address harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about GBV. These workshops should focus on educating parents about the different forms of GBV, its impact on individuals and society, and the importance of fostering healthy relationships.
- 4. Educator Training:** Teachers and school administrators are on the front lines of student interaction and have a significant influence on shaping the school culture. To effectively address GBV, it is crucial to provide training for educators, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to address GBV-related topics in the classroom and beyond. Educator training should focus on understanding the signs of GBV, how to respond appropriately to disclosures of violence, and how to engage in meaningful conversations with students about consent, respect, and equality. Furthermore, educators should be trained in how to manage sensitive topics within the school environment, ensuring that students feel safe and supported when discussing GBV.
- 5. Facilitators Training:** This is a necessary recommendation because facilitators' training equips participants with essential skills to handle outreach programs and address sensitive questions about topics of discussion. The training should focus on empathy, effective communication, and trauma-informed approaches, to ensure that facilitators can create safe spaces, foster trust, and provide accurate information while supporting survivors with dignity and respect.
- 6. Curriculum Integration:** To ensure the long-term sustainability and impact of the programme, it is vital to advocate for the inclusion of GBV education as part of the school curriculum and activities. This integration would provide a structured approach to learning, ensuring that every student, regardless of their school, receives essential knowledge about GBV and their role in its prevention. Moreover, including GBV education in the curriculum and activities would institutionalize the message, making it an ongoing part of the school culture and empowering students to continue spreading awareness and advocating for change.
- 7. Peer Education Programmes:** Another important recommendation is the establishment of peer education programs in schools. Peer educators can be trained to lead discussions and awareness campaigns among their peers, creating a more relatable and peer-driven approach to GBV education. Peer-led initiatives often resonate more deeply with students, as they feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics with their classmates. Peer educators could also act as trusted allies for students who may feel uncomfortable speaking with teachers or adults, thus providing additional support channels for students in need.



## Conclusion

The 2025 “UNITE to end Digital Violence against Women and Girls” 16 Days of Activism was a success. It provided a vital platform for dialogue, learning, and empowerment in the fight against gender-based violence, particularly in the digital sphere. While challenges remain, the program succeeded in raising awareness, dispelling misconceptions, and inspiring students to take on active roles as allies and advocates. CHELD remains committed to continuing this vital work, ensuring that young men and boys are equipped with the knowledge and skills to foster a more equitable and violence-free society.



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