

PREVALENCE OF BULLYING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the prevalence of bullying among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 600 students selected through multistage sampling technique from six secondary schools in the State. A structured questionnaire that sought information on the subjects involvement in bullying. Validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through content validity and test-retest reliability techniques respectively.

The results of data analysis on the experience and manifestation of bullying showed that less than half of the sample (28%) had experienced bullying while 42% had bullied other students. It also revealed that emotional form of bullying was most experienced and that boys had experienced and manifested bullying more than their female counterparts. The results point to the need for violence prevention programmes in schools.

Keywords: Bullying Prevalence

Introduction

There are many reported cases of bullying among students in Nigeria secondary schools and other school levels. School administrators in their meetings with parents, for example at Parent – Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and other occasions report that bullying is on the increase and warn that parents should caution their children.

Bullying is a significant problem that can have impact on physical and psychological health of those who are bullied. There may be a commonality between delinquency and bullying in so much as many physical aggressive manifestations of bullying characterise delinquent behaviour. The students who bully their peers at an early age may gain undue

boldness and confidence to engage in more anti-social acts. School bullying can interfere with students concentration in their studies which can lead to failure and eventual drop out.

The problem of bullying is not new but seems to be an age long phenomenon in Nigeria as discussions with parents and other adults reveal personal experiences of bullying during the school days of the adults. The problem has probably been ignored or regarded as a normal rite of passage for children.

Bullying is a form of aggressive behaviour manifested by use of force or coercion to affect others particularly when the behaviour is habitual and involves imbalance of power. Olweus (1996) explained bullying to mean an intentional, repeated hurtful act, word or other behaviour committed by one or more children against another. According to him, a student is being bullied when another student or several other students say mean and hurtful things or make fun, call him or her hurtful names, completely ignore or exclude him or her from their groups of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose; hit, kick, push, shove around, tell lies or spread rumours about him or her.

Olweus (1993) had earlier defined bullying as repeated negative actions directed at a target over time, where there is a power differential (either real or perceived) between the target and the bully/bullies. In 2003, Olweus modified the definition to mean a repeated behaviour that is intended to harm or disturb another person. It is provocative or a threat to the victim and involves an imbalance of power with a more powerful person physically or emotionally attacking a less powerful one (Nansel, Overpeck, Philla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001).

According to Ross (2003) bullying is an intentional and generally unprovoked attempt by one or more individuals to inflict physical hurt and/or psychological distress on one or more victims. There must be an imbalance of physical or psychological power. Nickel et al (2005) in their own view, defined bullying as the “intentional” unprovoked abuse of power by one or more children to inflict pain or cause distress to another child on repeated occasions.

Konstantina (2010) defined bullying as the intentional, systematic and unjustified aggressive behaviour that is exercised by a student or a group of students more powerful, physically or psychologically towards another student or group of students less powerful.

Aluede (2011) in the same way described bullying as a form of aggression, a particular kind of violence exhibited in the course of social interaction by a more dominant individual (the bully) to a less dominant individual (the victim) with the intention to cause distress to the victim.

Bullying may include name calling, verbal or written abuse, exclusion from activities and social situations, physical abuse or coercion (Carey 2003, Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Bullies may behave this way to be perceived as popular or tough or to get attention. They may bully out of jealousy or be acting out because they themselves are bullied (Crothers & Levinson, 2004).

Bullying can be direct or indirect. Ross (1998) stated that direct bullying involves a great deal of physical aggression, such as shoving and poking, throwing things, slapping, choking, punching and kicking, beating, stabbing, pulling hair, scratching, biting, scraping and pinching. He also suggests that indirect bullying is social aggression characterized by attempting to socially isolate the victim. This isolation is achieved through a wide variety of techniques, including spreading gossip, refusing to socialize with the victim, bullying other people who wish to socialize with the victim and criticizing the victim's manner of dress and other socially significant markers (including the victim's race, religion, disability, sex, or sexual preference).

Bullying can include verbal harassment, physical assault or coercion and may be directed repeatedly towards particular victims, perhaps, on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexuality or ability. The "imbalance of power" may be social power and/or physical power. Bullying ranges from simple one-on-one bullying to more complex bullying in which the bully may have one or more "lieutenants" who may seem to be willing to assist the primary bully in his bullying activities. Bullying can occur in any context in which human beings interact with each other, this includes school, church family, the work-place, home, and neighbourhoods. Boys are more likely to be involved in bullying and physical violence because of their physical strength, stature, physique and masculinity (domineering spirit as boys) while girls are likely to be involved in verbal means of bullying and social isolation of the target because of their own nature of talkativeness.

Olweus (1993) has identified two types of targets; the first and by far the larger subgroup are passive targets. These children are generally characterized as anxious, insecure and unassertive before being targeted and these characteristics are likely to increase as a result of the bullying. The second smaller subgroup are the provocative targets, characterized by both anxiety and aggression. Frequently, they are bullied and disliked by an entire classroom of their peers and they in turn bully on other children, so they are both bullies and targets. School bullying can occur in nearly any part in or around the school building, though it may occur more frequently in physical education classes and activities, recess, hallways, bathrooms, in school buses and while waiting for buses and in classes that require group work and/or

after school activities. This is because the students may not be under adult supervision at such places (“School Bullying”, 2012)

Bullying in school sometimes takes the form of a group of students taking advantage of or isolating one student in particular and gaining the loyalty of bystanders who want to avoid becoming the next victim. These bullies may taunt and tease their target before physically bullying the target.

Bullying as a sub-set of school violence among school age children occurs in many schools across the globe (Mc Eacherin, Kenny, Blake & Aluede, 2005). School Bullying (2012) reviewed the statistics of bullying according to the American Psychological Association (APA). Approximately 40% to 80% of school age children experienced bullying at some point during their school careers (APA.org). Regardless of the grade level, socio-economic environment, gender, religion or sexual orientation, bullying can happen to anyone. However, various studies point out that students from lower socio-economic background were more bullied than students from higher socio-economic background (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, Van Avermaet & Bettelheim, 2011).

The following statistics illustrate the severity of bullying within classroom (School Bullying, 2012)

- 20 – 40% of bullying victims actually reported being bullied.
- 70% of middle school and high school students experience bullying in school.
- 7 – 12% of bullies is habitual and poses a serious threat.
- 23% of 9th graders has carried a weapon to school recently.
- 5 – 15% of students is constantly bullied.
- 27% of students is bullied because of their refusal to engage in common sexual practices.
- 25% of students encourage bullying if not given proper education and support in anti-bullying techniques.

Researches have revealed that 10% to 11% of adolescents sampled in Canada were victimized by peers and 8% to 11% were bullies (Hymel, Rocke-Henderson & Bananno, 2005). American schools harbor approximately 2.1 million bullies and 2.7 million are their victims (Aluede, 2011).

In Nigeria, the prevalent rate of bullying has not been fully established though Egbochukwu (2007) has revealed that in Benin City, Nigeria almost four in every five participants reported being bullied and 85% of the children admitted to bullying others at least once. In a study, Omotoso (2010) reported that 88.1% of the participants had been bullied, 33.1% were bullies and 64.7% had been involved in relational bullying while retaliation for being bullied in the past was 51.2%.

In another study, Owoaje and Ndubisi (2009) examined the 2007/2008 session admitted students in six public secondary schools in Odo Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State and reported that the students were bullied as follows: 1-2 days within a month 29.5%, 3-5 days 9.1%, 6-9 days 5% and 10-30 days 4.3%.

In a nationwide survey of school violence in Nigeria conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education (2007), it was revealed that physical violence and psychological violence accounted for 85% and 50% respectively of the bulk of violence against children in schools. Across school location, physical violence was more prevalent in the rural area (90%) than in the urban area (80%). Across region, physical violence in schools was higher in the southern region (90%) than in the northern region (70%). So was the case of psychological violence, which was 61% in southern Nigeria and only 38.7% in northern Nigeria.

Researchers have found variations in the prevalence of bullying among boys and girls. Asamu (2006) found that 21% of the students studied in Ibadan who had bullied other students were male. Omoteso (2010) discovered that 48.8% male and 51.2% female were involved in bullying, Bosworth, Espelage & Simon (1999) found that 85.5% of male students and 77% of female students were bullies. Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim & Sadek (2010) discovered that boys appeared to be more involved in bullying than girls across all bully status groups. The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of various forms of bully in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Method

The sample for the study consisted of 600 students, (300 senior and 300 junior) secondary school students selected through multistage sampling technique (purposive, stratified and random sampling to reflect adequate representation by school type and gender).

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The information sought by the questionnaire, relevant to this paper are the participant's gender and involvement in bullying, that is how frequently they were bullied or they bullied others. Validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through content validation and test retest reliability techniques respectively.

The questionnaire was personally administered by the researchers to the students in their schools and collected immediately for data analysis.

Results

Analysis of the data to determine the prevalence of bullying among the students, shows that 27.5% of the sample had been bullied and that

37.3% of boys and 17.7% of girls experienced bullying (Table 1). This means that bullying is prevalent in the schools, both boys and girls were victims but the boys experienced bullying more.

Table 1: The Experience of Bullying.

Experience of Bullying	Male	Female	Total
No	188(62.7%)	247(82.3%)	435(72.5%)
Yes	112(37.3%)	53(17.7%)	165(27.5%)

Table 2: Manifestation of Bullying

Manifestation of Bullying	Male	Female	Total
No	142 (47.3%)	204(68%)	346(57.7%)
Yes	158(52.7%)	98(32%)	254(42.3%)

Table 2 shows the percentage of the participants that are bullies. It shows that 42.3% of the sample had bullied other students and that 52.7% of boys and 32% of girls were bullies indicating that more boys bullied than their female counterparts.

Further analysis was to segregate bullying prevalence according to the forms of bullying as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Experience of Forms of Bullying by Sex

Types of Bullying		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Physical	Not Experienced	167(55.7%)	243(81%)	410(68.3%)
	Experienced	133(44.3%)	57(19%)	190(31.6%)
Verbal	Not Experienced	150(50%)	183(61%)	333(55.5%)
	Experienced	150(50%)	117(39%)	267(44.5%)
Emotional	Not Experienced	109(36.3%)	141(47%)	250(41.6%)
	Experienced	191(63.6%)	159(53%)	350(58.3%)

The table shows the experience of various forms of bullying by male and female students. It shows that 31.6% of the sample experienced physical bullying, 44.5% verbal bullying and 58.3% experienced emotional bullying. It further revealed that boys had the highest percentage in all the forms of bullying analysed. Emotional bullying was the most experienced form of bullying, followed by verbal bullying while physical bullying was least experienced.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the experience and manifestation of bullying showed that bullying was prevalent in the schools and that both boys and girls were victims with more boys being involved than girls. It was further shown that emotional bullying was the most prevalent form of bullying. These results correspond with Omoteso's (2010) report, which stated that 88.1% of the

participants in his study had been bullied while 33.1% were bullies. Bullying remains a serious threat to the entire school population. The gender differential in bullying is in support of Cook et al (2010), who discovered that boys appeared to be more involved in bullying than girls across all bully status groups. This can be explained in terms of boys seeming to be more aggressive and bossy than girls, and relying more on their physical strength, status and physique to bully others.

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