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SCHOOL CLIMATE AS CORRELATE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN YAGBA WEST OF KOGI STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

Bullying is the most common form of violence in schools. The current study examined the relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West, Kogi State, Nigeria. The research design employed for this study was a descriptive research method of the correlational survey type. The target population consisted of all SSS II secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 students as sample for the study. Questionnaire was used to collect relevant data. Frequency counts and percentage were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Also, summated mean rating was used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the t-test statistical tools were used to test the formulated hypotheses. Finding revealed that there was a significant relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State. Another finding revealed that there was no significant difference in the bullying behaviour of secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State based on gender. Hence, it was recommended that School management should create a conducive environment for students to feel safe and victims of bullying should be encouraged to report and not to stereotyped. Cases of bullying should also be referred to the school counsellors

Keywords: Bullying Behaviour, School Climate, Correlate, Yagba West.

Introduction

Bullying is an aggressive behaviour characterized by three defining conditions: (a) negative or malicious behaviour intended to harm or distress, (b) behaviour repeated over a time period, and (c) a relationship in which there is an imbalance in strength or power between the parties involved (Olweus, 1993; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). Thus, fighting between two persons of similar strength and skill cannot be classified as bullying.

Bullying behaviour can be physical acts (hitting, pushing, and kicking), verbal utterances (name calling, provoking, making threats, and spreading rumors), or other behaviours

(making faces or social exclusion) (Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield & Karstadt, 2000). Bullying takes place within relatively small and stable settings (like classes), which are characterized by the presence of the same people (e.g., children) (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman and Kaukiainen (1996) suggested that all the children in a particular class play a role in bullying and that only few of them may be considered to be uninvolved.

Several experts have taken a closer look at this behaviour to determine the cause of bullying, and how we may correct it. Even more importantly how we may empower the victims. According to Clore and Hibel (1997) bully or bullies were described as one or more individuals inflicting physical, verbal, or emotional abuse on another-including threats of bodily harm, weapon possession, extortion, civil rights violation, assault and battery, gang activity, attempted murder, murder and sexual harassment. Victims not only get victimized by the bully, but they get revictimized by a portion of their peer group as well. Children become less sympathetic to victims as they grow older; almost one-third of adolescent surveyed said they could understand why the bully chose the victim (Greenbaum, Turner & Stephens, 1989).

The overall pattern of a bully is to gain power over someone else. Most experts agree it is a learned behaviour, which must be unlearned. Unfortunately, bullies do not grow up and "grow out of it". They must be taught better ways of relating to others (Beane, 1999). The investigation of school bullying is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nigeria, it has been thoroughly investigated in several countries. For example, Scandinavian countries initiated the early research regarding school bullying (Olweus, 1978) and researchers from other countries followed this lead.

Bullying is the most common form of violence in schools. Studies show that violence makes schools unsafe places for children and has contributed to the perception that some schools are not safe anymore (Maliki, Asagwara & Ibu, 2009). Bullying behaviour may be referred to as a repeated aggressive behaviour perpetuated by a bully or a group of bullies who systematically victimize weaker peers (Olweus, 1993).

Mgalla, Schapink and Boenna (1998) conducted a study in rural and urban Tanzania and their investigation revealed that the incidences of bullying were real and some of the pupils had been adversely affected following the acts which are normally done to both male and female pupils. Moris (2008) claimed that, bullying is not only a case of school children bullying their peers, teachers are also involved either as victims or as bullies.

Most studies conducted in some African countries were gender based studies, focusing largely on sexual bullying or harassment of female students. Some of such studies were conducted by Afenyadu and Lakshmi (2003), who studied adolescents' *sexual and reproductive health in Dodowa*, Ghana. Also, Terefe and Desere (1997) studied violence in Ethiopian schools: A study of some schools in Addis Ababa. Mbassa and Daniel (2001) worked on violence against children within the family and in schools.

Together, parents and school staff are able to set the climate in a positive manner through modeling and accepting themselves. Treating others with kindness and with respect sets an example for the youth about what is expected from them. Setting guidelines and rules also defines clear expectations of behaviour. Many schools are beginning to adopt a zero

tolerance policy for weapons and violence. This policy may incorporate a safe environment, but it does not teach children how to correct their behaviour. This policy in conjunction with parents and schools working together to model acceptance behaviours is critical. In addition, teaching conflict resolution skills and social skills will encourage healthier choices and assist in the development of a healthier environment.

School climate is an important consideration in understanding school bullying because adult supervision decreases as students move from elementary to middle and secondary school. In turn, less structure and supervision are associated with concomitant increases in student bullying, particularly in locations such as playgrounds, lunchrooms, and hallways (Craig & Pepler, 1997; American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001; Vaillancourt, Brittain, Bennett, Arnocky, McDougall & Hymel, 2010). Students often report feeling unsafe and afraid in unsupervised places in and around schools (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner 2001; Vaillancourt, et. al., 2010).

For nearly two decades, Kasen and colleagues have studied the impact of school climate on child outcomes (Kasen, Johnson & Cohen, 1990; Kasen, Cohen & Brook, 1998; Kasen, Berenson, Cohen & Johnson, 2004). In their 1990 article, they found that students (ages 6–16) attending schools with high rates of student–student and teacher–student conflict showed greater increases in oppositional, attentional and conduct problems than students from well-organized schools that emphasized learning, who showed decrease in these negative behaviours.

Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) found that there is a negative connection between the school climates as perceived by the students and their involvement in bullying activities, either as victims, bullies or victims/bullies. Furthermore, researchers have ascertained that negative school climate increases the possibilities of aggressive reactions which can result in a vicious cycle of aggression and negative school climate.

Kasen et. al., (1998) did a 6-year follow-up study which indicated increased risk of alcohol abuse and criminality among students from high-conflict schools. In their most comprehensive examination of the impact of school climate, Kasen, et. al., (2004) surveyed 500 students and their mothers across 250 schools over a 2.5-year interval (ages 13.5 and 16) on a broad range of measures of both the school environment and student problem behaviours (for example, bullying, physical/verbal aggression, deviance, rebelliousness, and so on). Therefore, this research intends to investigate school climate as correlate of bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State?
2. What is the relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State?
3. What is the difference in the bullying behaviour of secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State based on gender?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference in the bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State based on gender.

Methodology

The research design that was employed for this study was descriptive research method of the correlational type. The population for this study comprises all secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State. The selected sample for this study was all SSS II secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 students as the sample for this study. Questionnaires were used to collect the necessary data. The demographic data collected from this study were described using frequency counts. Also, summated mean rating was used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the t-test statistical tools were used to test the generated hypotheses at the significance level of 0.05.

Findings

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	163	54.3
Female	137	45.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 1 showed that out of the 300 students that participated in the study, 163 representing (54.3%) were male, while 137 representing (45.7%) were female. This revealed that there were more male respondents than female respondents participated in this study.

Research Question 1: What is the nature of bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State?

In order to answer this research question, responses of the students to items on the bullying behaviours questionnaire were collated. The data collected from the study was analyzed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Rank Order of the Nature of Bullying Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Yagba West of Kogi State

S/N	Bullying Behaviours	Mean	Rank
1.	I get called names by others	3.96	1 st
2.	I give soft students a hard time	2.00	6 th
3.	I like to make friends	2.26	5 th
4.	I play up in class	2.00	6 th
5.	I feel I cannot trust others	2.00	6 th
6.	I get picked on by others	1.32	14 th
7.	I am part of a group that goes round teasing others	1.40	13 th
8.	I like to help people who are being harassed	2.00	6 th
9.	I like to make others scared of me	1.32	14 th
10.	Others leave me out of things on purpose	1.32	14 th
11.	I get into fights at school	1.32	14 th
12.	I like to show others that I'm the boss	3.26	4 th
13.	I share things with others	1.32	14 th
14.	I enjoy upsetting wimps	1.60	11 th
15.	I like to get in fights with someone I can easily beat	1.60	11 th
16.	Others make fun of me	2.00	6 th
17.	I get hit and pushed around by others	3.44	2 nd
18.	I enjoy helping others	3.44	2 nd
	Weighted Mean Score	37.56	

Table 2 indicates that 300 respondents participated in this study. Responses to items that sought information on bullying behaviours among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State revealed that majority of the respondents' bullying behaviours is high, because the benchmark weighted mean score stood at 36 and their weighted mean score is 37.56 which is above the benchmark weighted mean score.

H₀₁: *There is no significant relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State.*

In order to test this hypothesis, responses of the respondents on the bullying behaviours and school climate questionnaires were collated. The data collected from the study was analyzed as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Relationship between School Climate and Bullying Behaviour among Secondary Schools Students in Yagba West of Kogi State

Variable	No	Mean	Std.	Df	Cal.r-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Bullying Behaviours	300	37.56	4.30	298	0.36	0.00	Rejected
School Climate	300	28.11	8.12				

$p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the summary of the comparison of school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State. The sig (2-tailed) of 0.00 is lower than 0.05 significant level at which the hypothesis was tested. This implies, therefore, that the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that, there is a significant relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary schools

students in Yagba West of Kogi State.

H₀₂: *There is no significant difference in the bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State based on gender.*

In order to test this hypothesis, responses of the respondents on the bullying behaviours questionnaires were collated based on gender. The data collected from the study was analyzed as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The t-test Showing Difference in the Bullying Behaviour among Secondary Schools Students in Yagba West of Kogi State Based on Gender

Gender	No	Mean	Std.	Df	Cal.t-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Male	163	35.85	4.23	298	0.41	0.68	Accepted
Female	137	36.05	4.41				

Results on table 4 shows calculated t-value = 0.41 with calculated significant value = 0.68 > 0.05 alpha level. Since 0.68 is greater than 0.05 alpha level. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yagba West of Kogi State based on gender.

Discussion of the Findings

Findings revealed a significant relationship between school climate and bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State. This finding is in consonance with that of Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) who found negative connection between the school climate as perceived by the students and their involvement in bullying activities, either as victims, bullies or victims/bullies. Furthermore, researchers such as Kourkoutas, Giovazolias and Mitsopoulou (2007) have ascertained that the negative school climate increases the possibilities of aggressive reactions which can result in a vicious cycle of aggression and negative school climate. On the contrary, Klein, Cornell and Konold (2012) found out that the relationship between school climate and bullying was not significant.

Another finding of this study revealed that there was no significant difference in the bullying behaviour among secondary schools students in Yagba West of Kogi State based on gender. This finding is in disagreement with that of Tulloch (1995) who found out that despite looking at all forms of bullying boys were still predominant and victims from both gender claimed that it was boys who physically bullied, picked on or teased the most. Girls admitted to higher levels of bullying than boy, victims reported and also to being bullied at a higher level than boy bullies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The result of this study is an indication of the level of awareness of bullying in schools. Altogether, the present study indicated the importance of considering school climate in studies of bullying behaviour, in addition to relevant gender relationship. School children have the right to be educated in a safe environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying. Hence, this study recommends the following:

- i. School management should be tasked with the duty of care to their students
- ii. School management should not tolerate bullying in any form.
- iii. School management should create a conducive environment for students to feel safe.
- iv. Victims of bullying should be encouraged to report and not to stereotyped.
- v. Schools need to introduce intervention programmes for both teachers and students.
- vi. Teachers need to be aware of the alternative ways of punishing students which are not aggressive in nature and students need to be informed on the best ways of interaction when at school.
- vii. Finally, there is a need for the parents to be aware of the positive returns of investing in their children's education. Parents need to be educated on the negative effects of bullying so as to assist their children develop good moral values and behaviour.

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