

Prevalence and Effects of Bullying on Emotional Status and Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students in Abuja, Nigeria.

Obasanjo Solomon Balogun

Department of Criminology and Security Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Phone: +234 7063575854

Email: sanjobalogun2016@gmail.com

Abstract

Bullying, the process of intimidating or mistreating somebody weaker or in a more vulnerable situation, is mostly common among young people, particularly, among students of secondary schools. This study, therefore, investigated its prevalence and effects on emotional status and academic achievement among secondary school students in Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital city. One hundred and twenty (120) senior secondary students were randomly selected from four secondary schools purposively selected within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). Structured questionnaire was used for data collection, while data obtained were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. Simple percentages and frequency distribution were used for descriptive analysis. The study found among other things that about 60 percent of the respondents agreed that bullying negatively affects the emotional status of the bully (the perpetrator), and 78.3 percent also agreed that bullying affects the victim's emotional status negatively. On the other hand, about 60 percent of the respondents agreed that bullying negatively affects the bully's (perpetrator's) academic achievement, while 75.8 percent agreed that bullying has negative effects on the victim's academic achievement. The study recommended that school authorities should devise strategies of preventing bullying in schools.

Keywords: academic achievement; bullying; emotional status; Nigeria; secondary school students.

Introduction

Bullying is a specific type of aggression in which: the behaviour is intended to harm or disturb, the behaviour occurs repeatedly over time, and there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. This asymmetry of power may be physical or psychological, and the aggressive behaviour may be verbal (e.g., name-calling, threats), physical (e.g., hitting), or psychological (e.g., rumors, shunning/exclusion) (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton and Scheidt, 2001). It is a hostile behaviour displayed by an individual in order to harm another person or a group of others. Bullies engage in the act in order to establish power and control over their colleagues, whom they consider to be "weaker"

(Dewale, 2004; Idowu and Yahaya, 2006).

Bullying is a social problem, which can occur in any context in which people interact with each other; it has effect on both the bully and the bullied (Ohanaka and Okobia, 2011). Bullying among school-aged youth is increasingly being recognized as a serious problem affecting the well-being and social functioning of the students. While a certain amount of conflict and harassment is typical of youth peer relations, bullying presents a potentially more serious threat to healthy youth development (Nansel et al., 2001). It should be seen as an indicator of risk of various mental disorders in adolescence (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, Rimpela, 2000).

Given the concurrent behavioural and emotional difficulties associated with bullying,

as well as the potential long-term negative outcomes, the issue of bullying deserves serious attention, both for future research and preventive intervention (Nansel et al., 2001).

High-level forms of violence such as assault and murder usually receive most media attention, but lower-level forms of violence such as bullying have only by the 2000s started to be addressed by researchers, parents and guardians, and authority figures (Witted and Dupper, 2005). In Nigeria, interpersonal relationship among secondary school students is gradually being threatened by deviant behaviours such as bullying. As Umoh (2000) has noted, cases of bullying have been reported in many schools in Nigeria but the deviant act is not usually given the desirable attention.

Bullying has been described as a form of deviant behaviour that is usually ignored by many teachers, counsellors and school administrators because of its silent but adverse effect. Some school personnel even see it as not a serious problem and consequently pay little or no attention to the behaviour (Asonihare, 1998; Idowu and Yahaya, 2006).

On the risk factors for bullying, Swearer Napolitano (2011) noted that no individual exists in isolation. We are all products of the interaction between our biology and our environment. According to her, individuals exist within multiple environments: home, school, neighbourhood, church, community, and society. Within the interaction between individuals and these environments are risk factors for bullying and victimisation. She opined that it is important to keep in mind that these factors do not exist in isolation, and there is no one single causal factor for bullying. It is the interaction between these multiple contexts defined as the social-ecology in which bullying and victimisation unfold (Swearer Napolitano, 2011).

However, among other factors, classroom characteristics have been found to have a relationship with bullying behaviour.

According to Swearer Napolitano (2011), schools are comprised of classrooms and it stands to reason that healthy classroom environments will have less bullying and victimisation. However, there are four classroom characteristics that have been found to be associated with greater levels of bullying and victimisation: (1) negative peer friendships, (2) poor teacher-student relationships, (3) lack of self-control, and (4) poor problem-solving among students (Doll, Song, Champion, and Jones, 2011, cited in Swearer Napolitano, 2011).

Furthermore, research shows that bullies may be inclined toward negativity and dismal academic performance. A typical bully has trouble resolving problems with others and also has trouble academically. He or she usually has negative attitudes and beliefs about others, feels negatively toward himself or herself, comes from a family environment characterized by conflict and poor parenting, perceives school as negative and is negatively influenced by peers (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, Sadek, 2010).

Bullying is a common and potentially damaging form of violence among young people. Not only does bullying harm both its intended victims and the perpetrators, it also may affect the climate of schools and, indirectly, the ability of all students to learn to the best of their abilities. Thus, Ross (2006) concluded that school is supposed to be a place where students feel safe and secure and where they can count on being treated with dignity and respect. But, because of bullying students do not feel safe. According to him, bullying is a serious problem that can dramatically affect the ability of students to progress academically, socially and psychologically.

It is, therefore, against the above background that this study investigated the prevalence of bullying and its effects on students' emotional status and academic achievement among secondary school students in Abuja, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as the study area. The study population comprised of all the students currently attending any government owned or private-owned secondary schools located in the Study area. The study's sample comprised of a total of 120 senior secondary students randomly selected from four (4) secondary schools selected through a purposive sampling method from Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). The sampled schools include Two (2) private secondary schools (one located in Suburb, i.e. Nyayan area and the other located in the Abuja metropolis). Similarly, the other two (2) secondary schools selected were government (public) owned schools (one located in the suburb, i.e. Nyayan area and the other located in the Abuja metropolis).

The structured self administered questionnaire method was used for collection of the needed data from the consented participants, having obtained oral approval from the respective school managements, to carry out this study in the selected schools. The respondents were allowed to sit in a manner of examination mode and then were handed over the questionnaires. They were allowed to seek clarifications on any question they found "difficult" to understand. Data obtained for this study were processed using statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16, while simple percentages and frequency distribution tables were used for descriptive analysis.

Results

Socio-Demographic Data

Table 1 shows the sex (gender), age, class, religion and ethnicity of the respondents. On sex, the respondents were distributed equally representing 50 percent (60) of males and 50 percent (60) of females. Whereas their age revealed that 65.8 percent (79 respondents) were between the ages of 12 and 15 years, while 32.5

percent (39 respondents) were between the ages of 16 and 18 years, and 1.7 percent (2 respondents) were above 18 years. As regards the respondents' classes, they were distributed evenly with 33.3 percent (40 respondents) for SS1, while SS2 also represented 33.3 percent (40 respondents) and another 33.3 percent (40 respondents) for SS3. Furthermore, respondents' religious beliefs showed that 85 percent (102 respondents) practiced Christianity, while 13.3 percent (16 respondents) practiced Islam, and only 1.2 percent (2 respondents) practiced African traditional religion. As regards their ethnicity, 31.7 percent (38 respondents) were Ibo, while those from other ethnic backgrounds different from the commonly referred to as three major ethnic groups (that is Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Ibo) represented 30 percent (36 respondents); Yoruba represented 25 percent (30 respondents), and Hausa/Fulani respondents were only 13.7 percent (16 respondents).

Perceptions of what Bullying is

Table 2 shows what the respondents regarded bullying to mean. About 92.5 percent (111 respondents) perceived bullying as hitting, punching, or kicking someone. Whereas, 5 percent (6 respondents) did not regard bullying as hitting, punching or kicking another person while 1.7 percent (2 respondents) did not choose any option and 0.8 percent (1 respondent) was not sure whether bullying involves hitting, punching, or kicking someone.

Bullying as exclusion, shunning, or denial: about 75 percent (90 respondents) perceived it as that, while 19.2 percent (23 respondents) did not see it that way. However, 5 percent (6 respondents) were not sure whether bullying could involve exclusion, shunning and denial. While 0.8 percent (1 respondent) did not choose any option.

Bullying involves name-calling and rumor: about 80 percent (96 respondents) perceived it

that way, however, 19.2 percent (23 respondents) did not see it that way, and 0.8 percent (1 respondent) was not sure.

Bullying involves threats and intimidation; about 88.3 percent (106 respondents) saw it that way; 10 percent (12 respondents) did not see it that way, while 1.7 percent (2 respondents) were not sure.

Experience of bullying

Table 3 shows the respondents' experiences regarding bullying, whether they have bullied someone (as bullies), or they have been bullied (as victims); or whether they were both bullies and victims at the same time, or whether they were neither bullies nor victims of bullying. However, the findings revealed that 48.3 percent (58 respondents) were both bullies and victims (that is, they have bullied and have been bullied), while 26.7 percent (32 respondents) were neither bully nor victims. At least, 17.5 percent (21 respondents) have been bullied only, while 6.7 percent (8 respondents) have bullied only. Only one respondent (0.8 percent) did not indicate any option.

Perceptions of the effects of bullying on students' emotional status

Table 4 shows the respondents' levels of agreement with the effects of bullying on the students' emotional status. However, to know whether bullying negatively affects the emotional status of the bullies (perpetrators of bullying), 33.3 percent (40 respondents) strongly agreed that bullying has negative effect on the emotional status of the bullies; 26.7 percent (32 respondents) only agreed; 16.7 percent (20 respondents) disagreed; 10.8 percent (13 respondents) strongly disagreed, and another 10.8 percent (13 respondents) were undecided whether bullying has negative effect on the emotional status of the bullies. However, 1.7 percent (2 respondents) did not indicate any response.

On the other hand, the result on whether bullying negatively affects the emotional status

of the bullied (the students who were victims of bullying) showed that 44.2 percent (53 respondents) strongly agreed that bullying has negative effects on the emotional status of the bullied; 34.2 percent (41 respondents) agreed; 10.8 percent (13 respondents) were undecided; 8.3 percent (10 respondents) disagreed; 1.7 percent (2 respondents) strongly disagreed that bullying has negative effects on the emotional status of the bullied. However, 0.8 percent (1 respondent) did not indicate any response.

Perceptions of the effect of bullying on students' academic achievement

Table 5 shows the respondents' levels of agreement with the effects of bullying on the students' academic achievement. Firstly, to know whether bullying negatively affects academic achievement of the bullies (perpetrators of bullying), 30 percent (36 respondents) strongly agreed that bullying has negative effects on the academic achievement of the bullies; another 30 percent (36 respondents) agreed; 20 percent (24 respondents) disagreed; 10.8 percent (13 respondents) were undecided; and 9.2 percent (11 respondents) strongly disagreed.

On the other hand, to know whether bullying negatively affects the academic achievement of the bullied (the students who were victims of bullying), 38.3 percent (46 respondents) strongly agreed that bullying has negative effects on the academic achievement of the bullied (victims); 37.5 percent (45 respondents) agreed; 10.8 percent (13 respondents) disagreed; 8.3 percent (10 respondents) were undecided; 4.2 percent (5 respondents) strongly disagreed that bullying has negative effects on the academic achievement of the bullied (victims), while 0.8 percent (1 respondent) did not indicate any response.

Prevention of bullying in school

Table 6 shows the respondents' perceptions on the role of school in prevention of bullying. About 72.5 percent (87 respondents) believed

that school has a higher role to play; 21.7 percent (26 respondents) believed the school has a moderate role; 5.8 percent (7 respondents) indicated that school has little role to play in prevention of bullying.

Discussions

The study aimed at investigating bullying and its effects on emotional status and academic achievement among secondary schools students in Abuja, Nigeria. Most of the respondents were within the age range of 12 and 18 years (65.8 percent). This is a true reflection of secondary school age in Nigeria. Majority of the respondents were Christians (85 percent). This, therefore, could be a reflection of the favourable disposition of Christians towards western education.

The respondents perceived bullying to mean: hitting, punching or kicking (92.5 percent); threats and intimidation (88 percent), name-calling, rumour, or taunting (80 percent), and exclusion, shunning or denial (75 percent). Thus, according to Nansel et al. (2001), bullying may be physical or psychological, and the aggressive behaviour may be verbal (e.g., name-calling, threats), physical (e.g., hitting), or psychological (e.g., rumors, shunning/exclusion). Similarly, Pepler and Criag (2000) have identified five major forms of bullying, such as physical violence and attacks; verbal taunts name-calling and put downs; threat and intimidation; extortioner stealing (of money or other possessions) and exclusion from peer group.

Practice of bullying among the respondents of this study was reported, as 48.3 percent reported that they have been both bullies (people who bully another) and victims (receivers of bullying) at one point in time. Similarly, study by Ohanaka and Okobia (2011) investigating the prevalence of bullying among secondary

schools in Benin City, found the highest prevalence of bullying in mixed school.

Bullying, as perceived by the respondents, has negative effects on emotional status and academic achievement of both the bully (perpetrator) and the bullied (victim). In this regard, more than half of the respondents (60 percent) agreed that bullying negatively affects emotional status of the bully (perpetrator), and overwhelming majority (78.3 percent) also agreed that bullying affects the victim's emotional status negatively. Thus, Nansel et al. (2001) found that bullies, those bullied, and individuals reporting both bullying and being bullied all demonstrated poorer psychosocial adjustment than noninvolved youth... Poorer relationships with classmates and increased loneliness, on the other hand, were associated with both being bullied and coincident bullying/being bullied. According to them ability to make friends was negatively related to being bullied. In the same vein, Rigby (2000) found that the mental health of school children can be undermined by repeated bullying at school.

Furthermore, in this study, majority (60 percent) of the respondents agreed that bullying negatively affects the bully's (perpetrator's) academic achievement. Also, overwhelming majority (75.8 percent) agreed that bullying negatively affects the victim's academic achievement. Supporting this finding, Nansel et al. (2001) found in their study that persons who bullied others showed poorer school adjustment, both in terms of academic achievement and perceived school climate. Also, Ross (2006) concluded that school bullying is a serious personal, social and educational problem that impacts a substantial portion of school children.

Regarding the role of the school in prevention of

bullying, it is found that school has higher role to play in prevention of bullying among students in school. Over 72.5 percent of the respondents agreed to this. Thus, as Salawu (2003) has noted, school plays a crucial role in the socialization of children.

Conclusion

This paper is a report of a study undertaken to investigate bullying in secondary schools in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) of the federal capital territory (FCT) with the intent of examining its prevalence, and effects on emotional status and academic achievement of the students.

Bullying is a common psychosocial practice among most secondary school students. It involves physical violence (hitting, kicking, punching), verbal attack (such as name calling) threats and intimidation; exclusion from peer group. The devastating effects of bullying cannot be overemphasized. It can result in physical injuries on the part of persons (the bullies and the bullied) involved in bullying; emotional breakdown and negative consequences on students' academic achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Since school has a very significant role to play in prevention of bullying, it is crucial for school to devise strategies of tackling this menace by involving the students in wholesome activities like class participation, recreational activities, and counselling.
2. Victims of bullying should be supported through counselling.
3. Parents should also create time for their children at home. They should also enquire into the behaviour of their

children in school.

4. Bullying should be prohibited and entrenched in the school rules and regulations, wherein if there is any infraction; such a student or group of students should be punished appropriately.
5. Finally, since school bullying is a serious problem, it is also recommended that further research on this social phenomenon should be encouraged.

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Appendix

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Sex, Age, Class, Religion and Ethnicity

Variables	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
Sex		
Male	60	50
Female	60	50
Age		
12-15	79	65.8
16-18	39	32.5
19 and Above	2	1.7
Class		
SS1	40	33.3
SS2	40	33.3
SS3	40	33.3
Religion		
Christianity	102	85
Islam	16	13.3
African Traditional Religion	2	1.7
Ethnicity		
Yoruba	30	25
Hausa/Fulani	16	13.3
Ibo	38	31.7
Others	36	30

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2014

Table 2 Respondents' perception of what bullying is.

Variables (Types of Bullying)	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
Hitting, punching, kicking		
Yes	111	92.5
No	6	5
Not Sure	1	0.8
Missing Value	2	1.7
Exclusion, shunning, denial		
Yes	90	75
No	23	19.2
Not Sure	6	5
Missing value	1	0.8
Name calling, rumour, taunting		
Yes	96	80
No	23	19.2
Not Sure	1	0.8
Threats, intimidation		
Yes	106	88.3
No	12	10
Not Sure	2	1.7

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2014

Table 3: Respondents' Experiences of Bullying

Experience with Bullying	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
I have bullied	8	6.7
I have been bullied	21	17.5
I have both bullied and been bullied	58	48.3
None of the above	12	10
Missing value	1	0.8

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2014

Table 4. Respondents levels of agreement with the effect of Bullying on the students' Emotional status

Effects of Bullying on Students' emotional Status	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
Negatively Affects the Emotional Status of the Bullies (the Students who bully others)		
Strongly Agree	40	33.3
Agree	32	26.7
Undecided	13	10.8
Disagree	20	16.7
Strongly Disagree	13	10.8
Missing Value	2	1.7
Negatively affects the Emotional Status of the Victims (the bullied Students)		
Strongly agree	53	44.2
Agree	41	34.2
Undecided	13	10.8
Disagree	10	8.3
Strongly disagree	2	1.7
Missing Value	1	0.8

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2014

Table 5: Respondents' levels of agreement with the effect of Bullying on the students' academic achievement

Effects of Bullying on Students' Academic Achievement	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
Negatively Affects Academic Achievement of the Bullies (the Students who bully others)		
Strongly Agree	36	30
Agree	36	30
Undecided	13	10.8
Disagree	24	20
Strongly Disagree	11	9.2
Negatively affects the Academic Achievement of the Victims (the bullied students)		
Strongly Agree	46	38.3
Agree	45	37.5
Undecided	10	8.3
Disagree	13	10.8
Strongly Disagree	5	4.2
Missing Value	1	0.8

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2014

Table 6: Perceptions on the role of school in prevention of Bullying in school

Role Players in the prevention of Bullying	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage
School		
High	87	72.5
Moderate	26	21.7
Low	7	5.8

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2014.