



Prevalence of bullying among secondary school students: A case study of three schools in Obio Akpor Lga of rivers state

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Abstract

There is a global outcry on the incidence of school bullying and its consequences on the social climate and academic life of students. This study seeks to determine the prevalence of school bullying in selected schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The survey design was adopted using 3 secondary schools for data collection on bullying experience, forms of bullying, the impact of bullying and coping strategies among male and female students. A sample of 1762 students was used; out of which 1330 have been bullied. School Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire was completed by the students. Data analysis adopted frequency, percentage, and mean. Results from descriptive and inferential statistics show that more female students are bullied and more male student are bullies. Further results show that harmful name calling as a form of bullying ranked topmost, followed by an intimidating warning and ridiculing. Bullying was found to affect students' low academic performance and loss of concentration in learning and to cope students adopt a strategy of concealing to self and telling a friend(s) and teacher(s). The study, therefore, called the schools, administrators, teachers, PTA executives, education secretaries/directors and parent to put a number of intervention programmes and policy to reduce the incidence of bullying if not to completely eliminate it in secondary schools.

Keywords: prevalence, school, bullying

Introduction

Globally, education focuses on the overall development of the human beings who constitute the citizens of nations. Hence the first goal of Nigerian education as enshrined in the section 1 number 6(a) of the National Policy on Education (2013) [6] p.2), is to bring about the Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen. The inculcation of moral rectitude and sense of empathy are paramount in the education system going by the goals of the National Policy on Education. This is why much research attention is being paid to the issue of moral and character development among our learners at the various levels of education. The fact remains that education that fails to mould the moral and character of learners is a failed one. Every student is expected to learn how to live harmoniously with others and not to constitute a threat to the wellbeing of the community.

School bullying has been observed as a serious social and moral problem facing our young people in secondary schools. This menace has existed in school and the society for quite a long time. In the view of Owuamanam and Makinwa (2015) [14], the menace has probably been ignored or regarded as a normal rite of passage for children, especially in secondary school level. Older Nigerians who attended secondary schools some decades ago see it as part of childhood experience which every Nigerian child must learn to tolerate as part of the process of growing up (Obidi, 1990) [13]. It should always be tackled in order to have a harmonious social atmosphere where teaching and learning will thrive.

Bullying has been defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as a form of aggressive behaviour in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying can also be described as the repeated antisocial behaviour of harming or injuring a weaker or smaller person by a socially maladjusted individual. Konstantine (2010) [11] defined bullying as the intentional, systematic and unjustified aggressive behaviour that is exercised by a student or group of students more powerful and physically or psychologically towards another or group of students less powerful. Smith (1991) [18] described it as an act of unprovoked attack that causes hurt of psychological, social or physical nature. In other words, the action is not necessarily provoked by the victim. Bullying is actually a form of aggression and it is not accidental. It is intended to harm or injure the powerless. Sometimes, it can be distinguished from the usual conflict between children in that bullying behaviour is a combination of aggression and power.

Bullying is a primitive and nasty behaviour used to assert dominant at someone else's expense. It is known to have varying effects that are related to physical and emotional psychological consequences on victims and perpetrators, academic and school disruption and discomfort to school staff. Bullying leaves both the bully and the bullied with serious psychological distress, even though it often appears to only affect the bullied. As an antisocial behaviour, it is treated as a punishable act.

Bullying is repetitive in nature. This means that the bully

habitually and repeatedly carries it out on both old and new victims. It is usually not pleasing to the bullied due to the physical and emotional trauma and distress it inflicts on him or her. Lee (2017) ^[12] identified some forms of bullying behaviour such as issuing of threat, stealing, injuring someone, destroying of property, issuing an embarrassing statement, peddling false rumour against another person, humiliating another person, teasing, name calling, sending an abusive text message, physical attack and several other dehumanizing actions against people. He called on parents and teachers not to ignore early-childhood bullying, thinking that it is mere kids' way.

Research works on bullying have identified the different dimension of bullying. They include Physical bullying, verbal bullying, cyberbullying and psychological (emotional) bullying. Physical bullying involves the inflicting of injury and physical harm on the victim by way of slapping, kicking, stoning, flogging. Verbal bullying involves the use of utterance to coax, embarrass or insult another person, thereby causing the victim much distress. Cyberbullying involves the use of electronic media such as computer or cell phones and social media platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram etc to intimidate, harass or threaten another person. Psychological bullying involves hurting and causing damage to the psyche or emotional well-being of the victim by spreading ridiculous rumours, intentionally ignoring and provoking the victim; and making fun of victims (Wikipedia, 2017) ^[21].

For the likelihood that victims may decide to conceal their bullying experience, Lee (2017) ^[12] posits that parents should be observant and closely monitor certain responses and reactions of their children in relation to school attendance. He noted that the awareness of the signs of bullying in the school by teachers, administrators and parents is very paramount. Common indicators of bullying in the life of a student identified by Lee (2017) ^[12] include child refusing to go to school, complaint of sickness, expression of unexplained anxiety, poor school performance, injuries in the body, report of a fight with peers. Bullying in schools has constituted clog to effective teaching and learning in Nigerian schools. It has normally started from the home and progressed in the schools. Research works have further shown that children involved in bullying, (the bullies, bully-victims or both) have less favourable views of school, feel less safe and less connected to their schools. Other symptoms are a student being found in a corner crying and student concealing secret and student experiencing frequent loss of valuable items.

However, in view of the possibility of teachers not knowing that bullying is going on in the school, Espelage (2017) ^[6] recommended that teachers should understand what bullying is, get closer to students, create time for the children, be humorous to students, be vigilant and respond to every case of bullying. The school could also ensure that perpetrators are punished and students are fully informed about bullying. More so, the school could operate effective counselling services as well as maintain school code of conduct.

Despite what school management and teachers could do to curb the incidences of bullying in schools, students also have some roles to play. They could ensure that desolate areas of the school are avoided, display boldness and self-confidence

when relating with fellow students, especially those with bullying tendency, be outspoken and always report any case of bullying. Gordon (2016) ^[7] strongly believes that bullying persists in all schools, though at different degrees, despite what any school does to eliminate it. He noted that bullies capitalize on insecure body language, fear and low self-esteem of the vulnerable ones. According to Gordon (2016) ^[7], the way and manner students respond, speak up and stand tall help to check bullies' actions towards them. He suggested practical ways students could avert being bullied. They are to:

1. Always maintain eye contact when facing fellow students
2. Maintain boldness and self-confidence before peers
3. Avoid making victim thinking
4. Build high self-esteem and be assertive
5. Be aware of bullying zones in the school
6. Avoid self-blame and self-pity for being bullied.

It is instructive to note that effort to combat school bullying should not reside with teachers and the school only, parents also have a significant role to play. Lee (2017) ^[12] and Gordon (2017) ^[8] have noted what parents can do in the management of school bullying. These include:

1. Nurture empathy and emotional intelligence in children
2. Teach children how to take responsibility for their actions
3. Train children on how to deal with his challenges
4. Take the bullied child to a counsellor
5. Set a good example of how to tackle a case of bullying.
6. Begin at home to educate the child about bullying
7. Learn the warning signs
8. Instil healthy habits in the child
9. Become familiar with school policies
10. Spend time at school
11. Interact with other parents
12. Encourage the Parents Association to sponsor anti-bullying programmes.

So many cases of school dropout, truancy, school anxiety and academic underachievement have been reported by researchers and school operators. Most of these challenges, however, seem to have some level of connection with bullying among the students. It is against this background that this work was designed to determine the prevalence of bullying among students in selected secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. This study further sought the forms of bullying students experienced and the effect of bullying on the students.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study. They were stated thus:

1. What is the percentage of male and female students that have been bullied?
2. What is the frequency of the various forms of bullying?
3. What is the percentage of the various impacts of bullying on students?
4. How did victims of bullying manage their bullying experiences?

Method

The study applied the descriptive survey design. A descriptive

survey design was adopted to describe and draw inference on secondary school students' bullying behaviour in their schools. The population consisted of all students in secondary school in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Questionnaires were randomly administered to students in the three schools used for the study. The study adopted random sampling technique. The instrument was constructed by the researcher and given to two test construction experts for face

and content validation. It was tagged: School Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (SBBQ). The instrument had two sections. Section A elicited demographic data such as sex and class. Section B had research variables on issues relating to school bullying. Research assistants were employed by the researchers in administering the instrument. After retrieving the questionnaires from the respondents, 1,762 students, frequency percentage and mean were used to analyze the data.

Results

Table 1: Percentage of Male and Female students that have been bullied; and are Bullies

Sex	Number Bullied	N= 1762 Percentage Bullied	Number Not Bullied	Percentage Not Bullied	Number and Percentage of Bullies
Male	431	24.5%	180	10.2%	791 (59.5%)
Female	899	51.0%	252	14.3%	539 (40.5%)
Total	1330	75.55	432	24.5%	

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistical data of male and female students who have been bullied and those who are bullies. 431 male students representing 24.5% of the bullied and 899 female students representing 51.0% are victims of bullying. Also, 180 male students representing 10.2% and 252

female students representing 14.3% have not experienced bullying in school. From the responses of bullied students, 791 (59.5%) male students are bullies while 539 (40.5%) are female students.

Table 2: Frequency of the Various Forms of Bullying in Secondary Schools

Form of Bullying	Very Frequent	Moderately Frequent	Less Frequent	Never/Not at All	Calculated Mean	Cut off Mean	Decision
Harmful name calling	575	180	359	216	2.84	2.5	Moderately frequent
Ridiculing	286	360	395	289	2.48	2.5	Less frequent
Intimidating warning	360	374	272	324	2.58	2.5	Moderately frequent
Pushing	430	360	171	369	2.64	2.5	Moderately frequent
Flogging	356	162	449	363	2.38	2.5	Less frequent
Social exclusion/ ostracizing	143	216	360	611	1.92	2.5	Less frequent
Extortion (Money)	288	72	503	467	2.14	2.5	Less frequent
Beating	274	137	474	445	2.18	2.5	Less frequent
Destruction of personal belonging	268	109	297	656	1.99	2.5	Less frequent

From table 2, 575 and 180 students have very frequently and moderately experienced harmful name-calling respectively; while others fall into the categories of less frequent and never experienced bullying. The mean score of 2.84 indicates that harmful name calling as a form of bullying is moderately frequent among secondary school students. 430 and 360 students have very frequently and moderately experienced pushing bullying respectively; while others fall into the categories of less frequent and never experienced bullying. The mean score of 2.64 indicates that pushing as a form of

bullying is moderately frequent among secondary school students. The data further shows that 360 and 374 students have very frequently and moderately experienced intimidating warning respectively, the rest do not. The mean score of 2.58 indicates that intimidating warning as a form of bullying is moderately frequently among secondary school students. Ridiculing, flogging, beating, extortion (money), destruction of personal belongings and social exclusion/ostracizing as forms of bullying are less frequent among secondary school students.

Table 3: Percentage of the Various Impacts of Bullying on Students

Impact/Effect of Bullying	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Std. Dev.	Calculated Mean	Cut off Mean	Decision
1) Become afraid of going to school	129 (9.7%)	102 (7.7%)	406 (30.5%)	693 (52.1%)	0.96	1.75	2.5	Reject
2) Loss of concentration	385 (28.9%)	432 (32.5%)	384 (28.9%)	129 (9.7%)	0.97	2.81	2.5	Accept
3) Low academic performance	468 (35.2%)	395 (29.7%)	287 (21.6%)	180 (13.5%)	1.06	2.87	2.5	Accept
4) Wanted to withdraw from school	79 (5.9%)	280 (21.1%)	285 (21.4%)	686 (51.6%)	0.97	1.81	2.5	Reject
5) Poor social adjustment in school	275 (20.7%)	197 (14.8%)	381 (28.6%)	477 (35.9%)	1.14	2.20	2.5	Reject

In table 3, students have 468 (35.2%) responses for “strongly agree” and 395 (29.7%) for “agree” with mean score 2.87 indicates that bullying causes low academic performance among secondary students. Similarly, 385 (28.9%) responses for “strongly agree” and 432 (32.5%) for “agree” with a mean

score of 2.81 indicates that bullying causes loss of concentration in learning among secondary. Poor social adjustment, want to withdraw from school and become afraid of going to school with mean scores of 2.20, 1.81 and 1.75 respectively, indicate that they are not the major impact of bullying.

Table 4: Ways Victims of Bullying Manage Bullying Experience

Managing Bullying Experience	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Std. Dev.	Calculated Mean	Cut off Mean	Decision
Concealing to self	378	531	260	161	0.97	2.85	2.5	Accept
Telling a friend(s) about it	200	678	258	194	0.91	2.66	2.5	Accept
Reporting to teacher(s)	385	336	333	276	1.11	2.62	2.5	Accept
Reporting to parents	304	305	330	391	1.13	2.39	2.5	Reject
Retaliating	344	297	231	458	1.20	2.40	2.5	Reject

Table 4 shows ways victims of bullying manage their bullying experience. Responses of students show that majority of the victims of bullying cope with their bullying experience by concealing it themselves, telling a friend(s) about it and reporting to the teacher(s) as indicated by mean scores 2.85, 2.66 and 2.62 respectively. Other ways of managing bullying which is considered minor in the study are retaliating and reporting to parent(s) as indicated by mean scores 2.40 and 2.39.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results show that more female students are bullied than male students. On the contrary, more males are bullies than female students. Consequently, there is an inverse relationship between the number of bullies and victims of bullying along gender line. The male and female students in the selected schools have experienced bullying with their bullies, whether bullied by more male students than female students, clearly indicating that 791 male students and 539 female students are bullies. The number shows that 59.5% estimated bullies are male students while 40.5% are female students. Results show that more female students are bullied than male students. On the contrary, more males are bullies than female students. The results further show that out a sample of 1762 students, 1330 representing 75.5% of the sample were victims of bullying. Only a minimal number 432 (24.5%) were exempted. This study finding agrees with that of Kabriya (2015) ^[10], that female students are more affected by bullying than the male students. The U.S department of health and human service (n.d) in its key research finding on a study across 40 countries established that boys are more likely to bully others than girls. Bullying is a common occurrence among secondary school students as approximately 1 in 4 was a victim of bullying with male and female likely to be bullied based on a survey of bullying in Singapore secondary schools (Children Society, 2006) ^[4]. Omoteso (2010) ^[14] also agrees that about 88.1% of students in the secondary school are victims of bullying.

The result shows that three forms of bullying are moderately frequent among the students out of nine forms investigated in the study. A critical observation shows that harmful name-calling, pushing and ridiculing are predominant among the students. The means scores of other forms of bullying and frequency distribution reveal that they also occur in secondary schools as students ridicule themselves and form cliques at the exclusion of others. Salleh and Zainal (2014) ^[16] also agree with the study that verbal bullying which includes harmful name-calling and the intimidating warning was the most widely performed type of bullying among secondary school students in Malaysia. Jan and Hussain (2015) ^[9] also found that insult, name-calling and nicknames were among the most common and frequent forms of bullying in schools.

Results show that bullying experience whether as victims or

bullies, has a serious effect on students' involvement in academic activities, and the study shows that this affects students' academic performance and concentration in learning. In line with this result Ballard, Tucky and Remley (1999) ^[3] also affirmed that students who are targeted by bullies often have difficulty concentrating on their school work and their academic performance tends to move from "marginal to poor". Al-Raqqad, Al-Bourini, Al-Talahin and Arank (2017) ^[1] found that school bullying affects academic achievement of the victims who suffer from these phenomena and at the same time affects the bullies themselves. It important to note that bullies are not left out as they display some form of hyperactive, disruptive impulsive and other anti-social behaviours that may affect their psyche and involvement in school activities. However, victims of bullying do experience such other effects as a poor social adjustment in school, tendency to withdraw from school and becoming afraid of going to school based on the study which can be inferred on all secondary schools in the area.

The result indicates that students who are victims of bullying conceal their experiences to themselves and sometimes tell their friend(s). In order to enjoy the academic friendly interpersonal interaction, a good number of the victims of bullying tend to develop ways of coping with bullying in schools. Part of the reasons for these well thought ways or behaviour is to avoid further victimization by the bullies. Here student does believe that they would rely on themselves to solve problems than any other approach which in this case include concealing it to themselves. This is what Donoghue Almeida, Brandwein, Rochas and Callahan (2014) ^[5] referred to as the adaptive strategy of self-reliance as they found them as more favourable responses. But other findings as that of this study have also given premium to the telling it to someone whether parents or teacher with the notion that reported bullying activities help put the bullies in the check. Sittichai and Smith (2018) ^[18] reported that the most effective and recommended coping strategies for the victim of bullying is telling a teacher or parents, especially in cases of traditional bullying involving physical and emotional victimization. Whereas victims do little thing to maintain decorum in school and co-existence of teacher and student, among students, Sharp and Smith (1994) ^[17] affirm that schools which concentrate on a whole-school anti-bully policy; and which introduce a variety of interventions are more successful in reducing levels of bullying.

Suggestions

It should be borne in mind that bullying is a recurring experience in school and cannot be completely eliminated. Therefore, there are proactive and interim measures expected to prevent, contain and ameliorate the occurrence of bullying incidence in our schools. There are proactive measures

schools should take to prevent or ameliorate the occurrence of bullying incidents in the school.

1. Schools and subject teachers in core arts (areas) should teach and expose students to the behaviour and activities associated with bullying through the avenue of organized talk/gathering.
2. Schools should operate effective counselling programme that will attend to both the bullies and the bullied.
3. Schools should create fora for one on one interaction that will involve form teachers, students and parents to check bullying tendencies and foster sound social interaction among students.
4. When any case of bullying is reported, the school should ensure that perpetrators are appropriately punished.
5. Schools should keep complaint boxes around the school for students to make their independent report, and also select spies/informants that will effectively relate with the administrators and counsellors.
6. Schools should regularly organize educative programme where issues of bullying are mainly presented by clergies, PTA chairman and education secretaries/zonal directors.

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