

Impact of Bullying on Psychosocial Adjustment of Secondary School Students: Implications for Sociology of Education and Educational Psychology

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of students in Educational District II of Lagos State. A descriptive research design was adopted. Using stratified random sampling technique, 270 respondents were selected from the study population as sample size for the study. The research instrument, a self-constructed questionnaire titled; Impact of Bullying on Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (IBPSAQ) was used in the collection of data, which was validated and its reliability established in a pilot study ($r=0.76$). Four hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. Chi-Square, T-test and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical tools were employed in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that bullying has significant impact on students' anxiety and peer isolation. Also, there is a significant gender difference in bullying behaviour among students and there is a significant age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of students. The study hence recommended that; there should be school-wide education, training and bullying prevention programs that helps create an awareness of bullying. The schools and the home should work in synergy to collaboratively instill good values in their children/students. The school should provide counselling and support for students at risk of being involved in bullying. The school should develop an anti-bullying disciplinary committee to deal with the problem. The victims of bullying and bystanders should be encouraged to report bullying cases to school authority as soon as it is experienced.

Keywords: Bullying, Psychosocial adjustment, Social isolation, Students.

Introduction

The school is an institution established for the formal education of the citizens of any country. Students acquire relevant knowledge, skills, positive behavior, competencies, values and abilities for useful living in the society. However, while at school, students socialize with each other as they work in groups for their positive development. Positive development of students morally, socially, intellectually, emotionally and physically cannot take place effectively if the learners do not see the school environment as friendly, safe and secure. However, according to Fajoju (2009), only few students or pupils can blend harmoniously with their school mates without experiencing violence in school. Although the objectives of schooling are primarily academic in nature, schools are agents of socialization that not only teach subject based knowledge and life skills but also social skills through interactions with teachers, staff, and other students.

The school being a social institution hence paves way for interaction between students. This interaction however sometimes becomes complex and certain delinquent behavior begin to surface

such as bullying. It therefore becomes imperative for students to adjust psychologically and socially to this bullying behavior that emanates as a result of their relationship and interaction with their peers in school. Bullying in schools is a problem that can have some negative consequences for the general school climate and for the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. Bullying can also have adverse lifelong consequences both for students who bully and for their victims. Bullying has been understood as a problem in the peer relations characterized by the imbalance of power between the parties, by the intentionality and repetitiveness of aggressive acts.

A study by Egbochuku (2007) among students revealed that four in five participants (78%) reported being bullied and 85% admitted to bullying others at least once. In the survey by the FME (2007), it was reported 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 (90%) than urban areas (79%). The data on psychological violence further revealed a

prevalence of 61% in the Southern and 38.7% in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

Consistent with Egbochuku (2007), Omoteso (2010), using a sample of 750 secondary school students from Osun state found that overall 67.2% of the students had experienced bullying. Physical bullying was most prevalent with 46.5% of the sample admitting to being bullied physically. The finding also showed that victims were more likely to be fearful and exhibit symptoms of depression. In a later study of 412 secondary students in Lagos state, Adeosun (2015) found that more than half of their sample (56.8%) had been bullied within the month preceding the survey.

In Nigeria, bullying represents a significant problem in many schools since the tendency for aggression, attention and recognition by bullies has long been a major concern for educators.

However, while there have been considerable strides by school administrators, teachers and other stakeholders to make school environments safer for children, the way bullying is conceptualized and assessed in the nation, remains an important factor in the development of mitigation strategies.

It is in the light of the above this study examines the impact of bullying on the psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Statement of the Problem

Many people often remember their moments in school as one of the most memorable and happiest periods of their existence. However, in schools around the world, there are young people who are subjected to verbal and physical abuse, whose freedom of association are restricted as well as those who are insidiously branded as untouchables! More often than not teachers and parents hardly know exactly what happens to the students or their wards in the hands of their peers, which is a serious cause of concern.

The general attitude and perception of people towards aggressive behaviours in the past has been to glance over as an incidence which everyone must experience on their academic journey and as they grow from childhood to

adulthood. The rate of aggressive victimization among secondary school students is becoming so alarming and a menace to the society. Incidences of disturbing school bullying both locally and internationally are daily being reported in the news and print media systems. The school that is supposed to be a place where students should feel safe and secure has unfortunately become unsafe for the children who are being victimized. The danger this possess for the overall wellbeing of bully victims can only be imagined! There is need for a deeper understanding regarding the impact of bullying on overall wellbeing of students in order to reform home and school practices that put adolescents at risk. Thus, this study aims to fill a gap in research literature by examining the impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students in Educational District II of Lagos state.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine the impact of bullying on anxiety among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.
2. Determine the impact of bullying on peer isolation among junior secondary schools in Education District II of Lagos State.
3. Determine the gender difference in bullying behavior among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.
4. Determine the age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. There is no significant impact of bullying on anxiety among junior secondary

- school students in Education District II of Lagos State.
2. There is no significant impact of bullying on peer isolation among junior secondary schools in Education District II of Lagos State.
 3. There is no significant gender difference in bullying among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.
 4. There is no significant age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted in the study. The study sample comprised of 270 junior secondary school II students selected from the Educational District II of Lagos State by stratified random sampling technique. A total of 150 male and 120 female respondents were used as the sample size for the study. A self-designed questionnaire titled Impact of Bullying on Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (IBPAQ) which was validated and its reliability established through a pilot study ($r=0.76$). The instrument was administered on the respondents for data collection. Chi-square, T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tools were employed in testing the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant impact of bullying on anxiety in junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Table 1: Chi-square Analysis showing impact of bullying on anxiety among junior secondary school students.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>X²-Cal</i>	<i>X²-tab</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Bullying	159	16.09	4.88	1	31.69	9.48	0.05
Anxiety	111	12.16	11.24	92			
Total	270			93			

Significant at 0.05, df. = 1 and 92, X^2 cal = 31.69, X^2 tab = 9.48

Table 1: shows that the calculated X^2 - value 31.69 is greater than the X^2 tab value which is 9.48 given 1 and 92 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant impact of bullying on anxiety among junior secondary school students is rejected. Therefore, bullying has a significant impact on anxiety among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant impact of bullying on peer isolation in junior secondary schools in Education District II of Lagos State.

Table 2: Chi-square Analysis showing impact of bullying on peer isolation among junior secondary schools.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>X²-Cal</i>	<i>X²-tab</i>	<i>Stg.</i>
Bullying	143	26.55	4.26	1	22.246	9.488	0.05
Peer Isolation	127	22.06	3.25	86			
Total	270			87			

Significant at 0.05, df. = 1 and 86, $X^2_{cal} = 22.246$, $X^2_{tab} = 9.488$

Table 2 shows that the calculated X^2 - value 22.246 is greater than the X^2_{table} value which is 9.488 given 1 and 86 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant impact of

bullying on peer isolation among junior secondary school students is rejected. Therefore, bullying has a significant impact on peer isolation among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant gender difference in bullying behaviour among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Table 5: T-test Analysis showing gender difference in bullying behavior among junior secondary school students.

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>t-cal</i>	<i>t-critical</i>
Male	150	22.94	8.05	142	3.98	1.96
Female	120	16.41	4.75			
Total	270					

$P < 0.05$, df = 144, $t_{cal} = 3.98$, $t_{critical} = 1.96$

Table 3 shows that the calculated t - value 3.98 is greater than the critical t -value 1.96, given 142degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant gender

difference in bullying behaviour among junior secondary school students is rejected. Therefore, there is a gender difference in the involvement with bullying among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Table 6: One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students.

Variables	N	Mean	SD			
Age	270	29.36	7.43			
Bullying	118	27.09	8.75			
Psychosocial Adjustment	107	25.11	5.39			
Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Square	F-Cal	F-tab	Sig.
Between Groups	80.42	3	104.21	23.78	4.08	.000
Within Groups	461.45	186	30.35			
Total	541.87	189				

Significant at 0.05, df. = 3 and 186, *F-Cal* = 23.78, *F-tab* = 4.08

Table 4 shows that the calculated F- value of 23.78 is greater than the table value 4.08 given 3 and 186 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment among junior secondary school students is rejected. Therefore, age has a significant impact on bullying and psychosocial adjustment among junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one states that there is no significant influence of bullying on anxiety in junior secondary school students in Education District II of Lagos State. This hypothesis was rejected as their finding revealed a significant impact of bullying on anxiety among junior secondary schools in Education District II of Lagos State. Most victims of bullying exhibit fear and worry even while they are in school leading to even loss of concentration in class... This finding supports Campbell (2013) who opined that there is a synergy between aggressive behaviour and social anxiety. Full change and Furlong (2016) likewise

revealed that increased frequency of victimization increases the tendencies for other constructs such as anxiety disorders and depression. Findings of Reiss and McNally (2001), further opined that being a bully victim is one of many causes of psychopathological symptoms and may cause the generation of anxiety sensitivity in adolescents.

Hypothesis two states that there is no significant impact of bullying on peer isolation among junior secondary school students. The findings from this study revealed however that bullying has a significant impact on peer isolation among junior secondary school students. This may be due to the fact that bully victims do not make friends easily in school because of the denigration they often experience and may hence choose to isolate themselves than socialize. This finding corroborates Garbarino and deLara, (2002), who emphasized that peer isolation is itself a problem as victims of bullying can easily become disconnected from the moderating forces of mainstream society. They further explained that peer isolation can take the form of ignoring someone, openly excluding or isolating a child, rallying other students to dislike a child and usually name calling and rumor spreading can lead to this

exclusion and isolation however victims of bullying are usually faced with loneliness and depression from being isolated by their peers.

Hypothesis three states that there is no significant gender difference in bullying behavior among junior secondary school students. The findings from this study revealed that there is a significant gender difference in bullying behavior among junior secondary school students. Male students engage and experience bullying more often than female students which may be due to the fact that the male students tend to get involved in violent and aggressive behavior in school than their female counterparts. The finding supports Hussein (2010) who through his research provided the understanding on the effect of gender difference in bullying and found that the males are more bullied than the female counterparts. Further studies by (Carrera and Fernandez, 2013; Due, 2005; and Hussein, 2010) establishes that school-related bullying results in sexual, physical, and/or psychological harm to girls and boys. All of these forms of violence, including bullying, should be conceptualized as gendered, as they are affected by gender-related stereotypes that persist in society. For example, males and females are bullied at similar rates (Carrera and Fernandez, 2013; Due, 2005; Hussein, 2010), but boys are more often perpetrators and victims than girls (Hussein, 2010) and the type of bullying that females and males experience are different. Girls more often experience psychological bullying (Carrera-Fernandez 2013), while boys more often experience physical bullying (Roman and Murillo, 2011). According to Child Trends Databank (2016) males were likely to experience physical intimidation (e.g being hit, slapped, or pushed) but females however were more likely to be the targets of relational aggression such as teasing or emotional bullying such as name calling.

Hypothesis four states that there is no significant age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment of junior secondary school students. This hypothesis was rejected as the study found that age has a significant impact on bullying and psychosocial adjustment among junior secondary school students. Students experience bullying differently as they grow as students within the earlier ages are more prone to reporting bullying victimizations while older students who will

usually handle their bully themselves. This finding corroborates Alsaker and Valkanov (2001) who observed that bullying occurs during childhood and as early as at kindergarten age. Other researchers' contributions relating to this finding established that *age is an important risk factor for bullying and being bullied. Children in junior levels can report rates of bullying ranging up to 50% (Wolke, 2010). However, bullying in junior school is only minimally stable and is transient over time (Hanish and Guerra, 2004). These rates reduce remarkably as students get older (Rigby, 2006), probably due to the acquisition of more self-protective skills with age.* Also, the research findings by the US Department of Health and Human Services (2019), on the impact of age on bullying showed that an estimated 200 million children and youth around the world are being victimized by their peers. It is estimated that 10-15 % of children repeatedly bully others, and 10-15% of children are repeatedly bullied. Younger children in elementary and middle schools are more likely to bully others than older children in high school. Generally, there is a decrease in bullying as children grow older. Physical bullying declines with increase in age, while verbal, social bullying tend to increase

Implications for Sociology of Education.

In the application of sociological principles to education, teachers must be the vanguards of sustenance of the sociological ideals in the educational institutions. The principle of healthy human interactions is critical to the sustenance of the social system which embraces the school. Bullying in this study has been revealed to have some detrimental outcomes on the psychosocial adjustment of school adolescents. The network of human interactions within the school system, embracing the learners and teachers should foster social cohesion for conducive teaching-learning processes. Bullying stands in the way of achieving this objective and sociologists of education are expected to address this concern. Given that sociology of education tries to understand the problem of education from a sociological perspective, the field is critical to enthrone school discipline especially, curbing school bullying which has partly been traced to

societal causes. Sociology of education assists the teacher in describing, explaining and predicting human behaviours in the school, home or larger society arming him or her with the requisite coping strategies. Also, knowledge gained from the field helps to promote healthy social interactions and integration within the school system and by extension the larger society. Suffice it to say that keeping schools safe allows children to look forward to being in an encouraging environment that promotes social and creative learning. When their basic safety needs are not met, children are at risk for not feeling comfortable at school and they may remain on edge throughout the day.

Implications for Educational Psychology

Educational psychology involves scientific study of human learning from both cognitive and behavioural perspectives. In educational psychology and school discipline, it must be recalled that school discipline addresses school wide disciplinary issues be it the classroom or individual student needs with the intent to develop suitable interventions. Educational psychology will see beyond the normal schools' response to students' antisocial conducts which more often assume punitive approaches. Such approaches produce short-term fix to the problem and create even more antisocial problems. Educational psychologists would rather adopt the position of developing interventional approaches to improving school discipline which has profound lasting effects. This study has revealed that school bullying negatively impacts the psychological and social adjustments of school adolescents. Dealing with bullying in schools entails more than punishment as it is complex requiring developing student-discipline. This will require a pull of the classroom, school and community ecologies. This study has hence charged educational psychologists to develop suitable, lasting and easy-to use interventions to the problem of school bullying to mitigate its effects on the learners.

Conclusion.

This study concludes that bullying significantly impacts the psychosocial adjustment of secondary school students. Specifically, the findings revealed that bullying has significant impact on students' anxiety and peer isolation.

Also, there is a significant gender difference in bullying behaviour among students while there also exists a significant age impact of bullying on psychosocial adjustment among students. Given that students need a conducive school environment for their maximal cognitive, affective and psychomotor developments, bullying will definitely stand in the way of achieving such. Reducing and preventing bullying in schools is critical to all education stakeholders be it the policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents or community members. This study has hence proffered some solutions which when duly implemented will help to address the problem of school bullying and its attendant impact on the psychosocial adjustment of learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be school-wide education, training and bullying prevention programs that helps create an awareness of bullying.
2. The schools and home should work in synergy to collaboratively instill good values in their children/students.
3. The school should provide counselling and support for students at risk of being involved in bullying.
4. The school should develop an anti-bullying disciplinary committee that introduces some form of punishments for the bully.
5. The victims of bullying and bystanders should be encouraged to report bullying cases to school authority as soon as it is experienced.

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