

A Survey of “Bullying Traits” As Perceived By Schooling Adolescents in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify bullying traits and to determine the assessment techniques applicable for addressing the challenges of bullying among schooling adolescents. This study was guided by two research questions. Descriptive survey design was adopted. The sample consists of 150 schooling adolescents drawn from the south-east of Nigeria. Two instruments were developed by the researchers after extensive review of literature. The instruments were used for bullying traits and the assessment techniques. The instruments were validated. In analyzing the data mean and standard deviation were used. Some findings were made based on the analysis of the data. This was followed by recommendations which were made based on the findings of the stud

Keyword: taunting, psychological bullies, dorminance, aggression, imbalance

1. Introduction

Bullying plays very important and negative roles in the lives of schooling adolescents and therefore it is not supposed to be over looked by any reasonable society. Bullying is seen as verbal or physical behavior intended to disturb someone less powerful (Santrock, 2005). This indicates that for one to participate in bullying the individual has to be physically stronger than his/her victim to enable him/her gain upper hand in a physical combat. Therefore, bullying could be seen as undue advantage taken by stronger or older individuals to oppress their victims or the weak ones. Bullying is a type of aggressive behavior that causes injury or distress to the individual to whom it is directed. It can be in physical or verbal, such as body violence or psychological which has to do with social exclusion (Martin, Carson, & Buskist, 2007). In short it is the oppression of the victim which can manifest in physical or psychological terms. Bullying is more pronounced as children go through childhood to adolescent stage.

Bullying is generally intentional aggressive behaviors. It can take the form of physical or verbal harassment and involves an imbalance of power (Lee, 2012). Groups of children can gang up on a victim. Children who are physically bigger or more aggressive can intimidate others. According to Smith, Ananiadou and Cowie (2008) and Whitted and Dupper (2005) bullying is unprovoked aggressive behaviours repeatedly carried out against victims who are unable to defend or fight for themselves

Olweus (2003) described three different types of bullies. These are the aggressive bully, the passive bully and bully victims. Aggressive bullies are physically strong, impulsive, hot tempered, belligerent, fearless, coercive, and confident and lack empathy for their victims. They have the desire to dominate others. Passive bullies are insecure and tend to have low self esteem and unhappy home lives. They find it difficult to concentrate and focus their attention at school. They exhibit temper-tantrums which can lead to unhealthy interpersonal peer relationships. They tend to align themselves and display intense loyalty to more powerful aggressive bullies. Bully victims are those who had been bullied seriously in the past. They are easily aroused and may provoke others who oftentimes are weaker than them. They have the tendency to be depressed and anxious. Wolke (1999), identified a fourth group

which he referred to as the pure bullies'. These ones are healthy individuals, who like school but use bullying to obtain dominance. They are cool operators.

Bullies target students who are mostly victims over the years. Bullies are becoming an increasing problem in Nigerian schools and schools across America (Bainbridge, 2012). The victims targeted are usually solitary, smaller in stature, or members of marginalized groups (Craig & Pepler, 2007). According to Heinrich (2003), victims of bullying may be adolescents with exceptionalities because they are vulnerable. The victims can exhibit social skills deficit, verbal delays and impulsive or anxious behaviours which the bullies can use to advantage. Adolescents with exceptionalities who already had problems will likely have increased low rate of academic, social and emotional problems (Mishna, 2003). Also, Cummings, Repler, Mishna & Craig (2006) noted that adolescents that have learning, emotional and physical impairments are prone to be bullied by their peers. As such, they may experience severe forms of victimization (Heinrich, 2003). The behaviors and emotional states of some victims may make them vulnerable to bullying (Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagler & Mickelson, 2001). Studies have indicated that bullies are actually quite adept at reading social cues and taking perspectives (Olweus, 2002). They use the skills to identify and prey on vulnerability of peers.

Generally, bully targets can be children of any age – adolescents and kindergarten. They may be reluctant to tell parents out of fear or shame. They may not want to go to school. They may complain of headaches or stomach aches, and may manifest anxiety and sadness, lack of self esteem, sudden drop in school performance, trouble eating or sleeping, sudden aggressive behavior, or displays of temper. They may have conflicts with siblings or playmates. There may be repeated loss of/ or damage to personal belongings and unexplained injuries. Evidence from literature suggests that targets of bullies may experience adverse socio emotional growth. They may be anxious, depressed, isolate themselves from peers and avoid schools (Berthold & Hoover, 2005; Slee, 1994; Walker, Ramsey & Cresham, 2005). Moreover, it can even affect the entire school population and create an environment of fear which may disrupt academic learning (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Victims can be upset, afraid, ashamed and embarrassed about going to school. The signs may not be visible if the adolescent can manage the aftermath of bullying. The incidents might take place without parents and teachers ever knowing about them.

Usually, the effect of bullying is always at the negative side and can linger for a very long time. The victims can become depressed, lose interest in school activities and at times become truants, due to fear of the bullies. There is indication that victims who experienced bullying during childhood were depressed and had lower self-esteem than their peers who did not experience bullying during childhood (Olweus, 1993).

According to Bainbridge (2012), between 15-20% of students in the United States are bullied sometimes or often. It usually begins in elementary schools, gets to its' peak in sixth through eight grades and continues in high school. What is more, boys are more likely than girls to bully others. Good, McIntosh & Gietz (2011) noted that in Canada and United States, bullying is a wide spread problem. In a survey that involved five hundred and twelve American youths, it was reported that 52% of students said that they knew someone who was considered a bully. Rice 2003 as cited in Fairholm & Mader (2006) stated that 67% of the respondents revealed that they witnessed bullying once or twice daily. In another survey by World Health Organization, Canada and United States ranked 12th and 15th respectively out of thirty-five countries surveyed (Craig & Harel, 2004). The indication is that bullies are mostly found within primary and secondary school levels where students are mainly adolescents.

Adolescence stage is noted as a time of rapid physical change or development. It is a time of adjusting to the strange and unfamiliar body changes, forging new relationship and emerging intellectual powers. As we have observed elsewhere (Igbo, 2006), adolescence stage is the stage when children are becoming more independent from their parents and want to spend most of their time with peers. This is in essence, what induces much confusion in the mind of adolescents. This teenage year has been defined as early as 1904 by Hall, as a period of great storm and stress. This period further seen as stressful, confusion prone and full of despair (Onu, 2004). At this stage of development, therefore, the adolescent begins to strive towards self-assurance, economic independence and the acquisition of set values to guide his behaviours. This is linked with the major physical changes that children undergo, such as hormonal changes which lead to different manifestations of physical changes that adolescents are not familiar with. These include the sudden increases in height, weight and bodily changes, the expansion of chest, and change of voice for boys and the development of breast and menstruation for girls. All these help to change the adolescents mood.

Bullying increases as a result of physical development (Bukowski, Sippola and Newcomb, 2000). It is in the process of expressing their dominance that adolescents manifest bullying as a way of social acceptance to their peer groups. For Pellegrini and Long (2002) bullying is a way of establishing social dominance but reduces as adolescents establish their social groups.

In a study of bullying carried out by Whitney and Smith (1993) the findings indicate that children reported being victims of bullying in school. Bullying and being bullied reduced as children grow older. Boys were found to be bullies more than girls. Teachers were able to identify bullies as well as the victims. Above all, 60% of children reported that they do not like bullying. Generally the researchers' findings indicated that children are usually not comfortable with bullying and would wish it does not exist. In addition to these findings, according to Martin et al (2007) boys are more likely to be physical bullies (fighting) while girls are more likely to be psychological bullies (name calling and excluding others from their play group, and gossiping).

In another study carried out by Pellegrini and Long (2002) on pattern of bullying, the findings indicate that bullying increased in primary and junior secondary levels and decreased at senior secondary school level. There is the indication that boys manifest bullying behaviours more than girls. In another study by Santrock (2005) on bullying, the results indicate that the victims of bullies fall within children that are withdrawn, being belittled about their looks and speech and children with close and emotionally intense relationship with parents. All these might promote low-self esteem and self doubts, and worries that peer group or bullies perceive as weakness. On the other hand, bullies are usually learning disabled, always having low grades and often drink alcohol. Some researchers found that victims of bullying have parents who were intrusive, demanding, and adamant, lukewarm look-worm in handling their children (Coleman and Byrd, 2003, Nansel & Overpeck, 2002). Hence the emphasis on personality of the individual adolescent is necessary for ones life. According to Olweus (1997) personality may differentiate who becomes bully and who becomes target of bullies. For bullies in most cases they act on their aggressive impulses. As noted earlier many victims of bullying do not report that they are being bullied or even talk to an adult about it (Bainbridge, 2012). As such it is very important to look out for possible bullying traits.

Trait is seen as a consistent and enduring way that individuals act across a variety of situations (Martin & Osborne, 1992). Therefore, trait has to do with inner aspect of people that help to determine their actions or behaviours. Individuals/Students get into intimidating others because of their bullying personality trait which cannot be suppressed by the individuals due to the fact that it is part and parcel of their behaviour. When something is enduring, it means that the particular thing/object continues in the same stage.

For one to be regarded as a bully, means that the individual or student has the ability to persist in manifesting bullying traits or characteristics. These characteristics can manifest in form of central traits such as self-centeredness, ability to manipulate, untrustworthy, aggressive, suspicious, cruel, dominant, self-assured, self-sufficient, less intelligent, and lack of self-control (Martin, Carlson, & Buskist, 2007).

Olweus (1997) stated that in controlling bullying adults should be involved, warned against bullying, interested and made to be understood that bullying is not acceptable in the society. In addition it was stated that schools take wise decision to prevent bullying which has to do with depression, loneliness, and absenteeism (Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 2000). This means that bullies exert fear and withdrawal on their victims

In a study by Ujah (2006) on assessment of behavioural problems among schooling adolescents in Obollo-Afor in Nigeria, the findings indicate that the adolescent's behavioural traits and characters are porous and are readily drawn more to negative adventures. It was observed that to minimize or reduce bullying, parents should avoid authoritarian style of child upbringing, and poor supervision. Conducive environment should be created and children should be assessed whether they are sensitive to emotional and social events. Awareness to social cognition and manipulation is necessary (Martin et al, 2007). This means that both nature, in relation to emotions and nurture, which has to do with environmental influences, are necessary factors in minimizing or controlling bullying traits among children.

As indicated earlier, there are many bullying traits. They include withdrawing from favorite activities, declining interests in school or after-school activities, withdrawing from friends or social circle, wanting to run away, anger, stress, volatile emotions, consistently missing classes, torn clothes, back pack or loss of other personal items, including writing materials, books, home work and lunch box. The victim may want to take knife or even gun to school for protection. There might be bruises and loss or increase in appetite. Tannelli (2012) identified other

bullying traits as name calling, teasing, taunting, intimidation, threatening, insulting someone about weight, height, race, sexuality and religion. It can also include shoving, hitting, excluding someone and gossiping about somebody. There may be sudden drops in grades or loss of interest in usual activities and even thoughts of suicide. Fraiser- Thill (2012) and Tannelli (2012) noted that increased use of technology at an early age such as cell phones, instant messaging, e-mail and face book have made new ways of bullying possible such as cyber bullying. Certain traits of bullying have been identified in younger children. They are impulsivity, easily frustrated and lacks empathy, trouble following rules, and viewing violence in a positive way. Such children can develop anti social or violent behaviors when they grow up (Tannelli, 2012). Adolescent bullies tend to be more physically strong, have higher social status and are more powerful.

Statement of the problem

Bullying is a very serious problem in primary and secondary schools. If not seriously tackled, bullying can lead to absence from school, damage to school property and even death. Some students had been hospitalized as a result of bullying which consequently affected their academic performance. In some cases, the victims of bullying do not report incidences of bullying to their parents, guardians and teachers and end up being emotionally depressed and truants. Students with special needs are worse hit because by their very nature, they are very vulnerable. Therefore, this study was designed to explore bullying traits and techniques that could be adopted to actualize the reduction of bullying among schooling adolescents. There is the need to be able to identify some bullying traits among schooling adolescents and techniques that could be adopted to curb or substantially reduce bullying among schooling adolescents. To help achieve the purpose, the study was guided by two research questions:

Research questions

1. What are the bullying traits perceived by schooling adolescents in Nigeria?
2. What assessment techniques are appropriate for measuring bullying traits among schooling adolescents?

The study was guided by a null hypothesis which was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1.1 Methods

1.1.1 Design of the study

The design of the study was descriptive survey. It was a survey of bullying traits as perceived by schooling adolescents and the techniques adopted to actualize the reduction of bullying traits among adolescents in Nigeria

1.1.2 Area of the study

The area of the study is the south-east of Nigeria. These are Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi States of Nigeria.

1.1.3 Sample and sampling techniques

The sample for the study consists of 150 students who were proportionally drawn from the south-east part of Nigeria, which is made up of Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi States of Nigeria. To be able to achieve this, a proportionate random sampling technique was adopted in selecting adolescents in each geo political zone.

1.1.4 Instrument for data collection

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. This is a four point rating scale questionnaire developed by the researchers through extensive review of literature. The instrument was made up of information that were used to answer the research questions that guided the study. The items of the questionnaire were structured on a four point rating scale of Very Great Extent (VGE) (4), Great Extent (GE) (3), Little Extent (LE) (2), and Very Little Extent (VLE) (1).

1.1.5 Validation of the instrument

The instrument was face validated by three experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation and Special Education. The inputs they made were very meaningful and led to the final production of the instrument.

1.1.6 Reliability of the instrument

An internal consistency reliability estimate of 0.88 was obtained for the instrument. This showed that the instrument was reliable for the study.

1.1.7 Method of data collection

Three research assistants who were directed on how to administer the instrument were recruited. The assistants helped in the distribution and collection of data. The questionnaires were directly administered on the respondents and were collected on the spot.

1.1.8 Method of data analysis

Data for the study were analyzed by the use of means and standard deviation. The decision rule that guided interpretation was as follows:

1. 0.50- 1.49 was interpreted as Strongly Disagree (SD).
2. 1.50- 2.49 was interpreted as Disagree (D)
3. 2.50- 3.49 was interpreted as Agree (A)
4. 3.50-4.49 was interpreted as Strongly Agree (SA)

1.1.9 Result

1.2.0 Research Question 1: What are the bullying traits perceived by schooling adolescent in Nigeria?

Table 1: Bullying traits as perceived by schooling adolescents

S/N	Bullying Traits	N	X	SD	Decision
1	Bullying is characterized unprovoked aggression	150	3.95	1.06	SA
2	Bullies are known for spreading rumours	150	2.58	1.03	A
3	Are known for their truancy	150	1.86	.819	D
4	Stressed up and are always unfriendly	150	2.53	1.01	A
5	Consistently missing classes	150	2.53	1.07	A
6	Create problems by name calling and fighting	150	2.89	.949	A
7	Gossip and intimidate classmates	150	3.23	.942	A
8	Are interested in cyber bullying	150	2.67	1.05	A
9	Are easily frustrated and lack empathy for others	150	3.35	.820	A
10	Always view violence in positive ways	150	3.19	.895	A
11	Are powerful and use it as advantage over weaker ones	150	3.33	.855	A
12	Bullies are always anxious about everything	150	3.28	.787	A

Data presented in table 1 indicate that the respondents strongly agree with item 1 and disagree in item 3. The respondents all agree with items, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 as bullying traits observed with the schooling adolescents or that the bullies possess these traits in the school. On the other hand, the standard deviation of all the items are not high, rather the means (X) are higher which shows that the differences between the mean (X) scores is little. This implies that the respondent's views are almost at the same level.

1.2.1 Research Question 2: What assessment techniques are appropriate for measuring bullying traits among schooling adolescents?

Table 2: Assessment techniques for measuring schooling adolescents with bullying traits

S/N	Bullying traits assessment techniques	N	X	SD	Decision
1	Assessment procedure should be longitudinal for at least three consecutive years	150	3.12	1.00	Agree
2	Comprehensive assessment on every child with bullying traits should be examined by counselors, psychologists and special educationists	150	2.76	.96	Agree
3	Assessment of children with bullying traits should involve observation, interview, anecdotal and projection	150	3.42	.94	Agree
4	Children emotional status should be considered	150	2.60	1.06	Agree
5	Assessment of children with bullying traits should be focused	150	3.28	.83	Agree
6	Comprehensive family background should be considered	150	2.48	1.01	Disagree
7	Physical appearance of children with bullying trait should be considered.	150	2.86	.90	Agree
8	Continuous assessment of children with bullying traits is necessary for early notification	150	3.24	.87	Agree
9	Socio-economic background of children with bullying traits should be considered	150	2.64	1.10	Agree
10	Parents and teachers should monitor children with intimidating tendencies	150	3.52	.78	Strongly Agree
11	Assessment results of children with bullying traits should be evaluated and used appropriately for better adjustment	150	3.46	.64	Agree
12	Parents views should be considered in the assessment of children with bullying traits	150	2.04	.73	Disagree

Data presented on table 2 shows that the respondents, in response to the assessment techniques that are appropriate for measuring bullying traits within the schooling adolescents, agree with items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11. The respondents 'strongly agree' with item 10 and disagree with items 6 and 12 respectively. The standard deviation of the items range between .64 to 1.06 which implies that the deviation between the respondents mean scores is minimal. This also indicates that they operate within the same level in their decisions or their stands.

1.2.2 Discussion of Results

The results revealed that responses, according to respondents on the bullying traits exist and in different ways. Specifically, the respondents are of the view that bullying is characterized by unprovoked aggression by the bullies on their victims. According to the responses, at times bullying traits can manifest by the fact that the bullies are easily frustrated and lack empathy for others, are powerful and apply it to their advantage over the weaker ones. They gossip and at the same time intimidate others. They are always anxious about everything which probably makes children with bullying traits to be restless and always perceiving violence as an opportunity to create problems. They love calling others names and are ready to fight at all times. Other findings include spreading rumours, stressed up and are always unfriendly, consistently missing classes even when the bullies are within the school compound. Above all, one of the findings indicates that bullies have graduated into cyber bullying with the introduction of internet facilities.

The findings of this study in relation to bullying traits have support in some literatures. Findings by Tannelli (2012) identified name calling, threatening, intimidation, and taunting. In line with this, Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagler & Mickelson, (2001) findings indicated that bullying traits include aggression, impulsiveness, hot temperedness, fearless, lack of empathy, and self confidence. Marton & Osborne (1992) in their findings were able to identify self-

assurance and lack of control as bullying trait among children. This implies that bullying traits exist and can manifest in different forms.

The results in table 2 indicate the techniques that can be applied to reduce bullying among schooling adolescents. The responses of the respondents show that for bullying to be minimized, the following assessment techniques should be considered, comprehensive assessment of bullying traits by specialists in child development, consideration of children's emotional status, socio-economic background, and their physical appearance. Other findings include consideration of parents and teachers views in the assessment of children with bullying traits, monitoring children with intimidating tendencies and focusing on bullying traits. These findings are in line with the findings of some researches conducted outside the Nigerian context. In a study by Cumminings et al (2006), the researchers emphasized on checking the emotional states of children as they develop. Other researchers also emphasized that bullies sensitivity to emotional and social events in their relationship with others as are means of checking or measuring bullying among schooling adolescents (Martin et al 2007) This means that the bullies emotional and social levels will be of positive use, if these are under control.

Conclusion

Bullying trait is a process of forming the habit of dealing with others that are weak in a cruel way, in order to gain power over the victims. Bullying and bullying traits are seen as negative ways of gaining social interest among peer groups which has to do with intimidation, fighting, gossiping, unprovoked aggression, unfriendly, frustration and lack of empathy for others. On the other hand, there are evidences that the techniques stated were applicable techniques that would go a long way to reduce bullying and bullying traits among setting.

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