



Peer Influence, Age and Gender as Correlates of Bullying Behaviour Among In-School Adolescents in Owerri

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Abstract

The expression of bullying behaviour in school is a significant problem because of its alarming prevalence and physical and mental health consequences. Thus, this study investigated peer influence, age and gender as correlates of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents in Owerri. The study adopted a correlation research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select four hundred in-school adolescents from ten randomly selected secondary schools in Owerri Municipal. Two instruments used were: the Bullying Prevalence Questionnaire (BPQ) ($\alpha = .84$) and Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) ($\alpha = .96$ & $.91$). Three research questions were answered at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed using Multiple Regression statistical tool. There was significant relationship between peer influence, age, gender and bullying among in-school adolescents. Also, peer influence, age and gender accounted for 76.1% of the total variance on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents. In order of magnitude, of their impact: peer influence contributed most to the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent ($\beta = 0.546$, $t = 10.573$, $P < 0.05$) followed by age ($\beta = 0.498$, $t = 9.284$, $P < 0.05$) and gender ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 3.578$, $P < 0.05$) to the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent. Therefore, government should endeavour to establish counselling centers in schools to assist in the attainment of functional and capacity development of in-school adolescents and reduce the occurrence of bullying in school.

Keywords: Bullying, Behaviour, In-School Adolescents, Peer Influence, Age, Gender, Owerri

Introduction

Bullying as an anti-social behaviour among in-school adolescents have lately become a significant concern for teachers, parents, psychologists and society in general due to the negative consequences these behaviours have on the teaching-learning process. This is premised against the backdrop of the fact that bullying is a potentially damaging form of violence among children and youth. Though bullying is not a new phenomenon, what is new is the growing awareness that bullying has serious damaging effects for bullies, victims, schools and communities (Bonke, 2010). Bullying is thought to be one of the most prevalent types of school violence. Students assume roles, including bully, victim, bully/victim, and bystander. In the western world much attention has been devoted to stemming the act of bullying but in Nigeria this act goes on in many schools unnoticed (Bonke, 2010; Odedare, 2014).

Bonke, (2010) further affirmed that a wide range of physical or verbal behaviours of an aggressive or antisocial nature are encompassed by the term bullying. These include insulting, teasing, abusing verbally and physically, threatening, humiliating, harassing and mobbing. Generally, the findings on bullying indicated that bullying is a physically harmful, psychologically damaging and socially isolating aspect of a large number of children's school experience. Victims are typically withdrawn and anxious, characterized by tenseness, fears and worries (Odedare, 2014). In-school adolescents who bully others often do not learn to interact and communicate in socially appropriate ways and therefore have difficulty in interacting adequately with their older peers. This often results in persistent maladaptive behavioural patterns (Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Crump, Saylor, Yu & Simons-Morton 2001) as well as represents an elevated risk for serious injury, (Picket, Schmid, Boyce, Simpson, Scheidt & Mazur, 2002), alcohol dependency (Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja & Ruan, 2004) and delinquency (Perren & Hornung 2005). Therefore, in-view of this context, it is important to investigate some factors that could predict bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents in Owerri Municipal. Of particular interest to this study are peer influence, age and gender.

Membership in peer groups is a powerful force during adolescence. These groups provide an important developmental point of reference through which adolescents gain an understanding of the world outside of their families. Past research shows that peer influence has emerged over the last 50 years to be the chief source of values and behavioural influence in adolescence, replacing the influence of adults. Along with this new trend has come a rise in bullying and other antisocial behaviour (Neufeld & Mate, 2005). Although the expressed level of anti-social behaviour from peer group to peer group varies, the negative actions of one member in a group will increase the probability of other members taking part in similar behaviours. Craig and Harel (2004) found that a sizable minority of primary and secondary school students are involved in peer-to-peer bullying either as perpetrators or victims—or as both, being both bullied themselves and harassing others. Affiliation with antisocial peers predicts delinquent behaviour more strongly than community, school, or family characteristics (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005).

Studies have found that the risk of being bullied is higher for older adolescents and lower for younger adolescents (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Mitchell, Ybarra & Finkelhor, 2007). This age difference may be the result of developmental factors that affect the extent and type of Internet use. It is very likely that as youth grow older they engage in more activities with unknown others that result in an increased risk for being bullied online. Thus, as Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) drew connections between traditional and electronic bullying, there were also clear distinctions made. The authors presented an Internet experience questionnaire to 84 adolescents between ages 13 and 18 years old. The questionnaire asked students to rate experiences with Internet and traditional bullying in 28 different self-report questions. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) found that the adolescents of today are the “first generation to have grown up in a society in which the Internet is an integral part of daily life” (p. 564). This finding opens up the concern that parents of these adolescents might not be aware of the many different dangers in the cyber bullying context.

Antisocial behaviour at an early age is predictive of more consistent and more serious antisocial behaviour at later ages (Farrington, 2004). “Although the incidence of physical aggression (hitting and kicking) decreases from age 10 to age 17, the prevalence of CD and violent and property offenses

generally increases over this age range. It may be that most children grow out of minor types of antisocial behaviour, perhaps because of increasing internal inhibitions inculcated by parents, but that more serious types increase during adolescence, perhaps because of the increasing importance of peer influence” (Farrington, 2004, pg. 633, citing Farrington, 1986). Delinquent behaviour increases most dramatically during early adolescence and remains relatively stable across high school years (Farrington, 2004; Mason & Windle, 2002). However, girls and boys are gender typed to behave in certain ways. Simmons (2002) notes that female bullying is more difficult to notice for adults outside of the peer groups because females are likely to bully using relational aggression. Relational aggression is found to be an act that can cause harm and destruction to friendships or feelings of group inclusion (Simmons, 2002). This form of aggression is often missed at school because it involves very quiet ways for female aggressors to act cruel and hurt others. Girls as well as boys engage in bullying behaviour. Bullying has been described as a gendered phenomenon (Rodkin & Berger, 2008) and a relationship problem (Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008). Moving beyond consideration of mean gender differences in bullying requires carefully considering where gender differences do and do not exist. For a large, nationally representative United States sample, Nansel et al. (2001) found that boys reported perpetrating and being victimized by bullying more than girls did. When specific forms of victimization were examined, boys reported experiencing more physical bullying than girls, and girls reported more bullying by rumours and sexual comments. Consequently, it is observed that in Nigeria, adolescents are often exposed to conflicting value system that serves as stimuli and reinforces the disposition of bullying behaviour. This negatively impact on their interpersonal relationship with others and this has been expressed in diverse research context (Bonke, 2010; Odedare, 2014). Yet, there is paucity of studies that have been directed to the investigation of the association between peer influence, age, gender and bullying in a single study. This makes this study imperative to fill this gap.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescence is a critical period for the emergence and entrenchment of antisocial behaviours (including criminal behaviours), which for some, persist into adulthood and entail substantial costs for individuals, families and the community. Bullying behaviour as an antisocial behaviour is fast becoming a common feature in schools around the world. It is a practice that provokes concern as it infringes upon the child's right to human dignity, privacy, freedom and security. Thus, the physical, emotional and educational consequences of bullying behaviour can never be underestimated. Also, the detrimental effect of school bullying and victimization on children's mental health and psychosocial development later in life is best imagined than experienced. These development causes strain that elicits or produces feelings of anger, frustration, or depression - which then can surface as negative behavioural choices. Therefore, it could be said that in-school adolescents that experience strain in interpersonal relationship due to being bullied are more at risk to engage in deviant or delinquent behaviours. This implies that bullying can be a potent source of emotional and psychological strain among in-school adolescents that can in turn lead to deviant coping responses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to (a) examine the association and relationship between peer influence, age, gender and bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent; (b) examine the composite impact of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent; and (c) examine the relative impact of each of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What relationship exists between peer influence, age, gender and bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?
2. What joint impact do peer influence, age and gender have on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?
3. What is the relative contribution of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?

Methodology

Design and Participants

This study adopted a correlation research design. The population comprised of three thousand two hundred and sixty-five male and female in-school adolescents in Owerri Municipal Imo State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study consists of 400 in-school adolescents' in Owerri Municipal Imo State, randomly selected through the simple random technique from ten randomly selected secondary schools. The randomization ensures the selection of male, female and age based on the fact that the schools used are co-educational schools and schools based on records on their register operates a multi-age graded system. This implies that each class comprises of mixed aged students for example in SSII you would find 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 years all in the same class.

Instrumentation

Bullying Prevalence Questionnaire (BPQ) by Rigby (2003) was used to measure incidence of bullying among in-school adolescents. It is a twenty-item instrument that has being used across culture and proven to be reliable. It has items such as: I like to harass my peers in school: I like to intimidate people I play with at lunch break etc. The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.84.

Peer influence

Peer influence was measured using a well-validated measure of peer pressure developed and validated by Brown, Clasen and Eicher (1986). The Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) was designed to assess the perception of peer pressure in a number of domains, including peer social activities, misconduct, conformity to peer norms etc. Responses are made on a 4-point scale. Responses to all 11 items are summed up to yield the final composite score, with a range from 10 to 48. It has a Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.69 to 0.91 for all measures.

Procedure

The researchers obtained permission from the school authorities used for the study. The consent of participants was equally sought and obtained. After the consent of the participants was obtained, the researcher with the assistance of some teacher administered copies of the instrument with explanation on how to complete them and the purpose of the research.

Method of Data analysis

Data were analysed with multiple regression statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One

What relationship exists between the independent (peer influence, age and gender) and dependent variables (bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent)?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations among the variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent	400	45.23	10.13	1.000			
Gender	400	13.34	2.82	.431*	1.000		
Age	400	45.64	11.49	.528**	.464*	1.000	
Peer Influence	400	54.28	16.16	.785***	.683*	.661*	1.000

** Correlation Significant at 0.01 levels

Table 1 above shows there was significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables: gender ($r = 0.431$, $P < 0.05$); age ($r = 0.528$, $P < 0.05$); peer influence ($r = 0.785$, $P < 0.05$). This result indicates that peer influence, age and gender have positive influence on in-school adolescents expressed bullying behaviour.

Research Question Two

What joint impact do peer influence, age and gender have on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis showing joint impact of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent

Multiple R	=	0.878				
Multiple R ²	=	0.765				
Multiple R ² (Adjusted)	=	0.761				
Standard Error of Estimate	=	5.2632				
Source of variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean square	F-Ratio	P	
Regression	36471.124	3	12157.041	464.625	<.05	
Residual	10361.468	396	26.1653			
Total	46832.592	399				

Table 2 shows that peer influence, age and gender had significant joint impact on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent ($R = 0.878$, $P < .05$). The combination of the independent variables accounted for 76.1% of the total variance on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent (adjusted $R^2 = 0.761$). The analysis of variance of the multiple regression data yielded an F-ratio value which was found to be significant at 0.05 Alpha level, $F(3, 396) = 464.625$, $P < 0.05$). This implies that peer influence, age and gender positively predict the occurrence of expressed bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents.

Research Question Three

What is the relative impact of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?

Table 3: The relative impact of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	P
(constant)	9.227	2.490		3.705	.000	<.05
Gender	.173	.036	.187	3.578	.000	<.05
Age	.368	.049	.498	9.284	.000	<.05
Peer Influence	.547	.062	.546	10.573	.000	<.05

Dependent –Variable: bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent

Table 3 highlights the impact peer influence, age and gender have on the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent. In terms of magnitude of the prediction: peer influence contributed most to the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent ($\beta = 0.546$, $t = 10.573$, $P < 0.05$) followed by age ($\beta = 0.498$, $t = 9.284$, $P < 0.05$) and gender ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 3.578$, $P < 0.05$) to the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question One

What relationship exists between peer influence, age, gender and bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?

The result of the study revealed that significant relationship exists between the independent and dependent variables: gender ($r = 0.431$, $P < 0.05$); age ($r = 0.528$, $P < 0.05$); peer influence ($r = 0.785$, $P < 0.05$). This indicates that the occurrence of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents could be influenced by peer influence, age and gender. The reason for this could be that since the act of bullying is behavioural, it is easily experienced when secondary school adolescents find it difficult to adjust and overcome challenges in their immediate environment. This behavioural inadequacy has negative implications on the well-being of in-school adolescents who are most times at the receiving end of violent bully confrontation. This is consistent with the reported findings of Neufeld and Mate (2005) that past research shows that peer influence has emerged over the last 50 years to be the chief source of values and behavioural influence in adolescence, replacing the influence of adults. Along with this new trend has come a rise in bullying and other antisocial behaviour (Neufeld & Mate, 2005). Also, studies have found that the risk of being bullied is higher for older adolescents and lower for younger adolescents (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Mitchell, Ybarra & Finkelhor, 2007). This age difference may be the result of developmental factors that affect the extent and type of Internet use. It is very likely that as youth grow older, they engage in more activities with unknown others that result in an increased risk for being bullied online. However, girls and boys are gender typed to behave in certain ways. Simmons (2002) notes that female bullying is more difficult to notice for adults outside of the peer groups because females are likely to bully using relational aggression. Relational aggression is found to be an act that can cause harm and destruction to friendships or feelings of group inclusion (Simmons, 2002). This form of aggression is often missed at school because it involves very quiet ways for female aggressors to act cruel and hurt others. Girls as well as boys engage in bullying behaviour.

Research Question Two

What joint impact do peer influence, age and gender have on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?

The findings of the study indicate that peer influence, age and gender had significant joint impact on the prediction of expressed bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents ($R = 0.878$, $P < 0.05$). The combination of the independent variables accounted for 76.1% of the total variance on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents (adjusted $R^2 = 0.761$). The analysis of variance of the multiple regression data yielded an F-ratio value which was found to be significant at 0.05 Alpha level, $F(5, 396) = 464.625$, $P < 0.05$). This implies that when in-school adolescents have challenges interacting with each other, they most times engage in confrontation that leads to bullying. Thus, when they find it difficult to control their behaviour, due to poorly expressed interpersonal relationship skill they express aggression at slight provocation and this manifest violence. In support is the finding of Farrington (2004) that antisocial behaviour at an early age is predictive of more consistent and more serious antisocial behaviour at later ages. "Although the incidence of physical aggression (hitting and kicking) decreases from age 10 to age 17, the prevalence of violent and property offenses generally increases over this age range. It may be that most children grow out of minor types of antisocial behaviour, perhaps because of increasing internal inhibitions inculcated by parents, but that more serious types increase during adolescence, perhaps because of the increasing importance of peer influence" (Farrington, 2004, pg. 633, citing Farrington, 1986).

Research Question Three

What is the relative impact of each of peer influence, age and gender on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent?

The study revealed that in terms of magnitude of the contribution: peer influence contributed most to the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent ($\beta = 0.546$, $t = 10.573$, $P < 0.05$) followed by age ($\beta = 0.498$, $t = 9.284$, $P < 0.05$) and gender ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 3.578$, $P < 0.05$) to the prediction of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescent. This result confirms the fact that bully

behaviour manifest in school environment and is injurious to human mental functioning. This result corroborates Farrington (2004); Mason and Windle (2002) report that delinquent behaviour increases most dramatically during early adolescence and remains relatively stable across high school years. Also, Craig and Harel (2004) found that a sizable minority of primary and secondary school students are involved in peer-to-peer bullying either as perpetrators or victims—or as both, being both bullied themselves and harassing others. Affiliation with antisocial peers predicts delinquent behaviour more strongly than community, school, or family characteristics (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005).

Implication of Study

The findings of this research provide reasonable information that can be applied in counselling and social psychology to the better understanding of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents considering the fact that a keen observation of what is happening in Nigeria today seems to indicate that bullying behaviour is on the increase among in-school adolescents. This could have grave consequences across their developmental lifespan. Thus, bullying as an anti-social behaviour among in-school adolescents have lately become a significant concern for teachers, parents, psychologists and society in general due to the negative consequences this behaviour has on the teaching-learning process (Estévez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005).

Conclusion

Adolescents who are bullied by their peers in school are at higher risk for internalizing problems in view of the fact that the incidence of bullying often result in disruptions to healthy functioning that could make victims express loneliness, social dissatisfaction and social withdrawal and emotional and behavioural maladjustment. Therefore, school, government and policy makers should endeavour to put proper check in place to manage the occurrence of this phenomenon in school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers wish to make the following recommendations:

1. Adolescents should be given appropriate orientation on the danger of negative peer influence on their well-being and the need to avoid the expression of violence in their relationship with their peers.
2. Schools should endeavour to organize social reawakening activities that will enable in-school adolescents appreciate the need to develop friendly attitude instead of being a bully.
3. The government should endeavour to establish counselling centers in schools to assist in the attainment of functional and capacity development of in-school adolescents and reduce the occurrence of bullying in school.

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