PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS AND MEASURES FOR CURBING BULLYING AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE-NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Descriptive research design was employed to investigate the psychological dimensions and measures for curbing bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state-Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study.The population comprised all the 5, 827 teachers and 261 principals from the 261 secondary schools in Anambra state. A sample of 450 teachers and 90 principals was randomly selected from the 6 education zones using simple random sampling procedure. A researcher-developed questionnaire named "Psychological Dimensions of Bullying" (PDB) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three specialists in Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha method and alpha coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while t-test was employed for testing the hypotheses. The result of the study revealed that 17 psychological factors were identified by principals and teachers to be among the psychological factors implicated in bulling while 12 psychological measures were also identified as effective for repressing bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents should teach their children to express their emotions in socially appropriate ways and regulate their emotions effectively.

Keywords: Psychology, Bullying, School, Adolescents

Introduction

Bullying is a product of poor emotional control and poor social skills. Bullying have roots on anger, jealousy, pride, poor self esteem, negative self concept which are essentially psychological. The school is a social unit and such every student will try to fit into the system which implies that relationship and communication are inevitable. No relationship is void of offence, misunderstanding, quarrel and conflict. Inability of the adolescents to resolve the inherent challenges in human relation breeds social behaviours like fighting, knocking, hitting, striking, pushing and other violent behaviours and this will mature to bulling if uncontrolled and if it repeatedly occurs.

Most secondary schools in Anambra state has become a theatre of horror and wickedness with all manner of social and behavioural vices. Some students belong to secret cult. Some are drug and substance addicts, truants, kidnappers, robbers and bullies. Bullying is a very specific type of aggressive behaviour usually exhibited by a senior/stronger student on a junior/weaker student. Gragg (2022) noted that bullying is an unwanted aggressive and repeated behavior usually between school aged children or adolescents in which the victim is intentionally harmed. American Psychological Association (2022) explained bullying as an aggressive behaviour in which the bully intentionally and repeatedly causes injury or discomfort to the bullied. Aruya (2021) explained bulling as a situation where stronger students prey on the weakness and vulnerability of others.

Every stage of an individual's life is characterized by some problems which the individual is expected to overcome, withstand and solve for his/her psychological well being and proper development. The adolescence stage is not an exemption. Adolescence no doubt is a critical stage of development which is sometimes characterized by confusion. Knoop (2021) observed that adolescence is a special developmental period in human life marked by transition from infancy to adulthood with the young adult seeking for place in life, shaping his value system and trying to adjust to the social environment. The World Health Organization (2012) noted that adolescence is no longer children and neither adult. WHO emphasized that adolescence are: Period of rapid physical and psychological (cognitive and emotional) growth, period of development of new capacities and period of changing social relationships, expectations, roles and responsibilities. Allen and Waterman (2019) assert that adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood which is accompanied by biological and social changes.

The adolescent is faced with some developmental tasks in the process of transition from childhood to adulthood. Havighurst (1952) enumerated ten of such developmental tasks which he opined as being particularly important and significant for the adolescence. The task related to this study is achieving new and more mature relations with age mates of both sexes. At school,

adolescents try to make friends and also maintain friendship. Inability to understand, accommodate and adapt to communication/relationship problems breed social behaviour including bullying. The stages of adolescents' developmental tasks are based on probity and ego to establish an unending personality and determine functions. However, identity lapses frequently occur in adolescence stage such as bullying behaviour.

Bullying behaviours occurs everywhere such as in the home, school, play ground and even in the church. Holt (2023) asserted that act of bullying is common wherever adolescents congregate and especially in absence of adult supervision. Bullying is evident in all developmental stages but varies in intensity. For example bullying during early childhood is quite different compared with adolescence stage. Bullying is a behavioural and social problem which is a recurrent phenomenon in secondary schools in Anambra state. Bullies always target weak persons and intimidate, harm and hurt them. They are inconsiderate, lack empathy and have contempt for the weak. Most of the bully lack interest and cognitive ability for academics and so will rather crave for popularity, power and recognition. Gragg (2022) enumerated types of bulling as direct, indirect and cyber bulling. Saima (2022) opined that bullying can be in these forms namely physical, verbal, cyber, sexual, racist bullying. Sherri (2022) identified six types of bulling-physical, verbal, relational aggression, cyber, sexual, prejudicial bullying.

Some authors and researchers including Lucas, Jernbro, Tindberg and Janson (2016), Saima (2022), Tambawal and Umar (2017) and Usha (2021) have attributed bullying among adolescents to various factors including desire to gaining power and popularity, seeking revenge and retaliation, home background, envy, resentment and lack of self confidence. Bullying among in-school adolescents take the form of harassment, fighting, knocking, striking, slapping, molestation, intimidation, hitting, pushing, calling of names and making derogatory statements. Psychologically the adolescence period in life is a problematic and troublesome stage probably because of the various physical, emotional, cognitive and social attendant characteristics. The adolescent is bubbling with lots of energy and so is ready for fighting and violence even before they erupt. Also most adolescents are yet to develop proper vision and self identity and so channel their time, strength and energy to behavioral problems rather than their academics.

Bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state appear to hinge heavily on psychological factors which include dysfunctional families, unhealthy parenting, aggressive tendencies/aggression, need to preserve self image, desire to boost ego, peer pressure/influence, low self concept, negative self esteem, poor emotional intelligence, poor social skills, seeking recognition and attention, low intelligent quotient, impulsiveness and inferiority complex among others.

Observation of adolescents' behaviour suggests that dysfunctional families can lead to bullying act. A dysfunctional home is a breeding ground for neglect, addiction, denial and abuse and any

child that find himself/herself in this situation will struggle for adaptation and adjustment all through life. In the process, the child may develop some social, behavioural and academic problems as well as negative behaviours such as bullying.

Low self esteem is another psychological factor that can breed bulling. Naturally, adolescents with low self esteem will engage in bullying to boost their self esteem. They feel empowered by molesting and beating younger/weaker ones. Their low self esteem will drive them to intimidate others in aggressive ways such as bulling.

Poor emotional intelligence is implicated as one of the psychological factors leading to bullying. A person with low emotional intelligence may have difficulty making and maintaining relationship due to inability to control and regulate emotions properly therefore, tendency to choose anger, aggression and bulling as a response to any slightest provocation. Supporting the above statement, Divecha (2019) noted that developing emotional competence prevents a person from becoming a bully. Marc and Susan (2014) stressed that good emotion is an indispensable attribute for school. They observed that students with anxiety and depression have difficulty in learning and also tend to be victims of bullying.

Good social skill is a defense against bullying while poor social skills can also lead to bullying. This is because games, plays and collaborative projects are part of regular school programme and for a child's adequate adjustment and adaptation, good social skills are vital. Tolerance, endurance, accommodation, patience and understanding are virtues vital for survival in any social group. It then becomes evident that a child with poor social skills will find it difficult to belong and therefore likely to bully others.

Bulling has tremendous negative impact on social, mental, cognitive, behavioural and emotional developments of adolescents. Supporting the statement above, Tambawal et al (2017) observed that low psychological well being, poor social adjustment, psychological distress and physical illness are some of the negative impact of bullying act on the victims. Laili and Asfira (2021), Oyelade, Oyediran and Shittu (2018)and Pamela (2022) also noted that the impact of bulling in terms of psychological, physiological and in academic performance is overwhelming.Measures often taken by the school authority in disciplining the bully such as corporal punishment, demotion such as withdrawal of post, suspension and expulsion has not yielded any positive result and thus need to address the problem from the psychological root. No right thinking person will except to get a different result doing a thing the same way. As mentioned early bullying behaviour is linked to an enormous amount of psychological issues impinging on the bully as well as the bullied and even the observers/by-witness therefore need arises to secure the psychological and health being of these adolescents.

It is against this background that the researchers' intend to explore empirically the psychological dimensions and measures for repressing bulling among in-school adolescents in Anambra state-Nigeria and to give direction to this study, two research questions and two hypotheses stated in null form and to be tested at 0.05 significant level were formulated to guide the study.

Research Questions

1. What are the psychological factors implicated in bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state-Nigeria?
2. What are the psychological measures that are considered effective in repressing bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between teachers and principals perception on the psychological factors responsible for bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state.
2. The opinions of teachers and principalson the psychological measures that are effective in repressing bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state will not differ significantly.

Method

Descriptive research design was used for this study. Data were collected and analyzed from only a few people considered to be representative of the entire group. The population of the study comprised all the 261 principals and 5,827 teachers in 261 public secondary schools in Anambra state. The sample for the study was made up of 90 principals and 450 teachers. Stratified random sampling procedure was used to ensure a fairly equal representation of the variables for the study. The stratification was based on male, female and co-educational/community secondary schools. Then within each section, selection of principals and teachers was by simple random sampling technique. Two research questions and two null hypotheses to be tested at 0.05 significance level guided the study.

Two instruments for data collection were used for the study. First an unstructured interview schedule with some principals and teachers to elicit some information relevant to the study. Their response as well as information gotten from related literatures helped the researchers' in construction of the instrument used for this study. Second was a researcher-developed questionnaire named "Psychological Dimensions of Bullying" (PDB) with a total of 29 items structured on a modified 4-point likert scale of strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree and disagree. The instrument was validated for face and content adequacy by three experts in

education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha with overall reliability coefficient of 0.79.

Direct method approach was utilized in administering the questionnaire to the chosen sample for the study. Before the answering of the questions in the instrument, the researchers' had a little session with the respondents whereby certain psychological terms such as dysfunctional families, personality problems, premack principle, negative reinforcement, positive reinforcement, cognitive restructuring among others were explained to them using proper examples . This was to ensure their understanding of the items in the instrument that will guarantee their sincere answers vital for the validity of this research work. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the null hypotheses were tested using t-test. Acceptance point for the items was 2.50 and any mean score below 2.50 was rejected.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Principals and Teachers on the Psychological Factors Implicated in Bullying.

S/N	Items	Principals		Teachers	
		X	SD	X	SD
1	Dysfunctional families.	2.94	1.71	2.64	1.63
2	Unhealthy parenting.	2.66	1.63	2.64	1.63
3	Aggressive tendencies/aggression.	2.76	1.66	2.53	1.59
4	Need to preserve self image.	2.73	1.65	2.62	1.62
5	Desire to boost ego.	3.13	1.77	2.63	1.62
6	Peer pressure/influence.	2.61	1.62	2.66	1.63
7	Low self concept.	2.59	1.61	2.78	1.67
8	Negative self esteem.	2.72	1.65	2.58	1.61
9	Poor emotional intelligence.	2.64	1.62	2.87	1.69
10	Poor social skills.	2.67	1.63	2.64	1.63
11	Lack of interest in academics.	2.72	1.64	2.55	1.60
12	Low intelligent quotient.	2.53	1.59	2.66	1.63
13	Inferiority complex.	2.56	1.60	2.68	1.64
14	Seeking for attention and recognition.	2.60	1.61	2.88	1.70
15	Frustration due to lack of ability for academics/schooling	2.82	1.68	2.52	1.59
16	Drug and alcohol abuse.	2.54	1.59	3.03	1.74

17	Personality problems	2.71	1.65	3.30	1.82
	Average X and Sd =	2.70	1.64	2.72	1.65

Result from table 1 above revealed through the mean score of 2.50 and above the following to be among the principals and teachers perception of psychological factors implicated in bullying: Dysfunctional families, unhealthy parenting, aggressive tendencies/aggression, need to preserve self image, desire to boost ego, peer pressure/influence and low self concept. Others include negative self esteem, poor emotional intelligence, poor social skills, lack of interest in academics, low intelligent quotient, inferiority complex, seeking for attention and recognition, frustration due to lack of ability for academics/schooling, drug and alcohol abuse and personality problems.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Principals and Teachers on Psychological Measures for Repressing Bullying.

S/N	Items	Principals		Teachers	
		X	SD	X	SD
18	Premack principle/access to desirable activity is made contingent on performing less desirable activity.	3.01	1.73	3.56	1.89
19	Parental modeling of good virtues.	3.11	1.76	2.56	1.60
20	Cognitive restructuring	2.59	1.61	2.61	1.62
21	Building good social skills	2.64	1.62	2.73	1.65
22	Building good emotional skills	3.03	1.74	3.04	1.74
23	Positive reinforcement	2.65	1.63	2.58	1.61
24	Negative reinforcement	2.58	1.61	2.67	1.63
25	Proper and adequate parental training where reprove, correction and punishment is the watchword.	2.51	1.58	2.62	1.62
26	Proper counseling	2.55	1.60	2.56	1.60
27	Building positive self esteem	2.57	1.60	3.07	1.75
28	Giving recognition and attention to the bully	2.63	1.62	2.65	1.63
29	Outright denial of entitlement/position/right	2.66	1.63	3.29	1.81

to the bully.

Average X and Sd =	2.71	1.64	2.83	1.68

Table 2 shows the psychological measures that could be effective in quelling bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state. 12 items has a mean of 2.50 and above. They include: Premack principle, parental modeling of good virtues, cognitive restructuring, building good social skills, building good emotional skills, proper and adequate parental training, proper counseling, building good positive esteem, giving attention and recognition to the bully and outright denial of entitlement/position/right.

Table 3: Summary of t-test Analysis on the Teachers and Principals Perceptions on the Psychological Factors Implicated in Bullying.

Source of Variation	N	X	Sd	Df	Cal.t	Crit.t	P<0.05
Teachers	450	2.72	1.65	538	0.11	1,960	NS
Principals	902.70	1.64					

N = 540; P<0.05

From the result in table 3, null hypothesis 1 is accepted because the calculated t which is 0.11 is less than the critical t which is 1,960.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis on the Teachers and Principals Perceptions on Psychological Measures that Could be Effective For Repressing Bullying.

Source of Variation	N	X	Sd	Df	Cal.t	Crit.t	P<0.05
Teachers	450	2.83	1.68	538	0.63	1,960	NS
Principals	90	2.71	1.64				

Result in the above table shows that the critical t of 1,960 is greater than the calculated t of 0.63. Therefore null hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Discussion

The study revealed the following to be among the psychological factors implicated in bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state:Dysfunctional families, unhealthy parenting,

aggressive tendencies/aggression, need to preserve self image, desire to boost ego, peer pressure/influence and low self concept. Others include negative self esteem, poor emotional intelligence, poor social skills, lack of interest in academics, low intelligent quotient, inferiority complex and seeking for attention and recognition, frustration due to lack of ability for academics/schooling, drug and alcohol abuse and personality problems. The findings agree with that of Lucas et al (2016) which revealed that the bullies are victims of challenging and problematic families. As such the bully is exposed to domestic violence and abuse which are clearly associated with bullying. In alignment with the findings of this study is the outcome of Pamela (2022) research findings which stressed that aggressive parenting style promotes bulling behaviour among adolescents because the child is imparted with aggressive tendencies which are major cause of bullying.

The findings of this study corroborate with Usha (2021) who observed that psychological condition of low self esteem produce a bully. She opined that a person with low self esteem will likely engage in this act of dominating others in violent ways in order to conceal shame and feel empowered and thusboost their self esteem.The findings of Marc et al (2014) also agree with this research finding as they noted that absence of good emotional intelligence skills are associated with act of bullying. When in-school adolescents are able to regulate their emotions as well as understand others' emotions, they are unlikely to indulge in bullying. The findings of this research work align with Sherri (2022) who observed that good social skills are defense factor against bullying. Good social skills promote ones' self confidence, inter-relationship, communications, thoughts and feelings which are virtues essential for overcoming conflicts.

Furthermore, the study revealed 12 psychological measures to be effective for quelling bulling among in-school adolescents in Anambra state. They include:Premack principle, parental modeling of good virtues, cognitive restructuring, building good social skills, building good emotional skills, proper and adequate parental training, proper counseling, building good positive esteem, giving attention and recognition to the bully and outright denial of entitlement/position/right.

There is no doubt that premack principle could be very effective in repressing bullying behaviour. The teacher should identify what the bully likes for example arranging the laboratory for practical lessons in science and then link it to his abstinence from bullying. Put in another way, the teacher should deprive the bully the opportunity of participating in activities he likes whenever a report of bullying is brought against him and the reverse when he behaves well. This will to a great extent minimize his vices as he will not like to be deprived of his interest.

Good virtues by parents can go a long way in changing a bully. This is because children learn by imitation and always try to model their behaviour and of course grow into adult stage with such learned behaviour. Where there is peace, calmness, serenity and understanding in the home, the

child will grow into a healthier adolescence but if the home is dysfunctional, the child will grow with traits of violence, anger and abuse which are psychological factors implicated in bullying.

However, the findings of this study agree with Divecha (2019) who noted that social and emotional learning improves emotional well being, self regulation andclassroom relationship. It as well as reduces anxiety, emotional distress, depression, disruptive behaviours such as conflicts, aggression, anger and hostile attribution which are among the psychological factors implicated in bullying. Holt (2023) also agreed with the findings of this research work as she observed that good parenting is crucial to curbing bullying and such parents should sit up to their obligation of child rearing. Holt observed that children begin to learn how to behave at an early age by imitating adults. Therefore, parents should exhibit kindness, friendly character and respect so young children can observe and imbibe the good habits instead of bullying.

Conclusion

The findings of the study conclude as follows:

1. 17 psychological factors were identified by teachers and principals as contributing factor to bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state.
2. The teachers and principals also identified 12 measures as effective for repressing bullying among in-school adolescents in Anambra state.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers' recommend as follows:

1. Parents should teach their children to express their emotions in socially appropriate ways and regulate their emotions effectively. Everything is not about fighting, boxing, hitting and striking among others. Inculcate the godly virtues of patience, tolerance, endurance and love in your children through daily devotion (prayer, teaching the word of God).
2. Low self esteem is one of the psychological factors implicated in bullying. Parents are therefore admonished to help their children develop confidence regardless of the challenges around them. Discourage the covetious desire of aspiring to be like other people but rather teach them about their own worth and value as an individual.
3. Corporal punishment does not transform a bully but rather makes him/her to be more hardened, violent and destructive. Positive and negative reinforcement has been proven by Educational Psychologists to be more effective in strengthening desired behaviours and weakening undesired behaviours. Therefore parents and school authorities are encouraged to follow suit.
4. Children learn by imitation as emphasised in Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Infancy behaviour is carried into subsequent stages in life. Therefore parents should

model good social behaviours for their children to emulate. Avoid domestic violence and aggressive parental style.

5. Parents should always correct, reprove and punish any observed aggressive tendency in their children. Don't pamper or accommodate them so the child will not become a bully. "Catch them young" before it becomes late.

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