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## **Causes, Forms and Psychosocial Problems of Bullying in Secondary Schools as Perceived by Adolescents in Anambra State Secondary Schools**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the causes, forms and psychosocial problems of bullying in secondary schools as perceived by adolescents in secondary schools in Awka Education zone of Anambra State. The study was guided by three research questions and four hypotheses. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 20 schools and 633 students from Awka Education Zone. The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire which was duly validated. Mean and t-test were used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that school children get involved at different forms of bullying such as name calling, teasing someone, intentional provocation and so on, that frustration, aggression within the home, child abuse are the major causes of bullying, and that psychosocial problems arising from bullying include being fearful, aggressive behaviour and depression among others. Recommendations were made based on the findings.*

Secondary education normally covers the second decade of life known as the period of adolescence. It is a period of transition from dependent childhood to independent adulthood. Onyejiaku (1991) described this period as being mysterious,

boisterous, turbulent, venturesome and very unpredictable. Hall in Shertzer and Stone (1976) described it as a period of storm and stress.

Adolescence is associated with traumatic experiences because as children grow and move into this period, involvement with one's peers and the attraction of peer identification increases. They try to emancipate from parental control. The peer group becomes the source of affection, sympathy and understanding, a place for experimentation and a supportive setting for achieving identity and autonomy. The adolescent usually has a lot of energy to dissipate and the search for identity leads him to identity crisis. This identity crisis often gives rise to unacceptable behaviour which include bullying.

Swearer (2002) viewed bullying as a general term applied to a pattern of behaviour whereby one person with a lot of internal anger, resentment and aggression and lacking interpersonal skills chooses to displace his/her aggression onto another person. According to Sampson (2002) bully behaviour can be defined as repeated emotional, verbal and/or physical attacks against other students who are vulnerable and cannot properly defend themselves because of size, strength or being outnumbered. It is a form of abuse. Olweus (1994) defined it as a negative action on the part of one or more students that is repeated over time. Bullying in school sometimes consists of a group of students taking advantage of or isolating one student in particular and gaining the loyalty of bystanders who want to avoid becoming the next victim. Bullying is now recognized as a significant problem in many schools around the world (Nicolaidis, Toda and Smith, 2002).

Olweus (1994); Pepler and Craig (2000); Sampson (2002); Kim and Leventhal (2008); and Pollastri, Cardemil and O' Donnel (2009) have identified frustration, family instability, being a victim, aggression within home or society, family stress, rejection, isolation, exposure to violent movies, peer influence, poor state of the mental health, and child abuse as some of the causes of bullying among secondary school adolescents. Bullying consists of these basic types of abuse-emotional, verbal and physical. It typically involves subtle methods of coercion such as psychological manipulations (Baldry and Farrington 1999). Pepler and Craig (2000) identified five major forms of bullying as:

- a. Physical violence attack
- b. Verbal taunts and name calling
- c. Threat and intimidation
- d. Extortion or stealing of money and other possessions and
- e. Exclusion from peer group.

Cases of bullying have been reported in many schools in Nigeria but the deviant act is not usually given the desirable attention (Obinali, 2000). Available literature

shows that school bullying occurs throughout the world. Limber, Flerx, Nation and Melton (1988) reported that in American schools, approximately 2.1 million students are bullies and 2.7 million are victims. Swearer (2002) reported that everyday 160,000 American school children miss school because they fear being bullied. Rivers and Smith (1994) surveyed 7,000 secondary school students in the U.K., 12% of boys and 5% of girls reported physical bullying, 23% of boys and 24% of girls verbal bullying and 8% of boys and 10% of girls indirect bullying. No significant differences were found between the sexes. Bullying is also a prevalent problem in Canada. 80% of the Canadian students indicated being bullied on a regular basis, often, once per week or more often (Beran and Tutty 2002). The negative effect of bullying is high. According to Olweus (1996), students who are bullied report fear of going to school, anxiety and progressively lower levels of self-esteem when continually faced with bullying behaviour by their peers. According to Boulton and Underwood (1992); Carney (2000), Pepler and Craig (2000); Kim and Leventhal (2008); Pollastri, Cardemil and O' Donnel (2009); bullying could lead to injury, destruction of school properties and delinquency. Bullying promotes truancy, absenteeism, transfer and withdrawal from school by the victims. Rigby and Slee (1991) pointed out that bullied children tend to be loners, quiet, cautious, sensitive, and easily prone to crying. They tend to be fearful, anxious and have slightly lower self-esteem than non-bullied children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Interpersonal relationship among secondary school students in Nigeria is gradually being threatened by deviant behaviours such as bullying. Bullying has become a source of concern to counsellors, teachers, school administrators and parents due to adverse effects on relationship among students. Bullying is a social problem and most children are worried about going back to school because of bullying, intimidation, threats, taunting and violence. School environments tend to be one of "exclusion" rather than "inclusion". Children are left to form their own gangs and you are either "in" or "out". If a child learns how to bully, and gets away with it, he/she can carry it to the work place when he leaves school. Bullying also has adverse effects on the victims, so the researchers want to ascertain the causes, forms and psychosocial problems of bullying in secondary schools.

### **Research Questions.**

The study is guided by the following research questions

1. What are the causes of bullying as perceived by adolescents in secondary schools?
2. What are the forms of bullying which in the views of students, occur in secondary schools?
3. What are the psychosocial problems arising from bullying as perceived by adolescents in secondary schools?

### **Hypotheses**

The study is further guided by four null hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female adolescents on causes of bullying among secondary school students.
2. There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female adolescents on the psychosocial problems arising from bullying.
3. The responses of adolescents on causes of bullying will not differ significantly due to location.
4. There is no significant difference between the responses of adolescents in urban and rural schools on the psychosocial problems arising from bullying.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey design aimed at finding out the causes, forms and psychosocial problems of bullying as perceived by secondary school adolescents. The population of the study consisted of 8,962 SSI and SSII students in 60 public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone (Anambra State Post Primary Service Board – Statistic Division 2010). A sample of 20 secondary schools and 633 respondents was used for the study. 20 schools were obtained from 60 public secondary schools through stratified random sampling technique to take care of gender and location. The 20 sampled schools were made up of 8 schools located in the urban area and 12 schools located in the rural areas. 10 schools were girls, 8 were boys school while 2 schools were co-educational. Then in each of those 20 schools, 35 students were sampled. This was made up of 20 students from SS1 and 15 students from SS2.

A structured questionnaire designed by the researchers was used for data collection. The questionnaire was tagged Causes, Forms and Psychosocial Problems of Bullying (CFPPB). The questionnaire has four major sections A, B, C, and D. Section A dealt with the personal data, section B had 10 items on the causes of bullying among secondary school adolescents which was structured on a four – point Likert response scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Section C was on the forms of bullying behaviours and 15 bullying behaviours exhibited by secondary school students were listed. The respondents were asked to rate their frequency of occurrence on a five - point response scale of Always, Very Often, Often, Rarely and Never. Section D had 10 items that treated psychosocial problems of bullying structured on a four - point response scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

The instrument was validated by two experts in Educational Psychology and two in measurement and Evaluation. Feedback was given regarding question clarity, comprehensiveness and acceptability. All their corrections were effected in the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the same instrument was established by the use of split half method of reliability in which all the scores of the even-numbered items and those of the odd-numbered items were correlated with the use of Pearson

Product Moment Correlation. A reliability co-efficient of .78 was obtained; hence, the instrument was statistically adjudged reliable and considered suitable for the research.

The researchers with the help of three trained research assistants administered the questionnaire on 700 respondents. The respondents were given enough time (10-30 minutes) to complete and return the questionnaire. Out of the 700 copies of questionnaire distributed, 633 were collected back duly filled representing 90.4% return rate. The data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t – test. A mean rating of 2.50 for a four point rating scale and 3.0 for a five point rating scale indicated acceptance of items, while mean ratings below 2.50 and 3.0 respectively indicated rejection.

**Results**

**Research Question 1:** What are the causes of bullying as perceived by adolescents in secondary school?

**Table I: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of Perception of Adolescents on Causes of Bullying in Secondary Schools.**

N= 633				
S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1.	Students may bully because they have been the victim of bullying	3.4	0.8	Agree
2.	Frustration	2.8	0.9	Agree
3.	Parental neglect	2.4	1.0	Disagree
4.	Family Instability	2.7	1.1	Agree
5.	Aggression within the home	2.9	1.1	Agree
6.	Exposure to violence movies	2.7	1.0	Agree
7.	Peer group influence	2.7	1.2	Agree
8.	Child abuse	2.8	0.8	Agree
9.	Being brought up in a hostile environment	2.6	1.0	Agree
10.	Poor state of mental health	2.6	1.1	Agree
Grand mean		27.6	10	

Result of analysis presented in table 1 shows that the adolescents agreed with all the items as causes of bullying in secondary schools except item 3 (parental neglect) with a mean score of 2.4. Item 1 which states that students may bully because they have been the victim of bullying has the highest mean score of 3.4, followed by item 5 which states that aggression within the home may lead to bullying. Table 1 shows that being a victim of bullying, frustration, family instability, aggression within home, exposure to

violence movies, peer group influence, child abuse, being brought up in a hostile environment, poor state mental health are causes of bullying in secondary schools.

**Research Question 2:** What are the forms of bullying which in the views of students, occur in secondary schools?

**Table 2: Forms of Bullying Occurring in Secondary Schools.**

S/N	Items	N	=	633	X	SD	Decision
1.	Name calling				3.5	1.6	Agree
2.	Directing foul language at the target				3.2	1.4	Agree
3.	Verbal or Written abuse				3.3	1.3	Agree
4.	Commenting negatively on somebody's look, cloth or body				3.1	1.5	Agree
5.	Harassment				3.2	1.3	Agree
6.	Teasing someone				3.5	1.3	Agree
7.	Fighting				3.3	1.5	Agree
8.	Pinching someone				3.1	1.5	Agree
9.	Throwing objects at someone				3.3	1.1	Agree
10.	Pulling of ears or hairs				2.2	1.5	Disagree
11.	Spreading malicious rumours about someone				3.1	1.6	Agree
12.	Keeping certain students out of a group				2.6	1.3	Disagree
13.	Insulting someone				3.2	1.2	Agree
14.	Intentionally provoking someone				3.4	1.4	Agree
15.	Ridiculing someone				3.2	1.3	Agree
	Grand mean				47.2	20.8	

Results in table 2 shows that items 10 (pulling of ears and hairs) and 12 (keeping certain students out of a group) have mean scores of 2.2 and 2.6 respectively which are below the set criterion of 3.0 on a five point response rating scale. This indicates that the students did not see these behaviours as occurring very often. Item 1 (name calling), and item 6 (teasing someone) have the highest mean scores of 3.5 each followed by item 14 (intentionally provoking someone) which has a mean score of 3.4. Result of Research question 2 shows that name calling, directing foul language at the target, verbal or written abuse, commenting negatively on somebody's look, cloth or body, harassment, teasing someone, fighting, pinching someone, throwing objects at someone, spreading malicious rumours about someone, insulting someone, intentionally provoking someone and ridiculing someone are forms of bullying in secondary schools.

**Research Question 3:** What are the psychosocial problems arising from bullying as perceived by adolescents in secondary schools?

**Table 3: Psychosocial Problems Arising from Bullying.**

		N	=	633			
S/N	Items				X	SD	Decision
1.	Bullied children tend to be fearful				2.9	1.1	Agree
2.	The child being bullied may exhibit aggressive behaviours inorder to survive				2.9	0.9	Agree
3.	Victimized children are socially withdrawn				2.6	1.0	Agree
4.	They lack concentration in school work				2.4	1.1	Disagree
5.	Some of them play truancy				2.7	1.0	Agree
6.	Bullied children feel that they are not liked				2.6	1.1	Agree
7.	They suffer from depression or feeling of sadness that make them loose hope				2.9	1.0	Agree
8.	Bullied children tend to be frustrated				2.7	0.8	Agree
9.	They tend to be irritable				2.5	1.0	Agree
10.	Bullied children are anxious				2.3	1.1	Agree
Grand mean					26.5	10.1	

Table 3 shows that the adolescents accepted 8 out of 10 items as problems arising from bullying. Item 1 which states that bullied children tend to be fearful, item 2 which states that the child being bullied may exhibit aggressive behaviours inorder to survive, and item 7 which states that they suffer from depression or feeling of sadness that make them loose hope came top-most with a mean of 2.9. Item 10 which states that bullied children are anxious came last with a mean score of 2.3 followed by item 4 which states that they lack concentration in school work with a mean score of 2.4.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female adolescents on causes of bullying among secondary school students.

**Table 4: t-test Analysis on Male and Female Adolescents' Perception of Causes of Bullying**

Gender	N	X	SD	df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Decision
Male	320	26.7	3.7	631	-6.203	1.96	HO
Female	313	28.7	4.4				Accepted

Table 4 reveals that at 0.05 level of significant and 631 df, the calculated  $t - 6.2$  is less than the critical  $t$  1.96. Therefore the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female adolescents on causes of bullying is accepted.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female students on the psychological problems of arising from bullying.

**Table 5: t-test Analysis on Psychosocial Problems arising from Bullying.**

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Decision
Male	320	27.03	3.54	631	.58	1.96	HO
Female	313	26.84	4.50				Accepted

The result in table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference in the responses of male and female adolescents on psychosocial problems arising from bullying.

**Hypothesis 3:** Responses of adolescents on causes of bullying will not differ due to location.

**Table 6: t- test Analysis of Causes of Bullying as Perceived by Adolescents in Urban and Rural Schools.**

Location	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Decision
Urban	317	28.9	3.6	631	7.5	1.96	HO
Rural	316	26.5	4.4				Rejected



Table 6 shows that calculated t- value 7.5 was significant in terms of responses of students in urban and rural schools. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected  
Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between the responses of adolescents in urban and rural schools on the psychosocial problems arising from bullying.

**Table 7: t- test Analysis of Problems of Bully Victims as Perceived by Adolescents in Rural and Urban Schools.**

<b>Location</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Cal-t</b>	<b>Crit-t</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Urban	317	27.49	4.13				
Rural	316	26.39	3.89	631	3.4	1.96	HO Rejected

Table 7 reveals that the calculated t-test score is 3.4. Since the calculated t-score is greater than the critical table value of 1.96, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative. This means that location is a significant factor in the responses of adolescents on the psychosocial problems arising from bullying.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study are discussed in accordance with the research questions. The first research question tried to ascertain the causes of bullying as perceived by secondary school adolescents. The result of the study presented in table 1 showed that all the causes of bullying were accepted except item 3 which was on parental neglect. Item 1 which states that students may bully because they have been the victim of bullying has the highest mean score of 3.4. This was following item 5 (aggression within the home) with a mean score of 2.9. Item 2 (frustration) and item 8 (child abuse) followed with a mean score of 2.8 respectively. The finding agrees with the finding of Sampson (2002) that students bully because they have been the victim of bullying and want to revenge. The study also agrees with earlier findings of Olewus |(1994); Pepler and Craig (2000); Kim and Levanthal (2008); Pollastri, Cardemil and O’ Donnel (2009) who have identified frustration, child abuse, parental neglect, family instability, exposure to violent moves and peer influence among others as causes of bullying. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female on the causes of bullying. This finding agrees with the work of Rivers and Smith (1994) which shows that no significant sex differences were found on the causes of bullying.

Research question two sought to find out forms of bullying that occur in secondary schools as perceived by the students. The result showed that students accepted all the 15 forms of bullying except item 10 (pulling of ears or hair) and item 12 (keeping certain students out of a group). Item 1 (name calling) and item 6 (teasing someone) came topmost with a mean score of 3.5 respectively. This was followed by item 14 (intentionally provoking someone) with a mean score of 3.4. Item 3 (verbal or written abuse), item 7 (fighting) and item 9 (throwing objects at someone), followed

with a mean score of 3.3 respectively. The forms of bullying behaviour reported by students agree with the earlier findings of Olewus (1996) Swearer (2002) and Beran and Tutty (2002).

Research question three tried to ascertain the psychosocial problems associated with bullying in secondary schools. All the problems of bullying were accepted except item 10 which states that bullied children are anxious with a mean of 2.3 and item 4 which states that they lack concentration in school work with a mean of 2.3. Item 1 which states that bullied children tend to be fearful; item 2 which states that the child being bullied may exhibit aggressive behaviour in order to survive and item 7 which states that they suffer from depression or feeling of sadness that make them loose hope came first with a mean score of 2.9 respectively. The study also showed that there is no significant difference between the responses of male and female students on the psychosocial problems arising from bullying. The findings on psychosocial problems agree with the works of Rigbu and Slee (1991), Boulton and Underwood (1992), Olweus (1996), Carnery (2000), Pepler and Craig (2000); Kim and Laventhal (2008) and Pollastray; Cardemil and O'Donnel (2009) who identified the negative effects of bullying in schools as frustration, truancy, being fearful, depression and being irritable, among others.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, bullying occurs in our secondary schools. Students bully due to many reasons such as being victims of bullying behaviour, aggression within the homes, child abuse, frustration, peer influence among others. Some bullies attack their targets physically like pinching fighting, throwing objects etc. Others use psychological control or verbal insults like name calling, directing foul languages on others, verbal or written abuse, teasing, and spreading malicious rumours. The students reported that the bully victims are fearful, aggressive, socially withdrawn, frustrated and also they are truants.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The adolescents should be counselled on the negative effects of bullying and made to understanding that violence is not an acceptable behaviour.
2. The bullying victims need support, supervision and monitoring
3. Teachers have to be educated on methods of identifying bullying behaviours and instructed on ways they can reduce and deal with these behaviours when they occur in the classroom

4. An anti-bullying committee should be set up for countering bullying. Anti-bullying programmes should be designed to teach students co-operation
5. Peer group Counselling where the counselor pulls together a group of students to solve the bullying of one of their peers is recommended. Peer moderators should be used in intervention and dispute resolution, as a form of peer support
6. Parents should provide children with threat free environment at home and teach the best interaction skills.
7. The schools should create an environment whereby children understand from the moment they start school that bullying, aggression and violence are not acceptable

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