

# **BULLYING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: NEED FOR INTERVENTION**

*Dr. (Mrs.) P. U. Ekeh*

## **Abstract**

The study aimed at identifying different forms of bullying being experienced by junior secondary school class 1 (JSSI) students in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Two research questions directed the conduct of the research. The research design adopted in the conduct of this study is survey. All JSSI students in all the public secondary school in Port Harcourt city constituted the population of the study. The sample of the study consisted of 444 JSSI students drawn from 10 secondary schools using cluster and simple random sampling techniques. A questionnaire named "forms and incidence of bullying questionnaire" (FIBQ) was used in gathering data for the study. The FIBQ was face validated by specialists and Experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability co-efficient of the FIBQ was determined using the cronbach alpha technique and a co-efficient score of 0.73 was got. The researcher personally administered the instrument on the respondents with the help of teachers in the schools visited. The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot. Mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions. Results got after data analysis indicated that different forms of bullying prevail among JSSI students in the schools visited. These include beating, flogging, kicking, kneeling down, for too long, being made to carry heavy objects on their heads, damage and 'destruction of their books, school bags, school uniforms, extortion of their personal belongings, insulting name calling and exclusion of the junior students from participating in desired activities. Findings also showed that the incidence of bullying among the junior students in the schools visited is high. Based on these findings; recommendations were made for urgent steps to be taken by the schools towards ensuring that bullying is brought under control,

## **Introduction**

A careful observation of children in a typical secondary school environment will among other things reveal varied students behaviours. While some of these behaviours are effective and pro-social in nature, some others are very unhealthy and anti-social in nature. Bullying is just one of the many behaviour problems found among secondary school students (Nwachukwu & Anyanwu, 1999, Nwachukwu, 1999).

The word bullying, as defined by Lorimer and Lechner (1995) means to persecute physically or spiritually, to force, oppress or intimidate a weak person. Bullying can also be defined as longstanding, negative behaviour conducted by an individual or a group, and directed toward a somehow helpless victim. (Farrington, 1993, Rigby, 1996). Bullying can take different forms. These include-name calling, threat, rumours, extortion, damage to one's property, beating and inflicting injuries on a person or people, exclusion of a person from participation in a desired activity etc (Roland, 1998, shaw 2001). However, for any of the above acts to be regarded as bullying, it must be one that is repeated persistently instead of occurring only once; and the offensive behaviour must be directed against a person who is not able to defend him or herself in the actual situation (Olweus, 1997, Roland & Munlhe, 1991, Roland & Galloway, 2002). In effect, a child or person who bullies is one who delights in and actually, persistently beats, injures, threatens, jeers, extorts or damages properties belonging to a person who is weaker than him or herself. In whatever form it comes, bullying will constitute a major threat to peace and safety in our educational institutions.

Both the bully and the bullied (the victim) are negatively affected. While the bullied is psychologically harmed, as he or she is made to live in perpetual fear of the bully and so not able to settle down for any effective classroom work, the bully may frequently have to face the wrath of the school authorities for his or her unwholesome behaviour (s). As noted earlier researches abound which have

reported different forms of bullying including physical assault, teasing, active exclusion of an individual from a social group etc (Smith & Sharp, 1994, Roland, 1998), An astronomical rise in the incidence of bullying has also been reported in schools (Olweus, 2001),

However, (Shaw, 2001) believes that the forms, incidence and intervention strategies adopted to check or control bullying may not be exactly the same for all schools. In the light of this, what is the situation like in secondary schools in Rivers State of Nigeria? Precisely, what forms of bullying prevail among students in secondary schools in Port Harcourt city of Rivers State? Again, what is the incidence of bullying in these schools? This study was designed to answer this question.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study were:

- (1) to identify the forms of bullying experienced by junior secondary school class 1 (JSS1) students of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt city of River State.
- (2) to determine the incidence of bullying among JSS1 students in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt city of Rivers state.
- (3) to make some recommendations based on the findings

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the conduct of this study

- (1) What forms of bullying do the JSS1 students in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt experience, as measured by their mean scores?
- (2) How frequently do JSS1 students in Port Harcourt public secondary schools experience bullying, as measured by their mean scores?

### **Research Design**

The survey research design was adopted in conducting this research. The focus was to collect and analyze data and to present in systematic manner reports relating to forms and incidence of bullying among junior students in public secondary school in Port Harcourt metropolis.

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Technique**

All the 3025 junior secondary school class 1 (JSSI) students in all the 15 public secondary schools in Port Harcourt City of Rivers State constituted the population of the study. A sample of 444 JSSI students drawn from 10 public secondary schools, in Port Harcourt was used in the study. This sample was drawn using cluster and simple random sampling techniques. The researcher originally intended to use 450 students for the study. However, 6 respondents were dropped as their copies of the instrument were declared invalid due to errors they committed in filling them out. Therefore, the researcher eventually worked on 444 students.

### **Instrument, Method of Data Collection and Method of Data Analysis**

Data for this study were collected using an instrument named Forms and Incidence of Bullying Questionnaire (FIBQ) developed by the researcher. The FIBQ had 2 sections - A and B with 24 items each. While section A assessed the forms of bullying among the students, section B assessed the incidence of bullying among the students. The FIBQ is a likert type scale. Section A had 5 response options - Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), which were weighted 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Section B had 4 response options-Very Often (VO), Often (O), Not Sure (NS), and Never (N) which were weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. In the light of these scales, 3 and 2.5 were adopted as criteria for accepting or rejecting any item of the instrument. The FIBQ was face validated by specialists and experts in educational psychology and measurement and evaluation. The experts were requested to validate the instrument in terms of its relevance to the objectives of the study, as well as its suitability in generating the required data for (he study).

The reliability coefficient of the FIBQ was determined using the cronbach alpha technique; and a coefficient score of 0.73 was obtained. The instrument was administered on the respondents by the researcher with the help of some teachers in the school visited. The filled out copies of the questionnaire were collected on the -spot\* Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis. Mean (X), standard deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions.

### **Results**

Results got after data analysis, are presented in the tables below.

Research question 1: What forms of bullying do the JSS1 students experience as measured by their mean score?

Data generated in response to this research question were analyzed with mean (X) and standard deviation (SD). Summary of the analysis is shown in table 1

**Table I Mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) Analysis of Forms of Bullying Among JSS1 -student**

S\N	ITEMS	9C	SD	REMARK
	My Seniors Or Stronger Students			
(0)	Beat me with hand	3.531	1.26	A
(2)	Use cane to flog me	4.004	0.81	A
(1)	Stab me with sharp objects	2.943	1.36	R
(4)	Give me heavy objects to carry on my head	3.407	1.30	A
(5)	Kick me with their legs	4.644	0.72	A
(6)	Pour water on me	2.891	1.37	R
	Spit at me	3.207	1.39	A
(8)	Ask me to kneel down for a long time	3.261	1.41	A
(9)	Damage my books	3.405	1.26	A
(10)	Destroy my school bag	3.382	1.33	A
(11)	Tear my school uniform	3.092	1.42	A

(12)	Seize my personal belongings	3.069	1.45	A
(13)	Forcefully snatch my food items	3.263	1.38	A
(04)	Take my money from me	3.200	1.44	A
	Call Me Insultive Names Like-			
(15)	Idiot	3.063	1.34	A
(16)	Stupid Boy\Girl	3.141	1.40	A
(17)	Fool	3.117	1.46	A
(18)	Harlot	2.806	1.32	R
(19)	Bastard	3.002	3.43	A
(20)	Devil	3.132	1.35	A
	Curse me, as in-			
(21)	God punish you	4.000	0.88	A
(22)	God punish your father and your mother	3.317	1.31	A
(23)	Senior students stop me from playing where they are	4.484	0.65	A
(24)	Senior students come to take me out of my class for punishment	3.292	1.46	A

Note: A= accepted, R= rejected

An observation of table I above shows that items 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 were accepted as indicating forms of bullying prevalent in the schools studied. This is because

their respective calculated mean (X) scores are greater than 3 (the criterion). In effect, the respondents accepted that they experience the following forms of bullying- beating with hand (3.531), flogging with cane (4.004), being made to carry heavy objects on their leads (3.407), being kicked with legs (4.644), being spat at (3.207), kneeling down for a long time (3.261), damage to their books (3.405), destruction of their school bags (3.382), tearing of their school uniforms (3.092), seizure of their personal belongings (3.069), forceful snatching of their food items (3.263), their money being forcefully taken from them (3.200). The respondents also indicated that they experience being called insulting names like - idiot (3.063), stupid boy\girl (3.14-1), fool (3.137), bastard (3.002), and devil (3.132). They also accepted that they receive curses such as God punish you (4.000), and God punish your father\mother (3.317). The respondents also experience being stopped by their seniors from playing where they are (4.484). Seniors also take the juniors out of their classes for punishment (3.292). On the other hand, the subjects rejected that seniors stab them with sharp objects (2.943), seniors pour water on them (2.891) and seniors call them harlots (2.806). These are represented by items 3, 6 and 18 in the table above.

Research question 2- What is the incidence of bullying among JSS1 students as measured by their mean score?

Data collected in relation to this research question were analysed using mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) as shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) analysis of Incidence of Bullying among Junior Students.**

SN	ITEMS	X	SD	REMARK
	Senior And Other Stronger Students			
(1)	Beating the junior students with hand	2.844	1.43	H
(2)	Flogging them with cane	3.265	1.31	H
(3)	Stabbing them with sharp objects	2.236	1.50	L
(4)	Making them carry heavy objects	2.659	1.38	H
(5)	Kicking them with legs	2.851	1.26	H
(6)	Pouring water on them	2.376	1.35	L
(7)	Spitting at them	2.540	1.33	H
(8)	Making them kneel down for along time	2.641	1.37	H
(9)	Damaging their books	2.909	1.27	H
(10)	Destroying their books	2.750	1.34	H
(11)	Tearing their school uniforms	2.558	1.30	H
(12)	Seizing their personal belongings	2.659	1.36	H
(13)	Forcefully snatching their food items	2.628	1.40	H
(14)	Taking their money from them	2.691	1.29	H
	Calling Them Insultive Names Like-			
(15)	Idiot	2.565	1.28	H
(16)	Stupid boy/girl	2.623	1.42	H
(17)	Fool	2.594	1.30	H
(18)	Harlot	2.263	1.25	L
(19)	Bastard	2.747	1.46	H
(20)	Devil	2.524	1.33	H
	Cursing Them, As In-			
(21)	God punish you	2.635	1.32	H
(22)	God punish your father and your mother	2.583	1.22	H
(23)	Seniors stopping their juniors from playing where they are	3.141	1.28	H
(24)	Seniors taking the junior out of their classes for punishment	2.599	1.41	H

Note: H= High, L= Low.

Information in table 2 above shows that the incidence or the frequency of occurrence (among junior students) of the forms of bullying represented by items ), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,

14, 15,16,17,18,19, 20,21,22,23 and 24, is high. –

This is because the calculated mean (X) scores indicating their frequencies of occurrence (incidence) are respectively greater than 2.5 (the criterion). This means that physical assaults represented by items 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8, damaging and extortion of students belongings represented by item 9-14, insulting names calling represented by items 15, 16, 17, 19 and 20, cursing represented by items 21 and 22, and exclusion of junior students from participation in desired activities represented by items 23 and 24, all occur at high frequency among junior students in the schools understudy. On the other hand, the incidence of items 3, 6 and 18 representing stabbing (2.236), pouring water on junior students (2.376) and calling them harlots (2.263), is low. This is because the mean (X) scores indicating their frequencies of occurrence are respectively lower than 2.5 (the criterion).

### **Discussion**

This study aimed at determining the forms and incidence of bullying among junior secondary school class I (JSS1) students in Port Harcourt metropolis. Findings indicated that out of 24 forms of bullying in the instrument, 21 were accepted while 3 of them including seniors stabbing junior students with sharp objects, pouring water on them and calling them harlots, were rejected. Those accepted by the respondents as prevailing in the schools include senior students beating the juniors with hand, flogging them with cane, making them carry heavy objects, kicking them with their legs, spitting at them, making them kneel down for a long time, damaging their books, destroying their school bags, tearing their school uniforms, seizing their personal belongings, forcefully snatching their food items and taking their money from them. Other identified forms of bullying include calling junior students insulting names like, idiot, stupid boy/girl, fool, bastard and devil; cursing them as in God punish you, or God punish your father and mother. The respondents also accepted that their seniors stop them from playing where they are and also take them out of their classes for punishment. Finding of this study also indicated that the incidence or the frequency of occurrence of bullying among the subjects is high; as the mean (x) scores of individual items that assessed the incidence, except those of items 3, 6 and 18, are respectively greater than 2.5 (the criterion). Again, a grand incidence means (x) score of 2.661, which is also greater than 2.5 indicated a high incidence of bullying among the subjects.

These findings as stated above are alarming and frightening.

They are however consistent with the reports of Smith & Sharp, 1994, and Oleweus, 2001, which indicated severer forms of bullying and an astronomical rise in the incidence of bullying in schools. Some of the causes of this unwholesome behaviour (bullying) in schools may include high level of violence and aggression in the larger society which the young people witness or even experience and may try to practice them (JEkeh, 2004). The desire on the part of the senior students to make their junior realise that they are powerful and superior to them may have led to the findings of this study (Roland, 1998). Laxity on the part of the school administrators to put in place well plan intervention strategies to check bullying may have also led to the high incidence of bullying in the schools.

Bullying whenever and wherever it occurs, constitutes a serious threat to peace, safety and security, as victims feel threatened, frightened and humiliated (Rigby, 1996). In a school situation, no learner in an adverse physical, mental or emotional state like fear, anxiety, tension, lack of concentration, confusion or bodily injury e.t.c, arising from violence including bullying, can settle down for any effective classroom work and other school activities (Onunkwo, 2001). It is therefore possible that some of the aberrations we notice among young people in our schools like general laxity and disenchantment with education (Nwana, 2000), which manifest in absenteeism, truancy and dropping out of school, can be attributed to bullying. This is because victims of bullying in schools will prefer (as a result of fear and frustration), to stay away from a school environment that is hostile and where they have no rest of mind to settle for any serious academic work.

The prevalence of bullying among junior secondary school class 1 (JSS1) students in secondary schools in metropolitan Port Harcourt is counter productive, as it will surely antagonize efforts being by school administrators and teachers to achieve effective teaching and learning in the schools. It will also make difficult the establishment and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships among the students. The findings of this study therefore point to an urgent need for well articulated measures or intervention strategies to be put in place to check the high incidence of bullying in schools.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions for Intervention and Reorientation**

Conclusions drawn from the findings of this study include that JSS1 students in the schools used in the

study experience different forms of bullying from their seniors. These include beating, flogging, kicking, kneeling down for too long, being made to carry heavy objects on their head, damage and destruction of their books, school bags, school uniforms, extortion of their personal belongings, insulting names calling, curses and exclusion from participation in desired activities. The researcher also concluded that the incidence of bullying among junior students in the schools used for the study is high. The prevalence of bullying in the schools poses a serious disciplinary problem which needs to be tackled quickly for safety and effective teaching and learning to be achieved in the schools.

To achieve and maintain a crisis, violence and threat free school environment, (Shaw, 2001) suggests that emphasis should be placed on prevention, careful planning and preparation, rather than reacting after events have occurred. This in effect means that schools should have well planned and defined programmes for managing disciplinary problems instead of adopting ad hoc procedures. School authorities should not wait until something terrible happens before actions are taken. For these reasons, the researcher suggests as follows:

1. Schools should make conscious effort to identify and establish cases of bullying; as a problem can only be solved when it is properly identified and objectively defined.
2. Effort should be made by school authorities to identify both the victims and the victimisers so that necessary support can be provided early enough to anyone who may need it.
3. Schools should initiate anti-bullying programmes like establishing friendship clubs and other useful school clubs and associations and encourage students to be members. This way, students are kept busy and they learn to work, learn and play together in groups without quarrelling.
4. Schools should regularly organize seminars and workshops through which awareness is created concerning the adverse effects of bullying. Socially acceptable and effective behaviours such as friendliness, co-operation, tolerance, love, kindness etc should be emphasised during such workshops and students should be encouraged to adopt them.
5. Schools should establish and run counselling centres where students requiring help can get it.

Rules and regulations guiding the conduct of students in the schools should be well spelt out and students made aware of them. Offenders should be made to face penalties which will serve as deterrents to future offenders.

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