Original Research Article

BULLYING BEHAVIOUR: EXPERIENCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OBIO AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

Aims: To determine the bullying experience among secondary school students in Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Study Design: A cross sectional study was conducted among 1860 participants aged 10-19 years.

Place and Duration of study: The study was conducted in nine co-educational secondary schools in Obio Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria over a six month period (January 2021 – June 2021)

Materials and Method: Bullying behavior was assessed using a questionnaire designed by the researchers. Descriptive and inferential statistics were carried out. Statistical significance was set at a p-value <0 .05.

Results: The mean age of the study participants was 14.25±1.85 years and the male to female ratio was 1.1:1. Nearly all of the students (98.9%) had heard of bullying. Furthermore, 56.6% of participants were victims of bullying, 32.4% were perpetrators and 11.0% were neither victims nor perpetrators of bullying. The most common bullying behaviors known to the students were: physical assaults (19.6%) and "taking things forcefully from others" (19.3%). Factors significantly associated with both bullying victimization and perpetration included; age greater than 14 years, male gender and low socio-economic status (p<0.001). Furthermore, bullying perpetration was more common in senior school students (p<0.001) while a greater proportion of junior school students were victims of bullying (p<0.001).

Conclusion: Bullying behavior remains a significant social problem among secondary school students in our society. It has deleterious physical and psychological effects on both the victim and the perpetrator. Greater efforts are required from all stakeholders to eliminate this negative trend.

Keywords: [Bullying behavior, secondary schools, Obio-Akpor, Nigeria]

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as any unwanted aggressive behavior by another person or group of persons that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or highly likely to be repeated [1]. This imbalance of power often results from disparity in physical strength, social status, group size or a recognition of the victims

vulnerabilities [2]. Bullying represents a dynamic social interaction in which an individual may play different roles at different times [1].

Bullying is a widespread problem in childhood and adolescence which has been further compounded by increasing internet use at a young age [1]. There are however, variations in prevalence rates from different parts of the world. These variations may reflect differences in evaluation standards and tools [3]. Present estimates suggest that worldwide, school-based bullying affects about 18-31% of children and youths while cyberbullying affects 7-15% of youths [1]. In Africa, previous authors have reported prevalence rates of 56% in Ghana [4], 45.5% in Mozambique [5], and 44.5% in Malawi [6]. Studies done in Nigeria have reported the prevalence rates of bullying among school children to range from 29% to 85% [7-9].

Common forms of bullying reported among school children include physical assaults, verbal attacks, social or relational aggression as well as abuse via the internet (cyberbullying) or other emerging technologies [10-12].

Factors associated with bullying victimization among school children have also varied among different authors. Whereas some studies reported no association between gender and bullying victimization [4], some others reported male gender [13,14], and female gender [15], to be associated with bullying victimization. Other factors found to be associated with bullying victimization in previous studies include younger age [5,10,16], low self-esteem [17], lack of peer support [6,16] and poor relationship with parents [15].

Bullying has become an increasingly topical issue in child health as it is now recognized to have the potential for profound short and long term negative consequences on all those involved including perpetrators, targets and bystanders [1]. Consequences can affect the child's social experiences, academic progress, physical health as well as mental health [1]. These consequences include anxiety disorder, low self-esteem, depression, physical injuries and poor academic achievement [15,18].

The aim of our study was to determine the bullying experience among secondary school students in Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This was a descriptive cross sectional study carried out over a six month period (January 2021-June 2021). Routine Covid-19 safety protocols were observed throughout the conduct of the study.

2.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in nine co-educational (gender mixed) secondary schools in Obio Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria.

2.3 Study Population

Study participants consisted of 1860 junior and senior secondary school students aged 9-19 years recruited from 9 co-educational (gender mixed) secondary schools in the LGA. Sample size calculation was based on the prevalence of rate of bullying from a previous Nigerian study [19]. Multistage sampling was used to recruit the study participants.

2.4 Methods

A pretested self-administered questionnaire designed by the researchers was used to obtain the socio-demographic variables of the participants. Bullying behavior was assessed using a questionnaire developed by the Researchers. Questionnaire was developed based on existing information about bullying in literature [1,2,6-10]. It was pretested in a pilot study and areas of ambiguity duly corrected before the commencement of the main study. Socio-economic classification was based on the method developed by Olusanya et al [20].

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics were presented as tables, graphs and charts in simple proportions. Student's t-test was used for the comparison of means while Chi square test was used to test for association between subgroups. Confidence interval was set at 95% and p value of ≤0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean age of the study participants was 14.25±1.85 years. The male to female ratio was 1.1:1. Nearly all of the students (98.9%) had heard of bullying. Furthermore, 56.6% of participants were victims of bullying, 32.4% were perpetrators and 11.0% were neither victims nor perpetrators of bullying (Table I).

Table II shows that the three most common examples of bullying behavious known to the participants were "Beating , pushing, kicking others so as to intimidate them" (19.6%); "Taking things forcefully from others" (19.3%); and " Damaging peoples things to hurt them" (18.8%).

Factors significantly associated with both bullying victimization and perpetration included; age>14 years, male gender and low socio-economic status. Furthermore, perpetration of bullying behavior was more common in senior school students while a greater proportion of junior school students were victims of bullying (Table III).

Majority of the victims of bullying (81.1%) believed that the school authority was making sufficient efforts to curb the trend (Table IV).

Table I: socio-demographic variables and pattern of bullying among the participants

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Sex		
Males	984	52.9
Females	876	47.1

Age in years		*
≤14	1035	55.6
> 14	825	44.4
Class in school		
Junior secondary	900	48.4
Senior secondary	960	51.6
Social class of participants		
Upper	552	29.7
Middle	771	41.4
Lower	537	28.9
Ever heard of bully		
Yes	1840	98.9
No	20	1.1
*__Medium where bully was heard__		
School teachers	1278	44.0
From friends	780	26.8
Religious organizations	429	14.8
Media	390	13.4
Parents/relatives	30	1.0
Victim of bullying		
Yes	1053	56.6
No	807	43.4
Perpetrator of bully		
Yes	603	32.4
No	1257	67.6
*__Where bully occurred__		
School	1292	59.7
At home	202	9.3
Street	495	22.9
Other(religious centres, party)	177	8.1
Report of bullying among victims		
Yes	729	69.2
No	324	30.8

*Multiple responses

Table II: *Examples of bullying behaviors participant know

Examples	Frequency	Percentages
Saying mean and hurtful to others or making fun of them	1053	11.5

Ignoring or excluding others purposely from group of friends or activities so as to make them feel bad	892	9.8
Beating , pushing, kicking others so as to intimidate them	1792	19.6
Telling lies or spreading rumours about others so that people will dislike them	639	7.0
Taking things forcefully from others	1764	19.3
Damaging peoples things to hurt them	1711	18.8
Forcing or threatening people to do things against their wish	1274	14.0
Total	9125	100.0

*Multiple responses

Table III: Relationship between bullying behaviour and socio-demographic variables

Variables	Frequency	Perpetrators of bullying N (%)	χ 2 p-value	Victims of bullying N (%)	X p-value

Age ≤14 > 14	 1035 825	 276 (26.7) 327 (39.6)	 35.2 <0.001	 396 (38.3) 657 (79.6)	 319.8 <0.001
Sex Males Females	 984 876	 468 (47.6) 135 (15.4)	 218.5 <0.001	 702 (71.3) 351 (40.1)	 184.4 <0.001
Class Junior Senior	 900 960	 258 (28.7) 345 (35.9)	 11.2 0.001	 582 (64.7) 471 (49.1)	 46.0 <0.001
Social class Upper Lower	 552 1308	 297 (53.8) 306 (23.4)	 163.8 <0.001	 384 (69.6) 669 (51.2)	 53.5 <0.001

Table IV: Effort of school authority against bullying behaviour

Victim of bullying	Sufficient effort to curb bullying in school			Total
	Yes	No	Don't know	
Yes	489(81.1)	94(15.6)	20(3.3)	603(100.0)
No	1004(79.9)	249(19.8)	4(0.8)	1257(100.0)
Total	**1493(80.3)**	**343(18.4)**	**24(1.3)**	**1860(100.0)**

χ 2= 32.4, DF 2, p-value < 0.0001, significant at $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

In the index study, the proportion of participants who were victims (56.6%) and perpetrators (32.4%) of bullying compares favorably with the findings from previous studies [4,7,8]. The Prevalence of bullying victimization in our study is however higher than that reported in Mozambique [5], and Malawi [6] but lower than that reported in a previous Nigerian study [9]. These differences in prevalence rates noted between the studies in comparison may reflect variations in evaluation tools employed in the different studies as well as cultural differences in the populations studied.

Physical assaults such as "beating, pushing and kicking" were the predominant forms of bullying known by school children in our study. This is similar to the findings from previous studies [4,10-12]. This form of bullying is of significance as it can result in varying degrees of physical injuries, scars and disfigurement.

Concerning factors associated with bullying behavior among study participants, a significantly greater proportion of boys reported being both victims and perpetrators of bullying in comparison to girls. A similar finding have been reported by

other previous authors [9,21]. In contrast, some other studies found no gender difference in the prevalence of bullying among study participants [4,8,22]. Furthermore, Seo et al [15], reported bullying victimization to be more common among girls in a study done in Korea.

Bullying victimization was more common in the younger age group than the older ones in our study. This is similar to findings reported in several previous studies [5,10,15,16, 23]. This finding may be because the younger children may not have the capacity to seek the needed help to break the cycle of bullying. In contrast, bullying perpetration was more common in the older age group. This may be explained by the imbalance of physical strength between older and younger children.

Both bullying victimization and perpetration were significantly more common in children from low socioeconomic class in comparison to those from higher socioeconomic class. The reason for this difference is unclear. A similar finding was reported in studies done in Korea [15] and China [24].

Although a significant majority of the students in our study acknowledged that the school authorities were making sufficient efforts against bullying, greater efforts need to be strengthened by all stakeholders to curb this trend. This will further reduce the burden of bullying among school children and also avert the adverse consequences associated with it.

4. CONCLUSION

The prevalence of bullying among secondary school children in our society remains high. This is of great concern as bullying has deleterious physical and psychological effects on all concerned- the victim, the perpetrator and the bystander. Greater efforts are required from all stakeholders to eliminate this negative trend.

CONSENT

All authors declare that written informed consent was obtained from the parents/guardians of all participating children. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the Editorial office/Chief Editor/Editorial Board members of this journal.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Permission for the study was obtained from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and from the Head Teachers of the participating schools.

DISCLAIMER:

AUTHORS HAVE DECLARED THAT NO COMPETING INTERESTS EXIST. THE PRODUCTS USED FOR THIS RESEARCH ARE COMMONLY AND PREDOMINANTLY USE PRODUCTS IN OUR AREA OF RESEARCH AND COUNTRY. THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST BETWEEN THE AUTHORS AND PRODUCERS OF THE PRODUCTS BECAUSE WE DO NOT INTEND TO USE THESE PRODUCTS AS AN AVENUE FOR ANY LITIGATION BUT FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE. ALSO, THE RESEARCH WAS NOT FUNDED BY THE PRODUCING COMPANY RATHER IT WAS FUNDED BY PERSONAL EFFORTS OF THE AUTHORS.

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