

**INCIDENCE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG  
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE,  
NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING**

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**ABSTRACT.....**

*The study investigated the incidence of Bullying Inventory (SBI) which was developed by the researchers. The bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Anambra State. Four research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all the 30,579 secondary school students in Onitsha Education Zone of Anambra State. A total of 1,200 respondents were selected from the population using disproportionate stratified sampling technique. Instruments used for data collection was a structured questionnaire named Student*

*Bullying Inventory (SBI) which was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was validated by two experts from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Analyses of data was done using mean and standard deviation. Findings from the study revealed that bullying exists in Onitsha Education Zone of Anambra State. Based on the findings recommendations were made including that the counsellors should help to enlighten the students on the harmful effects of bullying to the victims and the perpetrators.*

## INTRODUCTION

Schools are institutions for bringing up (educating) the young ones responsibly, obedience for rules and regulations, respect for the dignity and the right of other persons, good human relations and such like

Nevertheless, some deviant behaviours are sometimes exhibited by students in the schools and some of these deviant behaviours often found in schools include bullying, aggression, stealing, hostility, drug abuse, fighting, dishonesty and truancy (Chima, Otta and Odoemalam, 2005). According to Chima et al (2005), these behavioural problems are classified into four groups namely conduct disorder, personality disorder, inadequate/immature behaviours and socialized delinquent disorders. Bullying as a conduct disorder is believed to be continuously present in our schools apparently because the students involved do not consider it an aberrant behaviour or because most teachers and parents do not recognize it as a serious problem in the school system. (Neto, 2005; Ron, 1997 & Rigby, 2007). Bullying in schools however is a world wide problem (Ron, 1997) that has drawn the attention of researchers. Many of these researchers see bullying as a serious behaviour problem that must be addressed or reduced in the school system (Ron, 1997; Limber and Nation, 1998; Neto 2005; & Rigby, 1998).

Bullying can be defined as a willful conscious desire to hurt another and put him under stress (Tattum & Tattum, 1992). Any behaviour that a person exhibits with the intention to hurt another person physically or psychologically, for no good reason, is considered an act of bullying. Zirpoli (2009) saw bullying in school as one or more students seeking to have power over another student through the use of ongoing verbal, physical or emotional harassment, intimidation or isolation. A bully is a student who intends to hurt, threaten or frighten another student, who is considered the victim (Neto, 2005). Bullying as a behaviour problem is apparently present in every school, as long as the school brings together students from different family backgrounds and with different characters. Rigby (2007) agrees with this when he said that bullying has been reported as occurring in every school in which he investigated. According to Olweus (1993) a survey of 207 students from small mid-western towns of U.S.A, discovered that 77% of the respondents indicated that they have been victims of bullying in their schools.

Nigeria is no exception in witnessing cases of bullying in our secondary schools, where some students who are older or who feel stronger or more powerful try to intimidate others. These bullies, most of the time, get involved in bullying behaviours because they want to feel important or attract the respect of other students. Ron (1997) observed that students who engage in bullying behaviours tend to have a need to feel powerful and to be in control. Idowu & Yahaya (2006) noted that deviant behaviours such as bullying are gradually threatening interpersonal relations among secondary school students in Nigeria. They are of the opinion that bullying has become a source of concern to counsellors, teachers, school administrators and parents, owing to its adverse effects in the lives of students. Umoh (2000) agreed that cases of bullying behaviours have been reported in many schools in Nigeria, but unfortunately the deviant behaviour has not been given desirable

attention. According to Idowu and Yahaya (2006) the problem of bullying continues to be present in our schools because of its subtle nature, which makes it possible for it to be ignored by many teachers, counsellors and school authorities.

Worthy of note also is the fact that bullying behaviours appears to be more common with boys than girls. There are more cases of direct or physical bullying among boys. Girls on the other hand are more involved in indirect forms of bullying like excluding others from group activities, ignoring people, rumour mongering, manipulating situations to hurt others and denial of rights (Neto, 2005; Rigby, 2004; & APA, 2004). According to recent studies conducted by researchers, students report that girls are bullied by both boys and girls, while boys are bullied mainly by boys. (Rigby, 2004; & Olweus, 1993). Another instance of bullying in our secondary schools is seen in the untold hardships suffered by junior students at the hands of senior students. The latter under the guise of playing the role of school functionaries, subjected the former to unbearable pain and stress. This trend of oppression continues to occur in our schools because it is apparently seen or believed to be a normal part of the school life. A number of factors are seen to be responsible for the development of the attitude of bullying in students. These factors according to Neto (2005) include unstructured family, poor affective relationships, physical punishment, and violent emotional outbursts. Ron (1997) also agreed that use of physical penance by parents can result in their children developing bullying tendencies or behaviours.

This study therefore is to investigate the incidence of bullying behaviour among students in order to bring to light the seriousness of the cankerworm in the school system as well as highlight the need for all hands to be on deck in addressing this social and educational problem in the lives of the students. The main purpose of the study is to find out the incidence of bullying behaviours in the schools and proffer solutions to this negative menace.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. Does bullying take place among secondary schools students?
2. What are the causes of bullying among secondary school students?
3. Are there gender differences in bullying among secondary school students?
4. What are the ways of curbing bullying behaviours among secondary school students?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The study which aimed at investigating the incidence of bullying among secondary school students, is a survey design. Survey design seemed more appropriate here because the study sought for information as well as the opinions of the respondents regarding the existence of bullying behaviours among secondary school students.

## **Area of Study**

The study was carried out in Onitsha Education Zone. Onitsha education zone comprises Ogbalu, Onitsha South and Onitsha North Local Government Area. The residents are mostly traders

## **Population of the Study**

The population consisted all the 30,579 students in the state owned secondary schools in Onitsha Education Zone. There are 35 secondary schools and a population of 30,579 students. This information was collected from Statistics Department of Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission, Onitsha office (2009/2010 Annual Returns of Secondary Schools).

## **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample of the study was 1,200 students. The researcher employed stratified random sampling technique (disproportionate) in selecting four boys, four girls and four co-educational secondary schools totaling 12 out of the 35 secondary schools in Onitsha Education Zone. In addition, purposive sampling was used in selecting 200 students-100 from junior class and 100 from senior class-from each of the twelve schools selected.

## **Instrument for Data Collection**

The instrument used for the collection of data was structured questionnaire, named Student Bullying Inventory (SBI). This was developed by the researchers based on the research questions and information gathered from the review of related literature. The 25-item questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section A deals with the personal data of the respondents. Section B has 8 sub-items dealing with the various bullying behaviours exhibited by the students, 8 items on the causes of bullying among students, 4 items on gender differences in bullying, and the last 5 items on the prevention of bullying among students. The respondents were requested to indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement to all the items on a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

## **Validation of Instrument**

The structured questionnaire was given to two experts in the fields of Guidance & Counselling, at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. These experts checked the items for relevance, clarity and to know whether they were capable of eliciting the right responses and corrections were effected before using the questionnaire.

## **Method of Data Collection**

The instrument was distributed to the sampled secondary school students and were collected back by the researchers with the help of two research assistants, within a period of two weeks.

### Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents through the questionnaire were used to answer the research questions using the mean. The four point rating scale was assigned numerical values as shown below

Strongly Agreed (SA)-4points, Agreed (A)-3points, Strongly Disagreed (SA)-2points and Disagreed (D)-1point. A decision mean of 2.50 was determined and this was used as a basis for accepting or rejecting any response item. In other words 2.50 and above was acceptability while below 2.50 was reject

### RESULT

#### Research question 1:

Does bullying take place among secondary school students?

**Table 1: Responses on the bullying behaviours that occur among students**

S/N	Items	Mean	Remarks
	The following bullying behaviours take place among students		
1	Beating	2.91	Acceptable
2	Snatching	2.80	Acceptable
3	Insulting	2.98	Acceptable
4	Intimidating	2.97	Acceptable
5	Name calling	3.01	Acceptable
6	Destroying students belongings	2.85	Acceptable
7	Spreading rumours	2.78	Acceptable
8	Excluding others	2.81	Acceptable

A clear look at the above table shows that the respondents, on the average, responded affirmatively to the question regarding the occurrence of bullying behaviours among students. This was deduced from the fact that the mean scores of all items on the table are higher than the decision mean of 2.50. This is to say that most of the respondents perceived that bullying occurs among students.

#### Research Question 2

What are the causes of bullying behaviour among students?

**Table 2: Responses on the causes of bullying**

S/N	Items	Mean	Remarks
	Students bully for the following reasons		
1	They want to appear powerful	3.01	Acceptable
2	They are physically stronger	2.96	Acceptable
3	They were bullied by others	3	Acceptable
4	They want to dominate others	2.88	Acceptable
5	They want to be popular among peers	2.95	Acceptable
6	The teachers are not always available	2.80	Acceptable
7	Their families support bullying	2.37	Not Acceptable
8	Students tend to see bullies as role models	2.80	Acceptable

From the above table, apart from item 7 with a mean score of 2.37, all the other items have their mean scores higher than the decision mean of 2.50. This implies that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 were accepted as causes of bullying among students based on the perception of the respondents. On the other hand item 7 has a mean of 2.37 which is lower than the decision mean (2.50), it was not accepted as a cause of bullying among students.

### Research question 3

Are there gender differences in bullying among students.

Table 3: Responses on gender differences in bullying among students

S/N	Items	Mean Boys	Mean Girls
1	Boys tend to beat fellow students more than girls	2.96	3.21
2	Girls tend to involve more in exchange of words than physical beating.	3.07	2.96
3	Boys usually intimidate girls	2.83	2.32
4	Girls tend to victimize only girls	2.82	3.00

From the above table, it is observed that all the items have mean scores higher than the decision mean of 2.50 except item 3 where the girls refuse to be intimidated.

### Research question 4.

What are the ways of curbing bullying behavior among students?

Table 4: Responses on the means of curbing bullying behaviours among students

S/N	Items	Mean	Remarks
1	Students should report cases of bullying to the school authority	3.13	Acceptable
2	The school authority should make laws prohibiting bullying among students	3.13	Acceptable
3	Anti-bullying clubs should exist in schools to check bullying behaviours	3.25	Acceptable
4	Students should resist bullying among themselves	3.04	Acceptable
5	Students caught in the act of bullying should be disciplined	2.83	Acceptable

The above table reveals that item 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 had mean scores higher than decision mean of 2.50 and therefore were accepted as ways of curbing bullying among students.

## Discussion

Findings from the study reveal that beating, snatching, insulting, intimidating, name calling, destroying students belongings, spreading rumours and excluding other from social activities, are some of the bullying behaviours that occur among secondary school students. Authors like Neto (2005) and Rigby (2007) seemed to agree with the above findings when they listed the bullying behaviours occurring among students to include: verbal insulting language, spreading malicious rumours, name calling, hurtful words, social isolation and physical aggression or striking.

Also the study discovered the reasons why students engage in bullying. Some students bully others because they want to appear powerful, others bully because they had been bullied in the past, some bully in a bid to dominate other students, while some see bullying as a means to attain cheap popularity among their peers. The absence of teachers and adults in the classrooms and social environment was also found to be another reason why some students engage in bullying obviously because there will be no adult intervention. This was also observed by Olweus (1993) & Rigby (1997) that the majority of bullying activities take place in the absence of adults.

In addition, students sometimes appear to view the bullies as role models and some tend to copy the bad behaviour. This is also in line with the social learning theory of Bandura (1977) which says that children learn a lot by observing others. The study also found that the attitude of the family towards aggression (family influence) was not perceived to influence bullying among students. This is contrary to the opinion held by some authors (Neto, 2005 & Rigby, 2003) who believed that parental

attitude towards violence and bullying plays a significant role in developing in children a propensity to bully.

The study further found that both the school authority and students have their roles to play in controlling the problem of bullying among students. The students should endeavour to resist bullying among their peers as well as report cases of bullying to the school authority. On the other hand the school authority should make laws to prohibit bullying in school. Thus any student found in the act of bullying should be disciplined to serve as deterrent to others. Limber and Nation (1998) observed that a program of intervention that involved the authority, staff and students (entire school community) have been proved to be very helpful in reducing bullying among students.

## **Conclusion**

Conclusively, it was discovered that various forms of bullying behaviour take place in secondary schools in Onitsha North LGA. These include: beating, insulting, name calling, destroying students' belongings, spreading malicious rumours, etc. it was also observed that students indulge in bullying for different reasons among which are: desire to appear powerful, wanting to be popular, seeking to dominate others, bullying because one had once been bullied, as well as modeling after the bullies. Furthermore it was found that there are differences in bullying patterns of students of different sex. Finally, it was observed that to address the problems of bullying in schools, all hands must be on deck, laws should be enacted to prohibit bullying and appropriate disciplinary measures should be taken against offenders.

## **Implications for Counselling**

The findings of this study have a number of strong implications for Counselling. The study has found that there is bullying among secondary school students. Also most bullying take place in the absence of the teachers and adults because the students are mostly on their own in classrooms and playgrounds. Hence the need for regular visits and supervision of the activities of the students by the counsellors who will now counsel them towards behaviour modification.

The school authorities and teachers are often oblivious of bullying or take it lightly even when they observe it or it is reported to them. The implication of this is that the counsellors should use the techniques such as combination of aversive therapy and cognitive restructuring therapy and enlighten the teachers on how to make use of them to modify behaviour problem of bullying as rightly noted by (Chima,2003). Neto(2005) has reported that the cases of bullying are often not referred to counsellors. In as much as disciplinary measures are good for behaviour modification, the counsellors should be more involved in Counselling sessions of both formal and informal to find out the root cause of the bullying problem.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and education commission should ensure there are enough counsellors in all the schools, as counsellors have great roles to play in identifying and controlling bullying behaviours.
2. The school authorities should make it clear that bullying is prohibited in schools.
3. The school counsellors should help to enlighten the students on the harmful effects of bullying both to the victims and the perpetrators.
4. The student who are the victims of bullying should be encouraged to speak out and report to the authority or the counsellors and not to suffer in silence.
5. There is need for counsellors to visit the classrooms and playgrounds on regular bases. This will enable them to easily detect and intervene in cases of bullying that often take place in the absence of adults.

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