

Students' perception of the impact of Peer Bullying on the Academic Performance of School Adolescents in Okigwe Education Zone 1 of Imo State: Counsellors' Roles

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Abstract

The study investigated the students' perception of the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1 of Imo state and the counsellors' role. A survey research design was adopted for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 240 senior secondary II students from ten (10) schools. A research question was posed to guide the study, while a hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A researchers-designed instrument was used to generate data for the study namely: Effects of Peer Bullying Questionnaire (EPBQ). Data generated was analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. The finding showed that all the items on peer bullying negatively affected the academic performance of students. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female respondents on the effect of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1, Imo state. Based on the findings, it was recommended that school counsellors should make themselves available to students by conducting seminars and workshops to make students know the negative effects of bullying.

Keywords: peer, bullying, adolescents, academic, performance

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period in which an individual changes, over a varying length of time, from childhood into adulthood. As stated by WHO (2013), adolescence is defined as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from age 10 to 19. It is also referred to as the period of storm and stress. This creates confusion about the self because society considers them neither children nor adult. Adolescents, like other humans, exhibit various behavioural problems. They have fluctuating moods and are aggressive and anxious. Most times, they act inexperienced and immature in their dealings. As a result, they should be guided, directed and assisted in their dealings to avoid certain problems and mistakes in life.

According to Ogbuokiri and Otta (2016), the period of adolescence is marked by problems, some of which are as a result of changes going on in their bodies and their own environments. Attempts to find a way to adjust to all these problems and changes may push them into a variety of problems (Uba, 2012). During this period, they often rely on their peer group for support, approval and behaviour models (Aribiyi, 2006).

Various forms of ill-behaviours are exhibited by the adolescents sometimes through their peers. These behaviours range from stealing, cheating in examination, cultism, disobedience, poor academic performance, bullying and others. Hardly a day passes without hearing or reading about one deviance or the other among the adolescents in secondary schools. Therefore, for teachers' efforts not to be wasted and for learners to change along with the set objectives, such factors that affect teaching and learning which include their age, growth, heredity, interest, home and social effects, violence in schools including school bullying and peer victimization need to be addressed (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike & Afen, 2008).

Bullying is a global problem that occurs among children worldwide (Odoemelam & Ikpeazu, 2009). It is a form of aggression, a particular kind of violence which students are exposed to. Bullying is defined as an aggression in which a more powerful individual or more powerful group intentionally inflicts negative acts repeatedly upon those who are less powerful (Ugwu & Olatunbosun, 2016).

To Aluede (2011), bullying is a form of aggression, a particular kind of violence to which students are exposed to. It is a form of social interaction in which a more powerful individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behaviour intended to cause harm to the less dominant individual. When the harming is directed towards fellow students, it becomes peer bullying. This can be commonly defined as repeatedly (not just once or twice) harming others. It can be done by physical attack or by hurting other's feelings through words, actions or social exclusion. Ukoha (2013) describes the repeated and negative nature of bullying, asserting that a child is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions. She defines negative action as when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person through physical contact, words, or in other ways. Other instances of bullying behaviour include name calling, verbal or written abuse, exclusion from group activities or social situations, physical abuse or coercion, lies, rumours, gossiping and others. According to Olweus (2003), other tactics used in bullying include harsh teasing, name calling, constant criticism, insults, gossip, lies and unreasonable demands. It is undesirable behaviour that disrupts and jeopardizes the school activities.

Pepler (2003) noted that every day more than 160,000 children miss school because they fear being bullied. Roliders (2003) surveyed 2,972 pupils in 21 schools in Jerusalem and found that 65% complained of being smacked, pushed, kicked or molested by fellow pupils. In Nigeria, studies on peer-bullying revealed that bullying is preponderant among children and youth in public and private schools (Odoemelam & Ikpeazu, 2009)

Evidence abounds about the negative consequences of students' involvement in peer bullying. Rigby (2003), in a longitudinal study, reported that repeated exposures to being bullied often undermine the health and well-being of vulnerable students. On the part of students who are bullied, peer bullying can have devastating effects on victims. These types of effects can last long into the future which include depression, low self-esteem, truancy, health problems, poor grades, suicide thoughts and pathological fear (Olweus, 2001). Looking at its devastating effects strictly from academic perspective, he noted that, bullying has some detrimental effect on student's cognitive ability. For instance, it decreases the ability to concentrate, makes the students to shift from schooling.

Researchers like Lohmann (2014), reported that victims of bullying are unhappy, anxious, depressed and often times find it difficult to concentrate on their studies. Sometimes, they stay away from school because of fear of bullying. In spite of the efforts made to reduce the incidents of peer-bullying as evidenced by both foreign and Nigerian students, the anti-social behaviour continues to spread like wildfire, as a result affects the academic performance of the students.

Academic performance refers to what a student gets out of educational activity (Ojedele, 2000). This implies that student's academic performance is the measure of the extent to which students perform poorly or highly in accomplishing educational standards set by the school or the government at a given period. The success in the educational institution is largely predicted on student's academic performance or how well the student meets standards set out by the school.

Researchers have considered different factors that influence students' performance as they are faced with issues ranging from personal, social, environmental and emotional. According to Qwadiae (2011), the performance of students in secondary school examination is declining day by day. This can be attributed to poor study habits, socio-economic status of parents, poor funding, inadequate man-power, motivation, anti-social behaviour, peer bullying etc. In a similar vein, Adeyemi (2011) stated that the academic performance of the student in the internal examination has not been impressive overtime as the students have not been performing as expected in subjects like mathematics and English language. These poor performances have been attributed to factors such as poor teaching methods, organizational climate, peer-bullying and others (Madu, Offor, Ebere & Duke-Natrebo, 2017). Adeyemo (2005) and Adepoju (2001) have established the fact that certain factors such as teachers, school, peer bullying and the home play a part in predicting academic performance of students.

Igbo and Ihejieme (2014) conducted a research with 378 SSII students randomly drawn from a population of 14,171 for their study. They observed that parents (particularly working parents) to whom their children relate with and teacher's frequent work overload make them not to pay serious attention to students' social relationships, which are likely the loopholes through which students develop anti-social behaviour which led to poor academic performance.

Ernest-Ehibudu and Ezems (2016) carried out a study on peer victimization and academic achievement in English Language, mathematics and biology in Kwara State. The findings of the study revealed that those who are subject to peer victimization usually absent themselves from school or refused entering class when there is no teacher in the class. This was noted by Olweus (2003), who revealed that children are considered victims of peer harassment when they are repeatedly exposed to negative behaviours on the part of one or more peers irrespective of gender differences.

Gender is regarded as social and/or cultural contract, characteristics behaviour and roles which any society ascribes to females and males (Duru, 2017). However, it is assumed that very little attention has been given to the issue of peer bullying as it affects students' academic performance. It is against this background that the researchers are interested in investigating if peer bullying has a correlation with students' academic performance and also to use counselling as a way to proffer solution.

Research Question

One research question was posed to guide the study:

1. What is the students' perception of the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1 of Imo state?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no gender difference on students' perception on the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1 of Imo state.

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all senior secondary II students which are 2,443 students in the 29 public secondary schools in Okigwe Education zone I of Imo-State. Data was collected from Secondary School Management Board, Okigwe. Simple random sample technique was used to draw a sample of 240 senior secondary II students from 10 schools. A researchers-designed instrument titled "Effects of Peer Bullying Questionnaire" (EPBQ) was used for this study. The instrument has a cluster and five (5) items in the cluster. It has two (2) sections. Section 'A' sought information in the personal data of the respondents while section 'B' elicited information on peer bullying on academic performance. The response format for the EPBQ was the 4-point Likert scale of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by three experts; one from Guidance and Counselling and two from Measurement and Evaluation and was found that the entire instrument was suitable for measuring what it purports to measure. Using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method, the reliability index of the instrument was found to be 0.76. The instruments were administered directly by the researchers and the data

collected were subjected to mean and standard deviation while t-test was used to test the hypotheses. Results are presented in tables according to research questions and hypothesis. 2.50 is the benchmark for acceptance.

Presentation of results

Research Question One: What is the students' perception of the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1of Imo state?

Table 1: Peer bullying on academic performance of secondary school adolescents

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	SD	No.
1.	I have low motivation to concentrate in class as a result of bullying in the school	54	68	56	62	2.47	1.105	240
2.	Bullying creates a negative environment on my mind and makes me perform poorly in my academics	60	69	57	54	2.56	1.095	240
3.	When I am bullied, I rarely attend classes which negatively affects my performance in school	66	72	71	31	2.72	1.006	240
4.	Bullying in schools makes me want to drop out of school and this negatively impacts on my performance	76	64	68	32	2.76	1.040	240
5.	I am absent from school because of fear of being bullied in the school and my performance suffers as a result	65	72	57	46	2.65	1.075	240
Pooled Mean						2.63		

Table 1 reveals that all items except one returned mean scores above the benchmark of acceptance of 2.50, which implies that the students perceive that peer bullying has

negative effect on adolescents in secondary schools in Okigwe Education Zone 1 and this, according to responses, negatively affects the academic performance of the students.

Ho1: There is no gender difference on the students' perception of the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1 of Imo state.

Table 2: Gender difference on the effect of peer-bullying

Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	t	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remarks
Male	171	2.62	.467	238	.660	.510	Accept Ho
Female	69	2.66	.484				

Analysis of data used to test null hypothesis I revealed the mean score of 2.62 with standard deviation value of 0.467 for male respondents. Female respondents had mean score of 2.66 with standard deviation value of 0.484. The degree of freedom was 238 while the t-cal value of .660 was obtained. The probability value obtained was greater than the alpha value ($0.510 > 0.05$). The result therefore showed that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female respondents on their perception on the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1 of Imo state.

Discussion of the findings

The research question one focused on students' perception of the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of adolescents in secondary schools in Okigwe zone I of Imo state. The result indicates that all the items except one were rated above the criterion mean of 2.50, which indicates that all the items listed had negative effects on students' academic performance. The finding from the research is in agreement with Lohmann (2014) who reported that victims of bullying are unhappy, anxious, depressed and often times find it difficult to concentrate on their studies. Sometimes, they stay away from school because of fear of bullying. This is true as students who stay away from class may be unable to grasp what has been learnt.

The result of the null hypothesis showed that there was no gender difference between male and female students on their perception of the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of in-school adolescents. This finding supports the findings of Odoemelum and Ikpeazu (2009), who revealed that peer bullying is preponderant among children and youth in public and private schools. The researchers agree with this assertion because peer bullying is being experienced by many children and their performance academically

remains in bad shape. Thus, opinions are not gender biased on its effect on the academic performance of in-school adolescents. This shows that there is no gender difference between male and females on their perception on the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of in-school adolescents in Okigwe Education zone 1 of Imo State.

Counsellors' roles

Since counselling is a helping profession, there is need to create awareness on contributions of guidance and counselling services towards peer bullying in order to enhance academic performance. The school counsellor should have knowledge of what peer bullying is, the forms it takes and how to handle peer bullying and assist the victims. The first thing a counsellor should do is to make it known to students that he/she can handle cases of peer bullying. The meaning and forms should be made known to them as well as the impacts on the victims. Adolescents should be taught to engage in self-instruction and rational thinking. Using these skills will enable them develop positive statements that will lead to the reduction of peer bullying behaviours. Counsellors should create educative programmes like excursion, debate, assignments in order to make the adolescents not to spend much time gossiping, name calling, rumour mongering but to always be busy constructively. Adolescents should be taught how to create a loving environment where they will be free to discuss their problems.

Conclusion

Peer bullying is a menace that needs to be get rid of as it greatly affects the mental health of students from childhood even until adulthood. The issue of peer bullying may lead to self-isolation, low self-esteem as well as suicide on the extreme mental health cases. This study indicates that peer bullying negatively affects the mental health of students and thereby affecting their academic performance; also that gender did not influence the opinion of respondents on the impact of peer bullying on the academic performance of in-school adolescents.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. School proprietors, principals and teachers should give orientation to students on the impact peer bullying may have on their classmates and as such advice against such.
2. School counsellors should make themselves available to students by conducting seminars and workshops to make the students know the negative effects of bullying.

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