Peer Encouragement (PE), Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among Secondary School Students in Delta State

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Abstract
The study investigated Peer Conformity (PC), Peer Encouragement (PE) and bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Delta State. The aim is to examine the nature of the relationship among peer conformity, peer encouragement and bullying behaviour among secondary school student in Delta State. The study adopted a correlational research design. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated and tested. The population of this study is 32,422 Senior Secondary 3 students in 474 government-owned secondary schools in Delta State (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2023). A multistage sampling procedure was used to select a sample size of 1,023. The simple random and proportionate sampling techniques were used to select the sample for the study. Peer Pressure Rating Scale was adapted from Peer Pressure Measure, developed by Santor et al (2000) and Bullying Behaviour Rating Scale as adapted from the Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire, developed by Uyanne, et al. (2013) were used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated through experts' judgement and factor analysis. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha (α) reliability statistics and Peer Pressure Rating Scale yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.838, and Bullying Behaviour Rating Scale yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.873,. The descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation), Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer and test all hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that there was no significant relationship between peer conformity and bullying behaviour, while there was significant relationship between peer encouragement and bullying behaviour among secondary school students. Based on these findings it was recommended that School Counsellors/Psychologists should implement targeted interventions focused on reducing extraversion traits among secondary school students to mitigate bullying behaviour. School Counsellors/Psychologists should implement targeted interventions focused on building good tenets of relationship among themselves through the use of peers groups among secondary school students to mitigate bullying behaviour. School Counsellors/Psychologists should educate students through group counselling and guidance of the implication of bullying behaviour among themselves and their counterparts. The school administrators and counsellors should develop programmes that foster healthy peer relationship among students

Keyword: Peer, Peer Conformity, Peer Encouragement, Students, Bullying Behaviour

Introduction

Bullying behaviour has become a major challenge among adolescents in secondary schools. The influence of peer group dynamics can be powerful, as adolescents strive to fit in and seek validation from their peers. In the context of bullying, the need for belongingness and the desire to maintain social connections might contribute to peers conformity and

encouragement. Adolescents who identify strongly with a group may feel compelled to defend or prove their loyalty to the group, even if it involves engaging in fights or causing damage to property. The group's opinion and the individual's participation within the group can strongly influence their actions and behaviours. Given the importance of peer conformity and encouragement in understanding bullying behaviour, the current study focuses specifically on adolescents in secondary schools. These variables are crucial for understanding the underlying dynamics of bullying and devising effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

Statement of the Problem

An appalling video made wave on social media (Facebook) in Nigeria, of a girl from a public secondary school in Nigeria who bullied another girl who resisted her intimidation in June 2018. She forcefully humiliated the girl and beat her to death as other girls and boys watched but could not interfere until they sensed that the girl had passed out. A similar headline rocked the Nations Online Magazine of August 13, 2016, bemoaning the ugly bullying incidence that led to serious bruises and bone fracture of a 10-year-old girl who became bullies' favourite. The lives of children who were sent to school healthy suddenly should not be quenched or threatened against the regulations of International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 155, (1974).

Victims of bullying tends to find themselves oppressed, subjected to pain, and under significant stress due to the actions of bullies. They are typically targeted because they may be perceived as less important or disadvantaged compared to their peers. Bully victims can exhibit a range of characteristics that make them more susceptible to being targeted. These characteristics may include physical weakness, lower self-esteem, lack of self-worth and efficacy, passiveness in social activities, shyness, depression, anxiety, lack of social skills and friends, and a tendency to avoid school and social interactions; a situation in which this current study intends to solve with a view to enhancing students safety in educational institutions and also the need to understand some of the variables that influences bullying behaviour becomes necessary. In the light of these, this study is geared towards investigating Peer Encouragement (PE), Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to examine peer encouragement, peer conformity and bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Delta State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State
2. evaluate the relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State?
2. What is the relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.
2. There is no significant relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Literature Review

There is no universally accepted and precise definition of bullying, however, most researchers agree on its key components which includes intent to harm, power imbalance, and repetition of the behaviour (Olweus, 2013). Bullying is said to be aggressive, intentional acts that are repeatedly carried out by an individual or a group against a victim who is unable to defend themselves easily (Olweus, 2013). Bullying is characterized by a dynamic interaction between the perpetrator and the victim, where the bully gains power while the victim experiences a loss of power (Menesini et al., 2012; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). This power imbalance makes it challenging for the victim to respond effectively or cope with the problem at hand. The bully's actions and behaviours consistently reinforce their power while undermining the victim's sense of agency and ability to defend themselves.

When examining bullying in schools, it is crucial to differentiate it from other forms of violence and simple interpersonal conflicts between students (Bauman & Del Rio, 2016). Firstly, bullying is distinct from other types of violence due to its repetitive nature. Unlike isolated acts of aggression, bullying involves a pattern of intentional harm inflicted on the victim over a period of time. This persistent and ongoing nature of bullying distinguishes it from sporadic acts of violence. Secondly, bullying is different from ordinary conflicts between students. While conflicts may arise from disagreements or misunderstandings, bullying involves a power imbalance between the aggressor and the victim. The bully seeks

to assert dominance and control over the targeted individual, often using intimidation, coercion, or physical aggression.

Bullying in schools is a form of aggressive behaviour where one or a group of students intentionally and repeatedly target another student who is unable to defend themselves due to a power imbalance (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Smith et al, 2019). Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias (2013) define bullying as an intentional and ongoing aggressive behaviour directed towards a person who is unable to defend themselves, typically characterized by an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. This definition emphasizes the deliberate nature of bullying, highlighting the intention to harm another person physically or psychologically without any justifiable reason. Nickel et al. (as cited in Olubunmi, 2015) contributed to the understanding of bullying by defining it as the intentional abuse of power carried out by one or more children with the aim of inflicting pain or causing distress to another child. This definition emphasizes the intentional nature of bullying and the repeated occurrence of such behaviour. It highlights that bullying is not limited to sibling relationships or necessarily restricted to children of the same age.

According to Inchley et al. (2020) quoting a recent study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the prevalence of bullying and cyber bullying involving a large sample of 227,441 students aged 11, 13, and 15 years old from 45 countries, it was found that 10% of the students reported experiencing bullying victimization at least twice or three times in the two months prior, while 6% reported engaging in bullying perpetration within the same timeframe. When it came to cyberbullying, the percentages were slightly higher, with 13% of students reporting being victims of cyberbullying, and 10% admitting to engaging in cyberbullying behaviours. This indicates that a significant proportion of students around the world are affected by or involved in bullying incidents. However, it is worth noting that prevalence rates varied across countries. In Nigeria Aluede and Fajoju (2011) revealed that majority of the respondents (62.4%) have been victims of bullying, while 29.6% of the respondents indicated that they have bullied others within the academic session. From the study of Umoke et al (2020) found that 51.4% of the male pupils and 50.8% of females reported being victims of bullying. 51.8% of the males and 49.5% of females were found to be perpetrators of bullying. 39.6% of the males and 42.9% of the females were bystanders (peers) of bullying. 35.1% of the males and 34.1% of females have experienced any 2 of the categories while 11.2% of the males and 12.4% of the females have experienced all the categories of bullying.

Bullying can take different forms, ranging from one-on-one instances to more complex situations involving a primary bully and their "lieutenants," who actively support and participate in the bullying activities. These accomplices may enable the primary bully to exert more control and amplify the impact of their actions. This underlies the role of peers in the perpetuation of bullying behaviour among secondary school students.

Peer refers to a social unit consisting of individuals who share similar characteristics, such as age, class, school, workplace, interests, and social status among others. Peers hold a significant and distinctive position in our lives, influencing us in both positive and negative ways, depending on our reactions to them. Within educational institutions like schools and colleges, we encounter numerous friends who belong to our age group, fostering a unique connection with each of them. In research studies, understanding the dynamics within peer is crucial for comprehending social behaviours, identity formation, and the influence of interpersonal relationships on individuals. Investigating the impact of peer allows researchers to gain insights into developmental processes, decision-making, and the shaping of attitudes within specific demographic cohorts. During the transition from childhood to adolescence, young individuals gradually gain more independence from their parents. As a result, they begin to spend an increasing amount of time with their peers.

Peer association during adolescence occurs through some primary mechanisms which include peer conformity and peer encouragement. In peer conformity, adolescents either adopt their behaviour based on perceived peer norms (Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010). Perceived peer norms refer to the attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs that adolescents believe are acceptable within their peer group. It is important to note that these norms may not always align with actual behaviours or beliefs. When children try to emulate their friends, their behaviour can become as unpredictable and erratic as birds taking their first flight from the nest. They often feel uncomfortable with societal norms and values that seem restrictive and reminiscent of an older generation. This shift in social dynamics makes peer conformity a prevalent factor during adolescence. Children are drawn to peer groups because they seek a sense of security and identity within them (Singh, 2017).

Peer encouragement is another factor that can influence bullying behaviour among secondary school students. It is noteworthy that this period of childhood, characterized by the formation of peer groups, which can also give rise to various relational difficulties (Muñoz et al., 2008). During the stage of adolescence, peer groups hold significant influence and play a central role in the lives of individuals. Adolescents, in particular, usually encourage their peers to spend a considerable amount of time with their peers as compared to adults. Buseini (2012) and

Santrock's (as cited in Ayodele, 2017) studies indicate that adolescents' affiliation with deviant peers is a strong predictor of engaging in deviant behaviour. This suggests that when adolescents conform and encourage to engage in bullying or other negative behaviours, they are more likely to adopt those behaviours themselves. In the context of bullying, the need for belongingness and the desire to maintain social connections can contribute to aggressive and destructive behaviours.

Adolescents who identify strongly with a group may feel compelled to conform or prove their loyalty to the group, even if it involves engaging in fights or causing damage to properties. The group's opinion and the individual's participation within the group can strongly influence their actions and behaviours to conform to their tenets. This suggests that interacting with deviant peers can contribute to the escalation of problem behaviours in deviant youths. When children observe their peers engaging in aggressive acts, it can encourage them to increase their own likelihood of engaging in similar behaviour through processes such as observational learning and social reinforcement. Adolescents often seek acceptance and belonging, and they may join groups that readily accept them, even if those groups are involved in illegal or negative activities. The need for affiliation and closeness can outweigh the need to "do the right thing" for some adolescents, leading them to engage in deviant behaviours to maintain their connection with their peer group.

Empirical research has consistently confirmed that juveniles who associate with delinquent peers are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour (Chui & Chan, 2015). Keletsositse (2021) examined the impact of peer groups in the unfolding of bullying in a private boarding school in Botswana. The study adopted a qualitative approach. The study used 25 participants, 15 girls and 10 boys. School disciplinary records, interviews and a questionnaire were used to obtain data. This study adopted Miles et al, (2014) Thematic Analysis Model on the procedure of qualitative data examination and clarification. The study found out that the pressure to conform to their peer groups coerced them to do anything to pass the loyalty test.

Ibimiluyi (2023) investigated the relationship between bullying behaviour and peer group influence among teenagers in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of all the adolescents, both male and female, in secondary schools in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria from where a sample of 120 students (46 boys and 74 girls) were selected using the simple random sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire titled "Peer Pressure and Bullying Behavior Questionnaire" (PPBBQ) was used to elicit information from respondents. The reliability of the instrument was established using test re-test method and the reliability coefficient of 0.72.

The data generated was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that bullying is a prevalent issue in secondary schools, affecting both male and female adolescents. The students also show signs of peer pressure. More importantly, there is significant relationship between peer pressure, peer encouragement and bullying behaviour among the adolescents in secondary schools.

The fear of rejection and the desire for acceptance often drive individuals to conform to the established norms, even if these norms involve aggressive or inappropriate behaviour (Connell, et al., 2016). This pressure to conform reinforces the perpetuation of aggressive behaviour within peer groups. By acknowledging the various motivations behind bullying, we can gain insight into the complex dynamics that contribute to its occurrence.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of this study is 32,422 Senior Secondary 3 students in 474 government-owned secondary schools in Delta State (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2023). A multistage sampling procedure was used to select a sample size of 1,023. The simple random and proportionate sampling techniques were used to select the sample for the study. Peer Pressure Rating Scale was adapted from Peer Pressure Measure, developed by Santor et al (2000) and Bullying Behaviour Rating Scale as adapted from the Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire, developed by Uyanne, et al. (2013) were used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated through experts' judgement and factor analysis. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient and coefficients were obtained: The Peer Pressure Rating Scale yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.838, and Bullying Behaviour Rating Scale yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.873. The descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation), Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB)

Variable			N	r-value
Peer Conformity	14.20	5.68	**1,023**	**.33**
Bullying Behaviour	**4.26**	**12.77**		

The data presented in table 1, shows the mean, standard deviation and Pearson (r) values of the relationship between peer conformity and bully behaviour. Peer Conformity and bully behaviour have mean and standard deviation values of 14.20, 5.68 and 4.26, 12.77, with an r-value=0.33. This reveals that there is a relationship among peer conformity and bully behaviour among secondary school students.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) of Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB)

Variable			N	r-value
Peer Encouragement	9.83	2.03	**1,023**	**.44**
Bullying Behaviour	**4.26**	**12.77**		

Table 1 shows the data analysis result of mean, standard deviation and Pearson (r) values of the relationship between peer encouragement and bully behaviour. Peer Encouragement and bully behaviour have mean and standard deviation values of 9.83, 2.03 and 4.26, 12.77, with an r-value=0.44. This reveals that there is a relationship among peer encouragement and bully behaviour among secondary school students

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Table 3: Regression Analyses of the Relationship Between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	25.50	1.28		19.99	.000
	Peer Conformity	.08	.16	.02	.49	.61

p>0.05, Not Significant

The result in table 3, shows the beta=0.02, t=0.49, p=0.61 at alpha level of 0.05. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 is greater than the alpha level 0.05 (p>0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State, is retained. This means that there is no significant relationship between Peer Conformity (PC) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Table 4: Regression Analyses of the Relationship Between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	25.50	1.28		19.99	.000
	Peer Encouragement	.74	.10	.33	7.06	.00*

p<0.5, Significant

The result in table 3, shows the beta=.033, t=7.06, p=.00 at alpha level of 0.05. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 is less than the alpha level 0.05 (p<0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school

students in Delta State, is rejected. This means that there is significant relationship between Peer Encouragement (PE) and Bullying Behaviour (BB) among secondary school students in Delta State.

Discussion of Results

The findings of hypothesis 1 indicated that the relationship between Peer Conformity (PC), and bullying behaviours among secondary school students in Delta State is not significant. This implies that Peer Conformity as a singular phenomenon does not influence bully behaviour among secondary school students. The possible reason for this finding might be that peer conformity without encouragement and persuasion might not make an individual conform to the ways of a group of individuals. This finding is in line with the assertion of Buseini (2012) and Santrock's (as cited in Ayodele, 2017) who noted that adolescents' conformity with deviant peers is a strong predictor of engaging in deviant behaviour which include bullying behaviour. But the findings is at variance with the findings of Keletsositse (2021) which revealed that the pressure to conform within peer groups led students to engage in bullying as a means of passing loyalty tests. This perceived pressure had a lasting impact, with students persistently participating in bullying and even initiating others to do the same.

The findings of hypothesis 2 indicate a noteworthy association between Peer Encouragement (PE), and bullying behaviours among secondary school students in Delta State. This implies that Peer Encouragement can significantly influence students to indulge in anti-social behaviour like bullying behaviour. The reason for this finding is that encouragement has the ability to influence an individual to conform or yield to the demand of the encourager. This finding is in line with the study of Ibimiluyi (2023) who found a significant relationship between peer pressure, peer encouragement and bullying behaviour among the adolescents in secondary schools. Encouragement is one of the reinforcement techniques that has been used to make individuals yield and accept certain tenets of living, as such it can be a force in making students to indulge in bullying behaviour.

Conclusion

Arising from the literature reviews and the findings of this study, it is conclude that the relationship between peer conformity and bullying behaviour is not significant and peer encouragement has significant relationship with bullying behaviour. This implies that peer encouragement in a significant factor in peer pressure to conform to the tenets and rules of peer groups.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School Counsellors/Psychologists should implement targeted interventions focused on building good tenets of relationship among themselves through the use of peers groups among secondary school students to mitigate bullying behaviour.
2. School Counsellors/Psychologists should educate students through group counselling and guidance of the implication of bullying behaviour among themselves and their counterparts.
3. The school administrators and counsellors should develop programmes that foster healthy peer relationship among students.

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