



Attachment Style and Personality Traits as Correlates of Bullying among Teenagers in some Secondary School Settings in Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between attachment style and personality traits to understand how it can be implicated in the act of bullying among teenagers in some secondary schools within the Lagos metropolis of Nigeria. The research was an explanatory survey with a correlational research design. The sample comprised 288 adolescents (155 males and 133 females) using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Participants responded to three scales combined in a questionnaire. These scales included the Adolescence Peer Relations Instrument which was used to measure bullying behaviour, a modified and adapted version of The Big five Personality Inventory (BFI) was used to assess personality traits, and an adapted version of The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was used to assess attachment style. The findings in the study showed that there was a significant relationship among attachment style, personality traits and bullying. Indeed, it was found that bullying is a prevalent issue among teenagers in Lagos State boarding schools. Results also showed that out of the Big Five personality traits, only conscientiousness and agreeableness were found to be significantly related to bullying (negatively). No significant relationship was found for the other three personality traits among the participants. Further significant differences were found between attachment style (secure and insecure) and bullying. Implications of the findings and future directions for research are discussed.

Keywords: Attachment, Bullying, Lagos, Personality

Introduction

Bullying appears to be an important issue in a lot of schools. However, from available literature in the Nigerian context, it may appear that the phenomenon has not been exhaustively studied. Bullying is a type of aggressive behavior that appears to harm the victim and it is characterized by repetition of these aggressive behaviours over time. It also portrays a disproportion of power. This also means that bullying usually involves attacking a person that is believed to be weaker than the perpetrator (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Seixas, Coelho, and Nicolas-Fischer, 2013). In some instances, the personality of the perpetrator of the bullying act is implicated in these kinds of

behaviour. Therefore, an attempt at understanding the personality of the bully may help to explicate this phenomenon. According to Hassan and Ee (2015), the need for power and control drive students in schools to bully others. They seem to have little or no sympathy for their victims and they take pleasure in seeing people suffer pain and agony. Bullying varies in dimensions and has various forms. Some of the forms include: Physical bullying, verbal bullying, humiliation, exclusion, cyber bullying, spreading of rumours and so on.

In one of the early studies in this area, Olweus (1993) defined bullying as a set of behaviours physical or verbal, exhibited by a person or a

group of people which is directed at another individual, and these behavioural forms are usually repetitive and aggressive, and are characterised by an abuse of real or perceived power whose sole intention is to harm the victim. Olweus made distinctions between bullies and bully-victims. These bully-victims bully others and are also victimized. Bully-victims also experience worse outcomes than bullies and are impulsive, hyperactive and more likely to experience peer rejection than bullies. They are also more susceptible to psychological issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide, substance abuse and delinquency (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Before behaviour can be classified as bullying, there has to be an imbalance of power between the victim and the aggressor and a time duration of at least once a week for a duration of a month (Kokkinos, 2012). In addition, the act of aggression needs to be intentional in its seeking of personal benefit without provocation, and there has to be an intention to do harm.

Bullying can be a direct form of action. This is when there is some overt aggression which is often physical (beatings, punches, etc) or verbal (insults, blackmails, etc). Bullying can also be indirect; this is when there is covert aggression which can also be physical (stealing, hiding property, etc) or verbal (rumour spreading, slander, etc). The issue of bullying is indeed ubiquitous and similar across cultures and educational systems. Studies by Olweus (1991) in Scandinavia, Whitney and Smith (1993) in Great Britain, Solberg and Olweus (2003) and Rigby (1997) in Australia all had similar findings, showing that a significant number of school children were involved in bullying. The similarity in the figures obtained from some of these studies indicate just how prevalent bullying in school children is widespread and schools within the Lagos metropolis are no exceptions. It also means that this social menace should be taken seriously.

Bullies generally exhibit aggressive behaviours to their peers and sometimes to adults like their teachers. They particularly pick on those they deem vulnerable, and less able to defend themselves. A few stereotypes exist about bullies, one of which is that bullies were thought to be socially maladjusted and less intelligent

individuals. However, It has also been found that many bullies are socially intelligent and are regarded in high status among their peer group (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). They are usually quite popular with their peers and teachers and possessing high levels of self esteem. The implication of this finding is that when bullies deviate from these stereotype and are socially adjusted, it makes them that much difficult to be identified by other adults or teachers. This may make the process of curbing bullying behaviour a little difficult. Another implication of this is that the status and power associated with some bullies might influence other children to view bullying as an admirable behaviour to aspire to (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Bullying behaviour is enhanced when the bully has an audience, and bullies have been found to come from families who discipline with physical punishment as well as from families with little or no adult supervision. In these instances, victims tend to be passive, quiet, insecure, anxious and smaller in size and weaker in strength than their peers. It has also been found that victims tend to have overprotective parents and long for approval from their bullies. They are usually loners with little or no friends. There are a number of factors that are seen to influence bullying, and they include individual factors such as antisocial personality traits, anxiety, depression; peer influences; parental factors such as parenting style, parental abuse, inappropriate discipline and cultural factors (Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

A variable that may be implicated in bullying behaviour is attachment style (Bowlby, 1977). According to Bowlby, there is always an inclination for humans to form strong affectional bonds with others. Attachment is a close emotional connection between two people, and is first formed in infancy. Several theorists such as Freud (1949), Erikson (1950) and Bowlby (1977) have each propounded their views on infant attachment. According to Freud (1949), attachment is formed when the infants are in the oral stage, and this attachment is formed with the person or object who provides the infant with oral satisfaction who in most cases is the mother during feeding. According to Erikson, the infant forms this attachment in the first year of life during the stage of trust versus mistrust and the attachment

formed is dependent on the physical care and comfort the infant receives.

Ainsworth, Blehar and Wall (1978) expanded on Bowlby's theory of attachment and came up with three patterns of attachment styles in infants which are avoidant, resistant (previously called ambivalent) and secure. Avoidant and resistant attachment styles were insecure types of attachment. These attachment behaviours were later known to have implications on bullying behaviour in later life of the individual. A person's style of attachment in infancy has a significant impact on their lives even into adulthood. Attachment style is relatively stable and is exhibited in the pattern of relationship an individual exhibits, and one's attachment style continues into adulthood and influences important aspects of their lives (Koiv, 2012). It is hypothesised that there will be a significant relationship between attachment style and bullying.

Bullying has been found to occur more in children with avoidant attachment style with respect to the other attachment styles, while children with resistant attachment style have been found to be more socially isolated from their peers and have lower levels of self confidence (Book, Volk, & Hosker, 2012; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). In relation to bullying, insecurely attached children particularly those with avoidant attachment style are more likely to bully their peers than securely attached children, while those with resistant attachment style are more likely to be victims of bullying than children with other attachment styles (Kokkinos, 2013).

Personality trait is another variable that may be implicated in bullying behaviour. Personality is defined as "a dynamic organisation, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behaviour, thoughts and feelings" (Allport, 1961, p. 48). There are a lot of theories on personality traits, each trying to highlight the basic dimensions of personality. In the present study however, the big five model personality traits informs the basis we look at personalities. This is because the big five model of personality have been found to show consistency in its finding in similar studies by different researchers. According to McCrae and

Costa (1990), the factors mentioned in the big five theory endure across adulthood. There are various conceptualisations of personality. The big five personality model serves to integrate all the other personality models rather than replacing them (John & Srivastava, 1999). Since then, further research has confirmed a basic 5-factor model of personality, the Big Five factors which are extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness and openness to experience (John & Srivastava, 1999). It is hypothesised that there will be a significant relationship between personality type and bullying.

Bullying is a worldwide issue with adolescents. Bullying and violence among school children and adolescents occur throughout the world. Globally, it has been found that about 246 million children and adolescents have experienced some form of bullying. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011), this number is made up of about 20% of the world population of school children. In 2006, the United Nations reported that verbal bullying was the most prevalent form of bullying, and that about 20-65% of schoolchildren were affected by it. In a study by Glover, Gough, Johnson, and Cartwright (2000) using a sample of 4700 adolescents from 25 schools around the UK, 75% of the participants reported being victims of bullying at some stage during the school years. Out of the 7000 surveyed children from 124 schools in Australia, it was found that 32% of the children had been bullied (Carr-Gregg & Manocha, 2011). However, most of these studies did not show if gender differences existed. It is the aim of this study to fill that gap. It is then hypothesised here that there will be significant sex differences in bullying.

In Nigeria, bullying is not given the attention it deserves. Although there have been studies done on the subject matter, there is a deficiency in the statistical evidence available due to very little research activities when comparing public and private schools. However, physical violence was found to be more prevalent in rural areas than urban areas (Omoniyi, 2013). The problem here is some of these studies have not sufficiently addressed issues pertaining to differences between private and public schools. This is largely due to the fact that the pattern of bullying in

private and public schools may be different. In view of that, it is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference in bullying scores between private and government schools.

It is clear that a lot of resources including research need to be invested in further understanding of bullying with specific reference to Lagos metropolis, as it affects a large number of adolescents. This study seeks to fill this gap by further understanding bullying among adolescents in Lagos by examining how factors such as personality traits and attachment style influences may predispose school pupils to bullying behaviour.

Methodology

This research was done in Lagos State, Nigeria. It was institution based and carried out in four secondary schools in the State which were all boarding schools. The research took place in the classrooms of Homat Group of Schools, Ikorodu; Sun and Stars College, Ikorodu; Federal Science and Technology College, Yaba and Igbogbo Model College, Ikorodu. In these settings, the students were under the strict supervision of their teachers which made it a semi-controlled environment. Furthermore, the setting comprised adolescents within the ages of 11-15 years which perfectly fitted the research scope and objectives.

Participants and sampling

Participants were adolescents within the ages of 11-15 years. They were considered appropriate because the study was interested in adolescent participants. The sample size for Lagos adolescents was calculated using the G Power software. A sample size of 138 was arrived at, which was in line with other studies carried out in this area of research. A total of 300 copies questionnaire were distributed for the study. However, 288 were returned as usable. These 288 participants were made up of 155 males and 133 females. This gave a total of 137 participants from private schools and 151 participants from public schools. The participants were all of ages 11-15 years. In this sample, 21.1% of the participants were of age 11 years, 15.9% participants were of age 12 years, 21.5% of the participants were of age 13 years, 20.4% of the participants were of

age 14 years and 20.8% of the participants were of age 15 years. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling and convenient sampling.

Research Design & Instrument

The research design was a cross-sectional and correlational design. This design captured the relationship between variables under study at a single point in time. This design was chosen because the nature of the study required the participants to fill a self-report measure with respect to the variables under study. This design helped in obtaining an estimate of the predictive relationship between them. The methodology was quantitative as the data collected across all participants were numeric and analyzed through statistical means. The dependent variable was bullying, while the independent variables were attachment style and personality traits.

The Adolescence Peer Relations Instrument is a standardized one for measuring bullying and victimization in adolescents developed by Parada (2000). It consisted of 6 subscales and 36 items in total. However, for the purpose of the study, the interest was in the bully alone and not the victim. Therefore, only the section of the scale that is to measure the behaviour of the bully was used. This consisted of three subscales, measuring verbal bullying, social bullying and physical bullying and 18 items. This scale had Cronbach Alpha internal consistency of 0.92 and 0.81 reliability (Adeoye, Okonkwo, & Makinde, 2014).

An adapted version of The Big five Personality Inventory (BFI) developed by Rammstedt and John (2007) was used to measure personality traits. This instrument had 10 items and comprised five subscales which were extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience. This scale had Cronbach's alpha reliability as follows: Extraversion (0.87), Agreeableness (0.89), Conscientiousness (0.84), Emotional stability (0.85) and Openness to Experience (0.86) (Adeneye & Fatade, 2015).

To measure attachment style, The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) developed by Greenberg and Armsden (2009) was used and it comprised two parts. Part one measured parent attachment (for father and mother), and possessed

three subscales (parent trust, parent communication and parent alienation) and 25 items. While part two measures peer attachment and possesses 3 subscales (peer trust, peer communication and peer alienation) and 25 items. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency of this scale for mother attachment was 0.87, for father attachment was 0.89 while for peer attachment is 0.92 (Greenberg & Armsden, 2009).

Procedure

This research was carried out at four different locations on four different days. The location was Homat Group of Schools Ikorodu classrooms, the second location was Sun and Stars College Ikorodu, the third location was Federal Science and Technology College, Yaba and lastly Igbogbo Model College Ikorodu. The survey was carried out one day each per school within the space of one week. The first school where the survey was carried out was Federal Science and Technology College, Yaba. The questionnaire was administered to the participants in their classrooms, under the supervision of their class teachers and the researcher. The participants were asked to fill appropriate demographic information required, after which they were instructed to respond to the items of the questionnaire by ticking their responses in the boxes provided in the

questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of the three scales mentioned earlier which measured bullying, attachment style and personality trait, all stapled together. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to leave. This procedure was repeated at the other three schools from the second school which was the Homat Group of schools Ikorodu, to the third school which was Sun and Stars College Ikorodu, and lastly Igbogbo Model College Ikorodu. Ethical considerations were applied throughout the study and informed consent was sought with the participants through their teacher/guardians. The school principals also gave formal approval.

Result

Summary of Demographic variables

The sample comprised male adolescents (N=155, M=49.87, SD = 12.23) and female adolescents (N=133, M= 52.04, SD= 13.19). In other words, 53.8% of the sample were males and 46.2% were females. The age with the highest frequency was age 13 years and the age with the lowest frequency was 12 years. The sample also consisted of Christian 64.2% participants and 31.5% were of Islamic religion while 7% were spread to other religious categories. By ethnic groups, 58.3% were Yoruba, 29.9% Igbo, 10.1% Hausa and the remaining 1.7% belonged to other ethnic groups.

Table 1. Summary of correlational analysis between personality and bullying

Scale	Mean	SD	N	Corr of 1 & 2	Corr. of 1 & 3	Corr of 1 & 4	Corr of 1&5	Corr of 1&6
1. Bullying	50.57	12.74	270	.	.			
2. Extraversion	6.70	1.99	270	NS				
3. Agreeableness	6.06	1.84	270		*			
4. Conscientiousness	6.30	2.26	270			*		
5. Neuroticism	6.00	1.74	270				NS	
6. Openness to experience	6.12	1.64	270			-		NS

Note: Mean was based on a 5-point response scales. SD= Standard deviation, NS=Not significant, * P<.05

Based on Table 1, bullying was not significantly correlated with neuroticism at $p < 0.05$, the Pearson correlation revealed that $r = 0.05$ and this indicated that there was no significant relationship between bullying and neuroticism among the students. Bullying was not significantly correlated with extraversion at $p < 0.05$, the Pearson correlation revealed that $r = 0.02$ and this indicated that there was no significant relationship between bullying and extraversion. However, Bullying was significantly correlated with agreeableness at $p < 0.05$, the Pearson correlation revealed that $r = -0.03$ and this indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between bullying and agreeableness. Bullying was significantly correlated with conscientiousness at $p < 0.05$, the

Pearson correlation revealed that $r = -0.42$ and this indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between bullying and conscientiousness. Table 1 also indicated that bullying was significantly correlated with openness to experience at $p < 0.05$, the Pearson correlation revealed $r = -0.05$ and this indicated no significant negative relationship between bullying and openness to experience.

Based on Table 2, bullying was significantly related to attachment style at $p < 0.05$, the Pearson correlation revealed that $r = -0.44$ and this indicated that there was significant negative correlation between bullying and attachment style.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables (Bullying and Attachment Style)

		Mean	SD	N	Corr
1.	Attachment Style	44.94	12.15	231	
2.	Bullying	49.88	13.30	231	*

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3. Summary of t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Gender Differences in Bullying

	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P > 0.05
Male (Bullying)	142	49.69	12.19			
Female (Bullying)	128	51.55	13.30	-1.20	238	2.31

Table 3 shows the mean for males ($M = 49.69$, $SD = 12.19$) differed from the mean for females ($M = 51.55$, $SD = 13.30$) but not significant at the 0.05 level of significance $t(238) = -1.20$, $p > 0.05$. Finally, the mean for private schools ($M = 48.89$, $SD = 12.49$) difference from the mean for public schools ($M = 52.14$, $SD = 12.82$) was significant at the 0.05 level of significance $t(238) = -2.10$, $p < 0.05$. This finding supported the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in bullying scores between private and public schools

Discussion

The study sought to investigate the prevalence of bullying among adolescents in secondary schools. It also sought to investigate the influence of personality traits and attachment style on bullying among adolescents in some secondary schools in Lagos metropolis.

This study's investigation revealed the following:

- Bullying was a prevalent issue amongst adolescents in Lagos secondary schools.

- Age differences existed in bullying among adolescents attending secondary school in Lagos State.
- Sex differences did not exist in bullying among adolescents attending secondary school in Lagos State.
- Significant differences were found in the rate of bullying between private schools and government schools.
- There was a significant correlation between attachment style and bullying
- There was a significant correlation between some personality traits and bullying.

With respect to the main objective of the study, which was to find if bullying was a prevalent issue among adolescents in Lagos Secondary Schools, the results showed that such required the immediate attention of school authorities in Nigeria, as the negative impacts extended beyond the victims of bullying to their family members, the community and the entire nation. The results indicated that bullying is a current issue amongst adolescents in Lagos State boarding schools. The highest rate of bullies were found among participants from higher classes and mostly older students, with age 15 years having the highest rate and the age with the lowest rate of bullies is 12 years. A number of reasons for these findings might exist; one of which could be that at age 15 years, which was the oldest age in this study, the participants were more physically and mentally developed than the other participants; hence were more likely to bully students of younger ages who were not as physically and mentally mature as they were. These findings support that of Popoola (2005) which found that bullying tendencies increase with age. The results showed that all three forms of bullying (verbal, social and physical) were present in Lagos boarding schools. This suggested that bullying is a major problem among adolescents in secondary schools across Nigeria and this is consistent with the findings by other researchers discussed in the earlier review (Adeosun, et al., 2015; Asiyai, 2015; Egbochukwu, 2007; Omoteso, 2010; Popoola, 2005).

The results further indicated a significant relationship between some personality types and bullying. There was a significant negative correlation between bullying and agreeableness as well as bullying and conscientiousness. However, the findings showed that there was no significant correlation found between extraversion and bullying, openness to experience and bullying as well as neuroticism and bullying. This is in agreement with studies reviewed earlier (Book, Volk, & Hosker, 2012; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015), which indicated that bullying was more prevalent in some personality types than others.

There was a significant negative correlation between bullying and attachment style. As attachment increased, bullying reduced. Therefore, participants with insecure attachment styles had high bullying scores while participants with secure attachment had low bullying scores. This is in line with Kokkinos (2013)'s view that bullying is related to insecure attachment, specifically avoidant attachment. Koiv (2012) and Nikiforou, Georgiou & Stavrinides (2013) also agreed with this as they found that insecure attachment style was prevalent among bullies.

With respect to gender, the results showed no significant sex differences in bullying between males and females. This result is not in agreement with studies reviewed earlier (Adeosun, et al., 2015; Asiyai, 2015; Omoteso, 2010) which found that bullying was higher in males than in females. Egbochukwu, 2007 found rates of bullying to be higher among females than males. From this study however, the female mean score (51.55) with regards to bullying was higher than that of males (49.69), although the difference was not a significant one.

With respect to school category, the study showed a significant difference in the rates of bullying between public and private schools, with the public schools showing a significantly higher rate of bullying. This might be as a result of the different tenets and climates among the two school categories, which included the fact that the teachers in private schools were usually better paid than those in public schools, and as a result could be more motivated to intervene in bullying

environments. Also, students in private schools usually have a lower population generally and in their classes, making close supervision possible. The difference in rates of bullying between private and public schools was not in agreement with the study by Egbochukwu (2007) which found no significant difference in the bullying rates between private schools and public schools.

Conclusion

This research investigated the prevalence of bullying, amongs adolescents in Lagos State secondary schools, as well as the influence of personality type and attachment style on bullying. This study also examined bullying prevalence among private boarding schools and public boarding schools. This study through due process of empirical scientific research in choice of participants, selection of measures, validation and administration of instruments, procedure in data collation and scoring of each measure, significantly asserted that bullying was a prevalent issue among adolescents in Lagos State secondary schools, and that there were some personality types which influenced bullying among them. Also, an individual's attachment style influenced the bullying behaviour.

The study showed that bullying was a prevalent issue among Nigerian adolescents. Although no sex differences were observed in the rates of bullying, age differences were observed older students were found to bully more than younger students. Also, differences were observed in school categories as private school had significantly lower rates of bullying. It was observed that attachment style influenced bullying as securely attached adolescents bullied less than insecurely attached adolescents. Also, conscientiousness and agreeableness were personality types found to be significantly negatively correlated to bullying, while no relationship was observed between neuroticism and bullying, openness to experience and bullying as well as extraversion and bullying.

Implications

Bullying indeed does take place in schools. The enormity of this issue can no longer be ignored as

more studies are bringing its prevalence to light. The fact that this study showed the prevalence of bullying in Lagos schools, helped to buttress this point. The prevalence of bullying amongst the participants supports the rationale for interventions to prevent it. This is because it can substantially promote unsafe environments in schools (Uche & Ngwu, 2016). Bullying can also be an indicator of high risk for health complications among adolescents. If a school does not adequately deal with bullying, it can endanger the safety of the entire school population. Accordingly, bullying must be seen as the concern of not just the school establishments and educators, but the entire society including the government, policymakers, parents, religious organisation and the students themselves.

Recommendations

From the findings, bullying is a very serious issue that should be dealt with appropriately as its adverse effects can be dangerous. To reduce the incidence of bullying and prevent its occurrence, effective intervention strategies need to be implemented in schools. These interventions should be comprehensive in their scope and should involve students, teachers, administrators, parents and the host community. Also, early intervention in trying to prevent this issue may reduce several adverse outcomes later in life.

Bullying may be lessened through anti-bullying programmes in schools that serve to raise awareness of the problem, target school culture, and work with pupils directly. Most schools may have policies about overt, physical aggression, but do not adequately address indirect forms of bullying.

It has been established that bullying behaviour is prevalent in school environments, however, further research can seek to investigate if the bullying behaviour is consistent across different environments. This is to establish whether bullies exhibit their bullying behaviour outside of the school environments and to know if the school environment provides a thriving environment for bullying. Further research is required to generate empirical evidence to inform intervention targeted at preventing and eradicating bullying among

school children in Nigeria. Also, policies should be put in place to ensure that the school environment is a safe place for the students with consistent rules and reprimands for bullies. The parents have a role to play in the way they model positive behaviours to their children. They should work collaboratively with school authorities to instill good values in their children.

Limitations

This research, with its advantageous prospects, still experienced some limitations. The sample of this study was collected at single point in time. Therefore, it was not to appraise the stability of the students' involvement in bullying over a longer period. This study would have benefited from a longitudinal research or rather one that would have allowed the establishment of causality. The participants were recruited by convenient sampling from public schools in an urban setting and their experiences may not be consistent with those of students from other settings. Data on this

research were collected by self-report measure and there was no attempt to test for social desirability. This was indeed a limitation to the study. In spite of these limitations, this study has helped to further understand bullying among adolescents in Lagos especially with emphasis on understanding how factors such as personality type and attachment style influence it. The study provided a fair understanding into the nature and extent of bullying in schools. Therefore, the results may be considered tentative until further research is conducted on the bullying phenomenon in Nigerian schools.

Conclusively, utilizing Nigerian respondents ensures that it has helped to further understand the prevalence of bullying among adolescents in Lagos especially with emphasis on understanding how factors such as personality type and attachment style influence it. It will also contribute to existing knowledge about bullying and could also be a source of information for other researchers interested in the subject matter

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