

EXAMINATION OF THE INCIDENCE OF SEX AND AGE ON BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN PUBLIC SPECIAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

Egbule, Elizabeth Osita Ph.D

Department of Guidance & Counselling, Faculty of Education,
Delta State University, Abraka
Email: egbuleosita2@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated the incidence of sex and age on bullying behaviour among children with disabilities in public special secondary schools in Delta State. The study employed survey research design. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population for this study consisted of all the three hundred and forty-eight (348) pupils in the public special secondary schools in Delta State. The sample of this study comprised of two hundred and ninety-two (292) students with disabilities in all the public special primary schools in Delta State and they were selected using purposive random sampling because of their peculiarities. The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed scale titled; Bullying Behaviour among Special Students Questionnaire (BSSQ). The instrument was validated by three experts. Inferential statistics of independent sample t-test was used to analyze the data gathered for the study at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The results showed that there is no significant difference between age, sex and bullying behaviour among children with disabilities in public special secondary school in Delta State. Consequent upon the result, it was suggested among others that, enlightenment programmes for the students, their instructors and parents in the form of seminars, conferences, short stories and pamphlets explaining the details of bullying and its consequences should be organized by the school counsellors from time to time.

Keywords: *Bullying, Special School, Students with disabilities, Age, and Sex*

Introduction

Behaviour is the way one acts or conducts oneself especially towards others. Psychologically, behaviour consists of an organism's reactions to its environment which may be overt or covert. When certain behaviour conforms to the demands and acceptable standard of the society, it is said to be an adaptive or positive behaviour but if it does not, it is said to be maladaptive or negative behaviour. Such negative behaviours include bullying. Bullying is an unwanted aggressive behaviour among special school aged

children. It involved real or perceived power imbalance. There is the tendency that children who are bullied and who bully others may have serious lasting problems. Bullying is the intentional, repetitive harming or injury by one's peer or peers; they are occurrences in which the victim is unable to avoid or stop the victimization, this behaviour has emerged as a persistent problem in many schools. Bullying is considered as a global problem that affects educational, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of special school-age children worldwide (Alison, 2016).

Bullying or harassment in schools could occur in any place or location that is connected with the school either in school building or around school building, playground and may occur in restrooms, school buses and during group work either during school hours or after school activities. The behaviour may be repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. There are three criteria that are relevant in order to define aggressive behaviour as bullying; they are repetition, intentionality and an imbalance of power. Given these characteristics, bullying is often defined as the systematic abuse of power by peers. Bullying involved a dynamic interaction between the perpetrator and the victim where the bully increases in power and the victim loses or reduces in power. As a result, it becomes difficult for the victim to respond or to cope with the problem Omoteso, (2010). Children who bully use their physical strength or popularity to control or harm others repeatedly, which is likely to happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once and it can take place in form of verbal aggression like the use of mean words, physical assaults like hitting, throwing of things, pinching, pushing, threat, joke or language and criticizing.

Pepler and Craig, (2010) discovered that bullying and victimization occurs in all schools as well as special schools. The phenomenon may seriously affect the development and adjustment of pupils and students with disabilities. Bullying has could have negative effects on all its victims but children with disabilities are especially vulnerable, since these children are already struggling with

self-esteem issues like feelings of inferiority due to social and communication skills challenges. These children are likely to experience peer rejection and struggle with social problem solving and competence. Pepler and Craig (2010) asserted that, children with special needs often have a lower social standing among the other children in the classroom which may lead them to frequently becoming the targets of bullying. Bullying is an inconvenient disorder in the school system and may affect a number of pupils with disabilities negatively thereby making the children to have difficulties in concentration and paying attention in class which have could result in poor academic performance as well as impede normal social development and psycho-social functioning. When a child is bullied, the child may continually feel insecure and on guard. Often times, special students are withdrawn and refrain from interacting with peers, classmates and school mates because of fear of being embarrassed whenever they want to ask or answer questions in class and most times, they would be found sitting at the back of the classroom. What used to be considered just a part of children and adolescence has now escalated into what some experts have agreed to be an epidemic within the schools system.

Bullying is a silent epidemic in schools and communities where hundreds of thousands of children with differences are being subjected to humiliation and isolation. Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are adversely affected by negative attitudes and perceptions of differences including forms of discrimination which

often involves bullying. The resulting humiliation, isolation and pain may likely affect not only individuals with disabilities but also all those around them including, peers, parents, care givers and teachers. Children are easily emotionally wounded and often may not have skills to cope with bullying especially, children with disabilities (physical, developmental, intellectual, emotional and sensory disabilities) these children with disabilities are at an increased risk of being bullied and victimized. There are several factors that could influence bullying among special students, but the researcher focused on age and sex.

Age could influence bullying among special students because bullying rate by age varies depending on the type of bullying. It has been observed that involvement in bullying behaviour and victimization tends to decrease with age Duhaime Law Dictionary, (2015). Younger students in elementary and middle schools are more likely to bully others than older children in high school. Physical bullying tends to declines with age, while verbal, social and cyber bullying tend to increase between the ages of 11 and 15 years. Finkelhor, et al (2015) discovered that the risk for bullying peaks at different ages for different types of bullying that intimidations like pushing, hitting slapping and kicking which is commonly reported by children under ages 10 has its prevalence to be 19 percent among children of ages two to five years and 18 percent among children of ages six to nine years.

The researcher as a teacher and a counsellor at times do asked her students/clients whether they have been

bullied, younger children tend to report higher levels of victimization compared to older children. Hence she concluded that there could be a decrease in victimization as children grow older. The researcher has observed also that bullying behaviour is likely to be more prominent among younger children than older ones because bullying starts at an early age and the child starts to build on initial concept of bullying then it continues to increase until it reaches its peak. Bullying in secondary school tends to be more innocent in nature than that which occurs as children get older because, the children are still developing the emotional, cognitive and social skills necessary to handle conflicts using words and calm, problem solving strategies, aggressive behaviour such as taking a toy away from another child, pushing, kicking, name calling and even fighting can be very common at this age. Direct bullying is very common at this age and level of primary education may continue at adolescent stage if this maladaptive behaviour is not addressed early, it could be a fertile ground to build on at adolescent stage Aihie (2009). Adolescents period consist of several developmental changes that place a lot of stress on them physically, emotionally, psychologically and otherwise. The younger children in the primary schools learn bully behaviours by watching the torment that the older siblings engage in or by mimicking the cruel behaviours they watch or see on the television Olweus (2013). The physical features or appearance of children are often topics of bullying, particularly if they are overweight or significantly underweight. Clothes or hygiene can also be common topics for bullying in elementary

school, just like any physical or cognitive disability (Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder-ADHD) that singles a child apart from the group. Children perceived as ugly or less attractive can also face ridicule. Victims of bullying have been found to have certain characteristics such as unexplainable injuries, declining grades and becoming over apologetic (Hanish & Guerra, 2014). It has been observed that bullying is practiced at all ages but in different forms. McIntyre and Franks, (2015) are of the view that bullying is an experience that nearly all children engage in but to a certain degree which most often occurs in younger children between the ages of five (5) to fourteen (14) years of age but in older children, it becomes more subtle in nature.

Sex is another factor that could influence bullying behaviour among special public secondary school students. Omoteso, (2010) asserted that boys are more involved in bullying behaviour than girls, while Egbochuku, (2008), and Banks and Asiyai, (2015) discovered that girls accept being bullied than boys while boys accept bullying others than girls. Boys may likely get involved in bullying, because they are more victimized than girls do and they are more likely to engage in physical aggression whereas, girls are more involved in verbal aggression. This could be as a result of the genetic makeup of male and female individuals. Boys tend to engage in physical forms of bullying and sexual harassment more the girls whereas girls are more involved in verbal aggression (Farrington and David, 2017). Harris & Hathorn, (2016), discovered that boys bullied and got bullied more

frequently than girls. Consequently, there is need to examine the incidence of bullying behaviour among secondary school students based on their sex and age. However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, bullying behaviour among public special secondary school students with disabilities in Delta State has not been quite researched. Consequently, the researcher therefore, examined the incidence of sex and age on bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in public special secondary schools in Delta State: Implication for counselling

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in public special secondary schools in Delta State. However, this study was also specifically designed to examine:

- if there is any difference in the male and female incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State;
- If there is any difference in the age incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the male and female incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. There is no significant difference in the age incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in

special public secondary schools in Delta State.

Methodology

The study investigated the incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in public special secondary schools in Delta State. The study employed survey research design. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population for this study consisted of all the three hundred and forty-eight (348) students in the public special secondary schools in Delta State. The sample of this study comprised of two hundred and ninety-two (292) students with disabilities in all the public special secondary schools in Delta State and they were selected using purposive random sampling because of their peculiarities, they are not regular at school, this is because the special schools are few and students with disabilities on ground are few as well. The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed scale titled; Bullying Behaviour among Special

Students Questionnaire (BSSQ), the instrument contained fifteen (15) items structured on a four-point Likert format with two sections (A and B). A number of the questionnaires were written in brail so that the visually impaired students could read and respond to the questionnaire while sign language was used for the hearing impaired students. The instrument was validated by three experts. The instrument was pilot-tested on some selected special students outside the sample of the study and validated through an internal method of validation. The test reported a test retest reliability coefficient of 0.77 after an interval of two weeks. The instrument was used to collect data for the study with the researcher first obtaining permission from the various schools' authority before administering the questionnaires personally to the students with the assistance of their class teachers. Inferential statistics of independent sample t-test was used to analyze the data gathered for the study at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the male and female incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 1: Independent Sample T-Test of Male and Female Bullying Behaviour among Students with Disabilities in Public Special Secondary Schools

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	97	86.35	14.39	1.236	.372
Female	195	82.64	14.76		

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 1 showed an independent sample t-test value of 1.236 and a p-value of .372, testing at an alpha level of 0.05. Since the p-value is greater than the alpha level of

0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis which says that "There is no significant difference in the male and female incidence of bullying behaviour among

students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State” is

retained. Meaning bullying behaviour is found in both boys and sex.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the age incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test of Age Difference in Bullying Behaviour among Students with Disabilities.

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
7-9years	182	88.14	15.22	.895	.417
10yrs and above	110	86.46	15.89		

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 2 showed a t-value of .895 and a p-value of .417, testing at an alpha level of 0.05. Since the p-value is greater than the alpha level of 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis which states that “There is no significant difference in the age incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State” is retained. Meaning there is incidence of bullying behaviour irrespective of the students’ age.

Discussion of Findings

The result showed that there is no significant difference in the male and female incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State. This finding has shown that both male and female students in special public secondary schools engage in bullying behaviour. This finding corroborates with the study of Farrington and David, (2017), where they discovered that both boys and girls do engage in bullying behaviour. This finding also agrees with the Bullying statistics (2010) which reported that both boys and girls equally involve in bullying behaviour.

The result also revealed that there is no significant difference in the age

incidence of bullying behaviour among students with disabilities in special public secondary schools in Delta State based. Meaning that bullying behaviour was found in students of every age group. This finding agrees with the findings of the study that was carried out by Finkelhor, et al (2015) where they found out that bullying activities is traceable to all children irrespective of their age.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher therefore concluded that that there is no difference in the male and female incidence of bullying behaviour among students in public special secondary schools with disabilities in Delta State; Also there is no significant difference in the age incidence of bullying behaviour among students in public special secondary schools with disabilities in Delta State. Bullying behaviour is done at every age but at different levels.

Implications for Counselling

1. The Government at various levels should ensure that all schools especially the special schools (primary schools to be précised) have professional counsellors to manage this

social undesirable behaviour such as bullying.

2. Campaigns such as seminars, conferences, and so on should be organized by the school counsellors for the parents/guardian, students, and their teachers in order to create awareness on the effects of bullying.
3. School counsellors should enlighten parents, instructors/teachers, and care givers, to be good role model to these children who easily duplicate the behaviour demonstrated by others.

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