

ADOLESCENTS' BULLYING AND AGGRESSION TENDENCIES AT JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL AS PREDICTORS OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-CONTROL

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Abstract

This study examined aggression and bullying acts as predictors of delinquent behaviour and the mediating role that self-control could play in the exhibition of the violent acts among junior secondary school students in Lagos, Nigeria. One hundred and fifty adolescents from three Junior Secondary Schools were selected through random and stratified sampling techniques with 25 male and 25 female from the co-educational school and 50 students from each of the two single sex schools selected for the study. The schools selected were one single sex (male), one single sex (female) and one co-educational, all are public schools at mainland local government area in Lagos State. Three null hypotheses were formulated on the basis of identified major independent variables. The results of the first hypothesis show that there is a significant influence of adolescents' aggression and bullying on delinquent behaviour respectively among the participants with $F_{cal} = 4.04$ and $F_{crit} = 3.90$. The second hypothesis also revealed that self-control can play a significant role of influencing both the aggression and the bullying tendencies among adolescents having $F_{cal} = 4.18$ as against $F_{crit} = 3.90$. For the third hypothesis, a significant gender influence on the two independent variables among adolescents with ($t_{cal} = 1.94$, $t_{crit} = 2.01$) and ($t_{cal} = 2.63$, $t_{crit} = 2.01$) is inferred. The study clarifies aggression and bullying as predictive factors for delinquent behaviour later. It also predicted the impact self-control can make as a mediating factor. Thus, there is the need for an early intervention to help overcome the full blown societal risks of delinquent behaviour among adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescent, Bullying, Aggression, delinquent behaviour, self-control.

INTRODUCTION

Delinquency is criminal behaviour, especially carried out by a juvenile. It is distinguished from a status offense, a term applied in the United States and other national legal systems to acts considered wrongful when committed by a juvenile but not when committed by an adult. Delinquency is also known as "juvenile offending". It is the act of participating in unlawful behaviour as minors. However, juvenile offending can be considered to be normative adolescent behaviour. This is because most teens tend to offend by committing non-violent crimes, only once or a few times, and only during adolescence. Equally, repeated and/or violent offending is likely to lead to later and more violent offenses. When this happens, the offender often displayed antisocial behaviour even before reaching adolescence. Since, most teenagers tend to show some form of antisocial or delinquent behaviour during adolescence, it is important to account for these behaviours in childhood or early teenager years. This is to help determine whether they will be life-course-persistent offenders or adolescence-limited offenders. Although adolescence-limited offenders tend to drop all criminal activity once they enter adulthood and show less pathology than life-course-persistent offenders. They still show more mental health, substance abuse and financial problems, both in adolescence and adulthood, than those who were never delinquent (Connor, 2012; Siegel and Welsh, 2011).

Sometimes, teenagers cannot easily explain why they act the way they do. They may just be confused about it or simply see delinquent behaviours as appropriate ways to deal with what they experience. Some influencing and critical problems may include marital crisis between parents; frequent fights and or hostility

among the family members. Many adolescents today have problems and are getting into trouble. There are a lot of pressures for adolescents to deal with among friends and family which made them resulted into delinquent behaviour. For some adolescents, pressures include poverty, parental problems and gangs, while some are concerned about significant issues such as religion, gender roles, values or ethnicity. Some others are having difficulty dealing with past traumas they have experienced, like abuse and they became aggressive. Most times, these conflicts result in behaviour problems (Connor, 2012; Samm et al., 2010). Any number of isolated behaviour problems can represent adolescent problem behaviour and delinquency e.g. truancy, a fight in school, drug or alcohol ingestion; damaging public properties, hitting, physical assaulting among others (Farrington, 1997). When adolescents are under pressure due to various environmental factors they may become violent and this can be manifested in a number of antisocial or delinquent behaviours (Dou et al., 2015).

Pediatricians see children and adolescents who have a variety of behavioural problems or mental health as concerns, and one of the most challenging is aggression/violent reactions. Aggressive behaviour can be either impulsive (reacting to a trigger) or proactive (premeditated). However, the manifestations are distressing to families and school personnel. Such behaviours may interfere with family or peer relationships and school performance (Dou et. al; 2015; Ronda and Edward, 2011).

Likewise, research in the United States and abroad has documented that bullying is also a common and potentially damaging form of violence among teenagers. Bullying does harm both its intended victims, the perpetrators, and may also affect the school climate. This, indirectly affect the ability of all students to learn to the best of their abilities. In the same vein, Olweus (1993) in his research found that in addition to threatening other children, bullies were several times more likely than their non-bullying peers commit antisocial acts, including vandalism, fighting, theft, drunkenness and truancy. Several studies also suggest that bullying in early childhood may be a critical risk factor for the development of future problems with violence and delinquency (Olweus, 2001). Hence, the link between bullying and later delinquent and criminal behaviour cannot be ignored. Although studies of comprehensive anti-bullying programmes are scarce in Nigeria, evaluation data from other countries suggest that adopting comprehensive approach to reduce bullying at school can change students' behaviours, and increase teachers' willingness to intervene. Moreover, from available studies, most research on aggression among adolescents and college-age students are on aggression from the perspective of victims rather than that of perpetrators. The present study was motivated to fill a gap in literature by focusing on students who perpetrate aggression against other students. Perpetrators are students who indicated on self-reported measure of bullying and aggression thus, inflicting aggressive acts on others. Social learning theory provides the justification for this perspective. The theory posits that children learn through observation and imitation, when violence is rampant in a society (as the case is in many countries today including Nigeria) and there is lack of effective controlling agents, children are more likely to learn that violence is normal way of handling frustrations (Ojedokun et al, 2013; Murray, 2008, Bandura, 1986). Nevertheless, students should be helped to socialize, to manage their emotions and control their anger as they pass through school. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (2000) and Pratt (2015) general theory of crime, poor self-control is the most important and pervasive individual trait associated with criminal behaviour. While researches in crime and delinquency consider psychological construct of impulsivity, poor self-control to be a correlate of deviant behaviour. Persons with low self-control are hypothesized to manifest six characteristics. They are impulsive, self-centered, and short tempered, and they choose simple tasks over complex ones, enjoy taking risks, and prefer physical activities over mental exertion

(Unnever and Cornell, 2003). In view of these characteristics, the study aimed to examine the mediating role of self-control on aggression and bullying behaviour as predictors of delinquent behaviour in adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Delinquent behaviour is an act that is improper or criminal in nature while a delinquent is defined as a person, especially someone young, who has done something society considers wrong or criminal. A delinquent can also be a person who is guilty of illegal or disorderly behaviour or who is engaging in illegal or disorderly behaviour. However, this study aimed to examine bullying and aggression as predictors for delinquent behaviour and anti-social behaviour later for both male and female. Aggression and bullying among adolescents in Nigeria have reached a critical height due to increased violent and anti-social demeanors pervading the society such as kidnappings (foreigners and citizens), robberies, suicide tendencies and ritual killings. Aggression and bullying at school are critical and difficult social problems, probably, the most common and noticeable problems among school adolescents. It is important to note the distinction between aggressive behaviour and bullying among adolescents. Aggressive behaviour is meant to hurt or harm while bullying is a repetitive behaviour further characterized by a power imbalance between two parties, such as one child against a group or a bigger child against a smaller child. Studies have shown that victims bullying and aggression display emotional and school based problems. Although, not every act of delinquency affects school performance in the same way, however, the seriousness of delinquent behaviour may determine whether or to what extent school performance suffers (Dou et al., 2015; Runday, Vassallo and Edward, 2011). It appears that poor school performance is a more severe problem among serious violent delinquents. Hence, findings from previous studies show that bullying, aggression and delinquency share similar risk factors. However, there has not been any documented review on the possible links between school bullying, aggressive assault and delinquent behaviour as well as possible mediating role of self-control.

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to examine the influence of bullying and aggressive behaviour on subsequent antisocial or delinquent behaviour among public secondary school students. In order to examine if bullying and aggressive behaviour in adolescence may be risk markers for a continuing pattern of antisocial or delinquent behaviour particularly among males in the absence of controlling agent. Childhood family violence (physical and psychological parental violence) and family structure as well as environmental influence were taken into account.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: Aggression and bullying respectively will not significantly influence delinquent behavior among adolescents.

H₀₂: Adolescents aggression and bullying tendencies respectively will not be significantly influenced by individual self-control.

H₀₃: There is no significant gender influence on aggression and bullying behaviours respectively among adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was used for the study and it remains a blue print or plan in this study because it assists in the selection, description and collection of information from the participants.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all the students in Junior Secondary Schools in Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample consisted of one hundred and fifty (150) participants made up of 75 male and 75 female JSS II students from three junior secondary schools in the area of study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the schools while stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select the participants. The sample was made up of 50 all boys, 50 all girls and the mixed school was 25 males and 25 females from each of the selected schools. The three schools were one co-educational, one single sex-male and one single sex-female public school.

Research Instrument

The research instrument is divided into four parts relating to the variables raised in the research hypotheses.

Low Self-Control:

Low self-control was measured according to 24 attitudinal items developed by Grasmick et al. (1993) which had been used in prior studies (Seevera & Moon 2013; Piquero & Bouffard, 2007). Each item contained a response on 4-point Likert-type scale. Therefore, the 24 items were combined and adapted to construct new measures for self-control scale of 10 items.

Bully Items:

To measure school bullying, the participants were asked to self-report their own involvement in 15 bullying behaviours towards others over the previous year (Kim et al., 2004). Both physical and psychological bullying indices were used to construct the general school bullying measure. The response options ranged from 0(never) to 3(six times or more), and each index was coded so that high score indicates a high involvement in psychological, physical and general school bullying

Aggression Items:

Aggression among adolescents was measured by the Aggression Questionnaire developed by Buss and Perry (1992). The questionnaire consists of 4 subscales with a total of 29 items; rated by a 5-point scale. The four subscales are physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Scores for items were combined to represent aggression scores. The high scores on aggression questionnaire indicate high aggression among adolescents. This scale was adapted as part of the measures for this study.

Delinquent Behaviour Items

This section consists of 15 items measuring tendencies in exhibiting criminal acts or unlawful antisocial behaviours such as drug use, street fighting, alcohol offenses, truancy, vandalism, theft, burglary, school discipline. The scale scores ranged from 15-60 and the high scores indicate high tendency to delinquent or unlawful antisocial behaviour.

Reliability of Instrument

The total items for the study instrument was forty-five consisting the four subsections (1) Aggression (10 items), Bullying (10 items), Self-control (10 items) and Delinquent Behaviour (15 items). The instrument was tagged ABSdbQ. For the reliability of the scale, a pilot test was carried out for the suitability and then,

Cronbach Alpha method of reliability was used to test for the internal consistency and the obtained coefficient was 0.81.

RESULT

Data collected from the study were analyzed using both the descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The inferential statistics of two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test statistic were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The data and analysis of results are thus presented.

Hypothesis One: Aggression and bullying respectively will not significantly influence delinquent behavior among adolescents.

Two-way analysis of variance statistics was used and the result is presented in Table 1

Table 1: ANOVA Test on the influence of aggression and bullying on delinquent behaviour.

Aggression	Bullying	N	X	SD	
High	High	42	12.99	2.14	
	Low	37	13.11	2.93	
Low	High	44	23.87	4.17	
	Low	27	26.07	5.21	
Sources of variation		Sum of Squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of Square	F-ratio
Aggression		82.42	1	82.42	
Bullying		114.20	1	114.20	
Delinquent Behaviour		51.33	1	51.33	
Within Groups		4130.34	146	28.29	4.04
Total		4378.29	149		

* Significant at 0.05; $df = 1, 146$; F critical = 3.9

The calculated F-value of 4.04 (Table 1), shows the influence of aggression and bullying on delinquent behaviour. This calculated F-value of 4.04 is significant since it is greater than the critical F-value 3.91 given 1 and 146 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the hypothesis was rejected. This implies that aggression and bullying respectively significantly influence delinquent behaviour among adolescents.

The results further revealed that students with high aggressive and bullying acts ($\bar{x}=12.99$, $SD=2.14$) had mildly lower mean score compared to students with high aggression and low bullying acts ($M=13.18$, $SD=2.93$), and students with low aggression and high bullying acts ($M=23.87$, $SD=4.17$) had lower mean score compared to students with lower aggression and high bullying acts respectively. This indicates that high aggression tendency may not necessarily predict high bullying tendency. It also points to the fact that the two independent variables are not interdependent, and both can result into delinquent behaviour. For the significant influence of the independent variable against the dependent variable which is adolescents' delinquent behaviour; the obtained results ($f_{cal} = 4.04$, $f_{crit} = 3.90$) with $df = 1, 146$ at $p > .05$) indicates there is a significance influence of aggression and

bullying (violent attitudes) on exhibition or tendency for delinquent behaviour particularly in Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos.

Hypothesis Two: Adolescents aggression and bullying tendencies respectively will not be significantly influenced by individual self-control.

This hypothesis was tested using two-way analysis of variance statistics. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA Test of the influence of self-control on aggression and bullying tendencies among adolescents

Aggression	Bullying	n	X	SD
High	High	34	24.17	3.92
	Low	27	26.74	4.69
Low	High	52	23.57	3.29
	Low	37	26.00	4.05
Sources of variation		Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of square
Aggression		69.76	1	69.76
Bullying		120.05	1	120.05
Self-control		77.25	1	77.25
Within		4200.06	146	29.11
Total		4517.12	149	

* Significant at 0.05; $df = 1 \text{ \& } 146$; critical $F = 3.9$

The data collected in relation to the stated hypothesis was subjected to analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. Results from table 2 revealed that students with high aggression and high bullying tendencies ($M=24.17$, $SD=3.92$) had lower mean score compared with students with high aggression against low bullying tendencies ($M=26.74$, $SD=4.69$). While students with low aggression and high bullying tendencies ($M=23.57$, $SD=3.29$) had lower mean score compared with those having low aggression as against low bullying tendencies ($M=26.00$, $SD=4.05$). From the results it could be observed that students with low aggression as against high bullying tendencies had lowest mean score while the highest mean score was obtained by the students with high aggression against low bullying tendencies. This means that students with high aggression tendency may not necessarily be bullies, while those with high bullying tendency may not necessarily have high aggressive tendency. However, the results of the ANOVA test revealed that ($f_{cal} = 4.18$, $f_{crit} = 3.90$), with $df = 1, 146$ at $p > 0.05$. since there is a significant influence, thus, the hypothesis two was rejected. The result of the ANOVA shows that self-control can significantly influence both aggression and bullying activities among adolescents.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant gender influence on aggression and bullying behaviours respectively among adolescents.

In testing this hypothesis, the Independent t-test statistical tool was used. The result of the analysis is presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender influence on aggression and bullying acts among adolescents

Variables	Gender	N	X	Sd	Df	t-cal	t-crit
Aggression	Male	75	7.41	1.64	148	1.94	2.01
	Female	75	5.72	1.13			
Bullying	Male	75	18.15	2.14	148	2.63	2.01
	Female	75	11.03	1.97			

* $P < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the value oft-calculated (1.94 and 2.63) is greater than the value oft-critical (1.65) with 148 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This led to the rejection of the hypothesis. This means that there is a significant gender difference in aggression and bullying among adolescent.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results obtained at the end of the data analyses were as discussed. The first hypothesis stated that aggression and bullying respectively will not significantly influence delinquent behavior among adolescents. This hypothesis was tested with the application of two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The outcome showed that adolescents' aggression and bullying were significantly related to delinquent behaviours among adolescents. This finding supports Buker (2011) who noted that aggressive motivation or the desire to inflict harm on others plays a very common role in human behavior. According to Colman (2013), childhood and adolescent aggressive and bullying behaviours are strong predictors of delinquency. While aggressive behavior has been described as part and parcel of a behavioral disorder; delinquency is a legal concept used to describe diverse antisocial actions including theft, burglary, robbery, vandalism, drug use, and aggressive behaviour. Delinquency is often used as a synonymous of antisocial behavior which includes lying, cheating, stealing, and committing antisocial acts. Kendra (2013) asserted that aggression, in its broadest sense, is delinquent, or a disposition, that is forceful, hostile or attacking. Similarly, Streuning (2011) opined that aggression can serve different purposes such as: to express anger and hostility, to assert dominance, to intimidate or threaten, to achieve a goal, to express possession, a response to fear, a reaction to pain, and to compete with others. It can thus be deduced that if a delinquent becomes a persistent offender, the tendency of becoming a great threat to the society at adulthood is high.

The second hypothesis stated that adolescents' aggression and bullying tendencies respectively will not be significantly influenced by individual self-control. This hypothesis was tested with the application of two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The outcome showed that aggression and bullying respectively significantly influenced by adolescents' self-control. This supports Gyurak and Ayduk (2008) who asserted that individual with high level of self-control could postpone the urge to gain immediate satisfaction and lower the chance to engage in aggressive behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi (2000) claimed that self-control serves as a vital role in the development of negative behavior among adolescents such as aggression and criminal behavior. Accordingly, those with low level of self-control have high tendency to

behave impulsively and therefore, they are easily engaged in negative behaviour such as aggression and bullying. They are self-centered and prefer simple task. These characteristics may push adolescents toward negative behavior. A study of Cheung and Cheung (2008) reported that self-control significantly linked with aggression and bullying. Ezinga, Weerman, Westenberg and Bijleveld (2008) in the same vein reported that there were significant positive relationships between temper, impulsiveness and adventure with adolescents' problem behaviors they also proposed that self-control serves as a mechanism that inhibits formation of negative behaviour as it assists adolescents to resist temptation.

The third hypothesis stated that there is no significant gender influence on aggression and bullying behaviours respectively among adolescents. This hypothesis was tested with the application of the independent t-test statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance. The outcome showed that there is a significant gender difference in aggression and bullying among adolescent. This is in line with Myers (2010) reported that male admit to more physical aggression than the female. Shaffer (2010) also noted that boys and men are more overtly, that is physically and verbally aggressive than girls and women. Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz and Osterman (2013); Kendra (2013) reported that males are quicker to aggression and more likely than females to express their aggression physically. Hence, males should be empowered and engaged more with the coping skills.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study it can be concluded that aggression and bullying can significantly influence delinquent behavior. The study also revealed that self-control can influence the independent variables significantly. Also, there is a significant gender influence on the exhibition of the two behavioural characteristics. In concluding, aggressive and bullying behaviour among secondary school students are very serious problems due to their inherent dangers. Aggression and bullying in schools could trigger absenteeism among students from school due to the fear of being intimidated or threatened. The manifestation of aggressive and bullying behaviors among adolescents will also affect their school performance and self-development in terms of personality. It therefore becomes imperative that necessary measures should be taken so as to eliminate or mitigate aggression and bullying in secondary schools. It is critical that any violence prevention strategy should work to raise the awareness of adolescent, school staff and parents regarding the link between bullying and aggression as well as other violent behaviours.

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have some implications for counselling practice. Counsellor's intervention was considered as a panacea to curb aggressive and bullying behavior among adolescents. To this end, the use of behavior modification techniques by counsellors is suggested as a way forward. Since aggression and bullying in adolescence can predict delinquent behaviour which is a societal menace, also, with the fact that the perpetrators can become more persistent offenders and the offenses become more heinous at adulthood, there is need for intervention at early age (Longe, 2018). In this study, self-control has been considered as a mediating factor. The intervention should also include the study of adolescents' trajectories developmental stages to help overcome potential environmental risk factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Bullying or aggression seems to be risk marker for antisocial development. Therefore, more collaboration on whole-school anti-bullying-aggression programs with child-centered and family-oriented strategies on delinquency prevention should be more integrated.

2. Parents and guardians should act as models before their children by behaving well. This is because adolescents watch and imitate the bad behaviors of their parents/guardians.
3. The school authorities should provide a good learning environment for students so as to reduce the incidences and causes of aggression and bullying and as such improve the school performance of young adolescents. Through success motivation there may be decline in delinquent behaviour across genders.

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