

## **BULLYING AS PREDICTOR OF STUDENTS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONITSHA NORTH LGA**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated bullying as predictor of students academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North local government area of Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 27,213 SSII students of public secondary schools students in Onitsha North Local government area. A sample of 300 students was drawn using purposive sampling technique. Data on bullying were collected using Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument: Bully/Target (APRI-BT) while the result of the students in English and Mathematics were employed to measure the academic achievement of the students. The data were collected by the researcher with the help of two research assistants who were properly briefed on how to administer the instrument. The completed copies of questionnaire were collected on the spot. Regression analysis was employed in analyzing the data. The study found that bullying moderately predicts the academic achievement of secondary school students, bullying moderately predicts the academic achievement of male and female secondary school students, and that the negative effect of bullying is stronger in male students than female students in secondary school in Onitsha North Local Government Area. Based on the foregoing, the study concludes that bullying predicts the academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local government area. The study recommends amongst others that schools should develop code of conduct that encourages students to exhibit appropriate behaviours at all times. Also, adequate and appropriate disciplinary measures should be taken against perpetrators of bullying and justice secured for victims.*

**Key Words:** Bulling, Academic Achievement, Public Schools

### **Introduction**

Academic achievement is generally being considered as a key criterion to judge one's total potentiality and capability in educational system. It occupies a very important place in the learning process. Academic achievement has been referred to as scholastic achievement which signifies various aspects of learning as ability to learn, scholastic aptitude, measures of motivation, level of aspiration, and creative capacity. According to Kpolovie, Joe and Okoto (2014), academic achievement is regarded as excellent in all academic disciplines in class as well as extra curriculum activities. Academic achievement is the outcome of education as it indicates the extent to which the students, teachers, curricular and indeed the educational institution has achieved the predetermined educational goals (Adeyemi, 2014). It is commonly measured with examination that assesses important procedural knowledge such as skills and declarative knowledge such as facts which students have learnt. Academic achievement is a measurable index that depicts a student's cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains in an educational setting. Student's academic achievement is ascertained by testing which "has and will continue to play significant role in any educational system world-over. In fact, it would be irrational to think of teaching without test, measurement and evaluation. Evaluation of academic achievement is indispensable for effective formal and even non-formal education (Kpolovie et al 2014).

Karthigeyan and Nirmala (2012) saw academic achievement as a key criterion to judge one's total potentiality and capability in educational system, it occupies a very important place in the learning process. They further defined academic achievement as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning. This implies that achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him. They also stated that achievement is defined as accomplishment or proficiency of performance in a given skill or body of knowledge. The knowledge attained or skills developed in school subjects are usually developed by teachers. Chapman (2010) stated that high academic achievement predicts

students' high level of marketability, enabling them to choose their own placement. Lent, Brown and Hackett (2011) noted that academic achievement is a key mechanism through which adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are an important part of developing career aspirations.

Bullying on the other is a problem of interest for many educators and psychologists, and a great deal of research has been conducted on the subject. Olweus and Limber (2010) further defined bullying as the "aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing that is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength. Their definition included three defining characteristics which have been adopted by most researchers: intent to harm, repetition over time, and a power imbalance. Similarly, Neha and Sairaj (2016) see bullying as a form of aggressive behaviour in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) noted that bullying involves a dynamic interaction between the perpetrator and the victim. The bully increases in power, and the victim loses power. As a result, it is difficult for the victim to respond or to cope with the problem (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Imbalance of power can be derived from physical strength, social status in the group, or from group size (e.g. a group targeting a single person). Power may also be achieved through knowing a person's vulnerabilities (e.g. appearance, learning problem, family situation, personal characteristics) and using this knowledge to harm him or her.

Bullying has typically been excluded as a reactive type of aggression because bullying is characterized by systematic/organized negative acts carried out over time versus a reaction of frustration or anger to an immediate threat or provocation (Espelage & Swearer cited in Totura & Mackinnon-Lewis, 2011). The categories of bullying behaviour lay the foundation to identifying the characteristics of the powerful, powerless and reactions from the powerless. These categories include bullies, victims of bullies and bully-victims respectively. Bullies are individuals who are considered the perpetrators of undesirable actions. Victims of bullying are the people who are in receipt of abusive behaviours by the bully. Bully-victims are those individuals who were victims of bullying and retaliated by bullying others. Amalu (2018) noted that in addition to the three characteristics, there are those who are by-standers and refrain from participating in the actions so as to avoid undeserved abuse or to indirectly sanction the abuse on the victim .

Bullying can lead to both physical and emotional harm, and the imbalance of power, real or perceived, may consist of a difference in physical, social, and/or emotional power (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011). Bullying may appear in many forms, including direct or indirect physical and/or psychological aggression, verbal harassment (such as cruel teasing, name calling), negative gestures and peer isolation. In addition to acts of deliberate physical aggression, bullying also includes verbal aggression (e.g., name calling and threats), relational aggression (e.g., social isolation and rumor spreading), and cyber-aggression (e.g., text messaging and e-mailing hurtful messages or images), a new venue for inflicting harm in an increasingly electronic youth culture (Holt, Vivolo, Polanin, Holland, DeGue, Matjasko & Reid, 2015). The major types of bullying are often classified in the literature as direct or indirect. Physical and verbal bullying are usually considered to be a direct form, while social (relational) bullying refer to an indirect form of bullying. Direct bullying such as hitting and name-calling is quite obvious in nature. Indirect bullying is aimed at damaging the victim's social status and is often much less detectable by bystanders or witnesses. It may include gossiping, rumour mongering and convincing others to socially exclude the victim (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

Bullying is a social problem that affects all students, either the person the bully, the victims, and those who witnesses. Bullying may include verbal, physical assaults, threats, jokes or language, mockery and criticizing, insulting behavior and facial expressions. All of such factors work either individually, or collectively, for contributing in students' likelihood of bullying. It is well known that bullying is difficult to eliminate or to stop it in schools because it is used by students. Bullying at school has serious impact particularly on the academic achievement the students. Bullying at school affects academic achievement since bullied children feel fear and weak and in the same time it affects students' personality traits and self-confidence. Therefore such situation makes bullied students unable to follow or to pay attention for their study well and even they might do not like to go to school. Moreover they miss opportunities to participate with their colloquies or even enjoy school activities.

A number of empirical studies have found that bullying has detrimental effects on a victim's physical and psychological well-being and also hurts his/her academic standing. Indeed, a growing amount of research within the last few years have reiterated the noxious concomitant and long lasting consequences of school bullying (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). Owing to these, researchers continuously explore potential risk or predicting factors that may in more ways than one predispose a child to engaging in bullying (Duncan, 2011). Lower school achievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010), higher school delinquency and school dropout are also attributed to bullying. Students in schools with high levels of reported bullying perform poorer academically than those with lower prevalence (Barboza, 2015). Based on the foregoing, the study examined how bullying predict students academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions;

1. To what extent does bullying predict the academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?
2. To what extent does bullying predict the academic achievement of male and female public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

1. Bullying would not significantly predict the academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.
2. Bullying would not significantly predict the academic achievement of male and female public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

### **Method**

The study adopted correlational research design. The correlation study according to Nworgu (2015) indicates the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the variables of the study. The study was carried out in Onitsha North local government area of Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of 27,213 SSII students of public secondary school students in Anambra State. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of 300 students. Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument: Bully/Target (APRI-BT) Parada, Marsh and Craven, (2010), was employed as the instrument of data collection. The APRI-BT is a self-report behavioural measure which comprises of multidimensional measures of bully/victim behaviours. It consists of 36 items made up of two sections A and B. Section A contains 18 items which measure bullying perpetration behaviour. In this section, participants responded on how often students engaged in bullying against other students within a year. While Section B contains 18 items which measure the types of target/victim experiences: Physical, verbal, and social/relational. Items are measured using a six-point likert scale ranging from 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Once or Twice a Month, 4 = Once a Week, 5= Several Times a Week, to 6 = Everyday. The scores of the students in English and Mathematics were used to measure students academic achievement.

The data collected were analyzed using simple regression analysis. Muijs' in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggestion for assessing the goodness of fit of regression model using squared regression coefficient ( $R^2$ ) and Beta weight ( $\beta$ ) were adopted in this study. For  $R^2$ : 0 – 0.1 weak; 0.1 – 0.3 modest fit; 0.3 – 0.5 moderate fit; > 0.5 strong fit.

For  $\beta$  weighting ( $\beta$ )

0 – 0.1 = weak effect

0.1 – 0.3 = modest effect

0.3 – 0.5 moderate effect

> 0.5 = strong effect

However, negative beta weighting ( $\beta$ ) indicates negative effect/relationship.

### **Results**

The data generated were presented and analyzed. The analysis was done in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses.

**Research Question One:** To what extent does bullying predict the academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

**Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis of Bullying as Predictor of Academic Achievement of Public Secondary School Students**

|                    | B     | SE B | $\beta$ |
|--------------------|-------|------|---------|
| Constant           | 3.391 | .117 |         |
| Bullying           | -.364 | .057 | .576    |
| R                  | .576  |      |         |
| R <sup>2</sup>     | .321  |      |         |
| Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | .311  |      |         |

Table 1 above indicated that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .576 while the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is .321. This indicates that 32.1 of the variation in academic achievement of the public secondary school students are accounted by the variation in bullying. Using Muijs' criteria, bullying moderately predict the academic achievement of secondary public school students in Onitsha North. The beta weight ( $\beta$  = .576) is an indication that bullying negatively predicts public secondary school academic achievement.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent does bullying predict the academic achievement of male and female public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

**Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on how Bullying Predict the Academic Achievement of Male and Female Secondary School Students**

|               |                    | B     | SE B | $\beta$ |
|---------------|--------------------|-------|------|---------|
| <b>Male</b>   | Constant           | 5.821 | .189 |         |
|               | Bullying           | -.619 | .073 | .781    |
|               | R                  | .781  |      |         |
|               | R <sup>2</sup>     | .484  |      |         |
|               | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | .480  |      |         |
| <b>Female</b> | Constant           | 5.068 | .131 |         |
|               | Bullying           | -.574 | .065 | .661    |
|               | R                  | .661  |      |         |
|               | R <sup>2</sup>     | .387  |      |         |
|               | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | .384  |      |         |

Table 2 showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) for male students is .781 while the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is .484. This is an indication that bullying explained 48.4 of the variance in the academic achievement of male secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. Using Muijs' criteria, bullying moderately predicts academic achievement of male secondary school students. The beta weight value of .781 indicates that bullying can negatively predicts the academic achievement of male secondary school students.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient (R) for female students is .661 while the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is .387. Using Muijs' criteria, bullying moderately predict academic achievement of female students. The beta weight value of .661 showed that bullying negatively predicts the academic achievement of female students. This suggests that the negative effect of bullying is stronger in male students than female students in secondary school in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis One:** Bullying would not significantly predict the academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Table 3: Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis of Bullying as Predictor of Academic Achievement**

|  | B | SE B | $\beta$ | P-value |
|--|---|------|---------|---------|
|--|---|------|---------|---------|

|                    |         |      |      |       |
|--------------------|---------|------|------|-------|
| Constant           | 3.931   | .117 |      | 0.000 |
| Bullying           | -.344   | .057 | .576 | 0.000 |
| R                  | .576    |      |      |       |
| R <sup>2</sup>     | .321    |      |      |       |
| Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | .311    |      |      |       |
| F                  | 171.261 |      |      | 0.000 |

Table 3 above indicated that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .576 while the R<sup>2</sup> is .321. The F-ratio associated with these is 171.261 and the P-value = .000. Therefore, since P-value is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance, we reject the stated hypothesis. The study therefore concludes that bullying significantly predict the academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis Two:** Bullying would not significantly predict the academic achievement of male and female public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Table 4: Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis of Bullying as Predictor of Academic Performance of Male and Female Students**

|               |                    | B       | SE B | $\beta$ | P-value |
|---------------|--------------------|---------|------|---------|---------|
| <b>Male</b>   | Constant           | 5.821   | .189 |         | .000    |
|               | Bullying           | -.619   | .073 | .781    | .000    |
|               | R                  | .781    |      |         |         |
|               | R <sup>2</sup>     | .484    |      |         |         |
|               | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | .480    |      |         |         |
|               | F                  | 179.00  |      |         | .000    |
| <b>Female</b> | Constant           | 5.068   | .131 |         | .000    |
|               | Bullying           | -.574   | .065 | .661    | .000    |
|               | R                  | .661    |      |         |         |
|               | R <sup>2</sup>     | .387    |      |         |         |
|               | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | .384    |      |         |         |
|               | F                  | 126.231 |      |         | .000    |

Table 4 indicated that the simple regression coefficient (R) for male and female students is .781 and .661 respectively while the R<sup>2</sup> is .484 and .387 respectively for male and female students. The F-ratio associated with these is 179.00 and 126.231 respectively for male and female students while the P-value is .000 and 0.000 for male and female students respectively. Since the P-values are less than the stipulated .05 level of significance, hypothesis two is rejected. Therefore, bullying significantly predicts the academic achievement of male and female public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

## Discussion

This study investigated bullying as predictor of students academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North LGA. The study found that bullying moderately predicts the academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This shows that bullying can influence the academic achievement of students in secondary schools. The above finding agrees with the findings of Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010) that bullying cause lower school achievement among students. This also agrees with the findings of Strøm, Thoresen, Wentzel-Larsen and Dyb (2013) that students in schools with high levels of reported bullying perform poorer academically than those with lower prevalence.

The study also found that bullying moderately predicts the academic achievement of male and female secondary school students in Onitsha North LGA. This indicates that the bullying can influence the level of academic achievement of students irrespective of their gender. The study also found that the negative effect of bullying is stronger in male students than female students in secondary school in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This agrees with the position of Barboza (2015) that students in schools with high levels of reported bullying perform poorer academically than those with lower prevalence.

## Conclusion

The study investigated bullying as a predictor of academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government area. The data generated were subjected to statistical analysis and the following became evidence. The study found that bullying moderately predicts the academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The study also found that bullying moderately predicts the academic achievement of male and female secondary school students in Onitsha North LGA. Based on the foregoing, the study concludes that bullying predicts the academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local government area.

### **Recommendations**

As one of the most persistent and destructive forms of aggression in the continuum of violence, bullying deserves the attention of everyone. Reducing and preventing bullying requires the joint efforts of the policymakers, administrators of schools, teachers, students, parents and community members. The study therefore contends that schools should develop code of conduct that encourages students to exhibit appropriate behaviours at all times. Also, adequate and appropriate disciplinary measures should be taken against perpetrators of bullying and justice secured for victims. Similarly, school authorities need to develop and mainstream anti-bullying policies into their system of operation. To be effective, bullying intervention must focus beyond the aggressive child and the victim to include peers, school staff; parents and broader community. Inappropriate behaviour should be discouraged. Children should be given the reasons why their behaviour is inappropriate which is enough to change their behaviour.

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