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ADDRESSING BULLYING THROUGH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT
This study, addressing bullying through guidance and counselling in Nigerian secondary schools, explored the prevalence, causes and strategies for addressing bullying in Nigerian secondary schools and examines the role of guidance and counselling services in addressing this issue. Through a literature review and case studies, the research findings highlight socioeconomic disparities, family background, peer pressure, ineffective school policies, cultural norms, and media influence as some of the causes of bullying in schools. Various forms of bullying were experienced by students, and the effectiveness of different intervention strategies such as comprehensive anti-bullying programmes, counsellor-led workshops, peer mediation, individual and group counseling, SEL integration, regular monitoring, and parental involvement, among others were identified. Recommendations were provided for improving the implementation and effectiveness of these services, including increased funding, training, and collaboration with other stakeholders.

Keywords: Bullying, Schools, Guidance and Counselling and Intervention Strategies

Introduction

Bullying, a universal issue in educational settings worldwide, is no exception in Nigerian secondary schools. It can have severe consequences for victims, including low self-esteem, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. Guidance and counselling services offer a promising approach to addressing bullying and creating a safer, more supportive learning environment for all students. Olweus and Limber (2010), defined bullying behaviour as the exposure, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Such negative actions may include attempting or intentionally inflicting injury or discomfort on others. Ugboha and Rotshak, (2022) defined Bullying is an unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated over time. Bullying happens within social relationships involving

repeated and hurtful behaviours that stem from a misuse power

Bullying can take various forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, and cyberbullying. In Nigerian secondary schools, it is often fueled by factors such as peer pressure, cultural expectations, and a lack of understanding about healthy relationships. Incidents of bullying must include all three of these characteristics: Intentional, repeated, and power imbalance. Intentional because the behaviour will be aggressive and a deliberate attempt to hurt another person. These aggressive actions towards others are usually repeated overtime. The bully tends to have more physical or social power than the victims(s) (Olweus, 2010).

The Prevalence of Bullying in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Bullying is a pervasive issue in Nigerian secondary schools, with students frequently reporting experiences of physical, verbal, and psychological abuse from their peers. According to Olweus and Limber (2010), bullying can be defined as aggressive behaviour that involves an imbalance of power and is repeated over time. In the Nigerian context, studies have shown that bullying is widespread, with a significant percentage of students experiencing some form of victimization during their school years (Adeoye, 2016).

Bullying in Nigerian schools manifests in various forms, including physical aggression, verbal harassment, social exclusion, and cyberbullying. Physical bullying involves acts such as hitting, pushing, and other forms of physical harm. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, insults, and threats. Social bullying, or relational bullying, involves excluding individuals from peer groups or spreading rumors to damage someone's social standing. Cyberbullying, a more recent phenomenon, involves using digital platforms to harass or intimidate peers (Smith, 2008).

Several studies have provided statistical evidence to illustrate the prevalence of bullying in Nigerian secondary schools. For example, Omoteso (2010) conducted a survey involving 500 students across five states in Nigeria and found that 78% of students had witnessed bullying, while 65% had been directly involved, either as victims or perpetrators. These figures suggest that bullying is not only common but also deeply entrenched in the social fabric of Nigerian schools.

Another study by Egbochuku (2007) found that bullying is more prevalent in urban schools compared to rural schools, possibly due to the larger student populations and increased anonymity in urban settings. The study reported that in some urban schools, as many as 70% of students had experienced bullying, compared to 45% in rural schools. This urban-rural disparity highlights the need for targeted interventions that consider the unique challenges faced by different types of schools.

Causes of Bullying in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Bullying in Nigerian secondary schools is a significant issue that has far-reaching consequences on the victims' physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Understanding the causes of bullying is essential to developing effective strategies to prevent it. Below are some of the primary causes of bullying in Nigerian secondary schools:

1. Socioeconomic Disparities: One of the leading causes of bullying in Nigerian secondary schools is the socioeconomic disparity among students. Students from wealthier backgrounds often bully those from less privileged backgrounds, leading to a power imbalance. This can manifest as physical aggression, verbal abuse, or social exclusion. Socioeconomic disparities contribute to a sense of superiority among students from affluent families, who may use bullying as a way to assert dominance over their peers (Adeoye, 2016).

2. Family Background and Parenting Styles: Family background and parenting styles play a significant role in shaping children's behavior, including their propensity to bully others. Children who grow up in abusive or neglectful homes may replicate such behaviors in school by bullying their peers. Additionally, permissive parenting, where parents do not set clear boundaries or discipline their children effectively, can result in children displaying aggressive behavior in school (Ogunleye & Oladeji, 2019). On the other hand, authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict and harsh discipline, can also lead to bullying as children may take out their frustrations on others (Nwankwo, 2021).

3. Peer Pressure: Peer pressure is another critical factor that contributes to bullying in Nigerian secondary schools. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers, and the desire to fit in or be accepted by a particular group can lead students to engage in bullying behavior. Group dynamics often encourage conformity, and students may bully others to gain approval from their peers or to avoid being ostracized themselves (Okeke, 2021).

4. Lack of Effective School Policies: The absence or ineffectiveness of school policies on bullying is a major cause of the persistence of bullying in Nigerian secondary schools. When schools do not have clear anti-bullying policies or fail to enforce them, it creates an environment where bullying can thrive. The lack of consequences for bullying behavior emboldens bullies and makes victims feel powerless (Adamu, 2022). Furthermore, inadequate training for teachers and school staff on how to handle bullying exacerbates the problem.

5. Cultural and Social Norms: Cultural and social norms in Nigeria can also contribute to the prevalence of bullying in schools. In some communities, aggressive behavior is normalized, and children may learn from a young age that bullying is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts or assert dominance. Additionally, certain cultural practices that emphasize hierarchical relationships and respect for authority figures can lead to situations where older students or those in higher classes bully

younger or less powerful students (Eze, 2020).

6. Media Influence: The influence of media, particularly social media and entertainment, cannot be overlooked when examining the causes of bullying. Exposure to violent or aggressive content in movies, television shows, and online platforms can desensitize students to violence and make them more likely to engage in bullying. Social media, in particular, has become a platform for cyberbullying, where students can anonymously harass or bully others without fear of immediate repercussions (Umar, 2021).

Bullying in Nigerian secondary schools is a complex issue with multiple causes, including socioeconomic disparities, family background, peer pressure, ineffective school policies, cultural norms, and media influence. Addressing these causes requires a multi-faceted approach that involves parents, educators, policymakers, and the community at large.

The Role of Guidance and Counseling

Guidance and counselors in Nigerian secondary schools play a crucial role in addressing bullying. They can: Bullying remains a significant concern in Nigerian secondary schools, affecting students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall school environment. The role of guidance and counseling in addressing bullying is crucial in mitigating its impact and fostering a safe and conducive learning environment.

1. Identification and Early Intervention: Guidance counselors play a pivotal role in the early identification of bullying behaviors. They are trained to observe students' behaviors, listen to reports from teachers and students, and identify signs of bullying, whether physical, verbal, or psychological. Early intervention by guidance counselors is critical as it helps to prevent bullying from escalating into more severe cases of victimization. According to Fawol (2017), early detection and intervention by school counselors can significantly reduce the prevalence of bullying in schools.

2. Providing Emotional Support and Counseling: Victims of bullying often experience anxiety, depression, and a decline in self-esteem. Guidance counselors provide essential emotional support to these students, helping them cope with the psychological effects of bullying. They offer a safe space for students to express their feelings and fears, and through counseling, they help rebuild the confidence and resilience of bullied students (Adeyemo, 2014). The emotional support provided by counselors is crucial in preventing long-term psychological damage and helping victims regain their sense of security in the school environment.

3. Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Guidance counselors often serve as mediators between the bully and the victim, facilitating dialogue and promoting understanding between the parties involved. They help students develop conflict resolution skills and encourage peaceful ways of resolving disputes (Ogunleye, 2019). This approach not only addresses the immediate issue but also equips students

with the skills to handle future conflicts constructively, thereby reducing the likelihood of recurring bullying incidents.

4. Developing Anti-Bullying Programmes and Policies: Guidance counselors collaborate with school management to develop and implement anti-bullying programs and policies. These programs typically include awareness campaigns, workshops, and seminars that educate students, teachers, and parents about the harmful effects of bullying and the importance of fostering a positive school climate. Counselors also play a role in formulating school policies that define bullying, outline consequences, and establish clear procedures for reporting and addressing bullying incidents (Ojo & Akintunde, 2016). These proactive measures are essential in creating a school culture that does not tolerate bullying.

5. Training and Supporting Teachers: Teachers are often the first to witness bullying incidents, making their role in addressing bullying critical. Guidance counselors provide training and support to teachers, helping them recognize the signs of bullying and understand how to respond appropriately. This training often includes strategies for managing classroom behavior, fostering inclusive environments, and addressing bullying when it occurs (Akinboye, 2018). By empowering teachers with the knowledge and skills to handle bullying, counselors help create a more vigilant and supportive school community.

6. Involving Parents and the Community: The role of guidance counselors extends beyond the school, involving parents and the community in efforts to address bullying. Counselors engage with parents, informing them about the signs of bullying and encouraging them to monitor their children's behavior and well-being. They also collaborate with community organizations to provide resources and support for students affected by bullying (Nwoye, 2017). Involving parents and the community ensures a holistic approach to tackling bullying, addressing it from multiple fronts.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation: Effective monitoring and evaluation of anti-bullying strategies are essential to ensure their success. Guidance counselors are responsible for assessing the effectiveness of the interventions and making necessary adjustments. They collect data on bullying incidents, analyze trends, and use this information to improve the school's approach to bullying (Onyeji, 2020). Continuous monitoring and evaluation help in sustaining the efforts to reduce bullying and promote a safer school environment.

The role of guidance and counseling in addressing bullying in Nigerian secondary schools is multifaceted, involving identification, emotional support, mediation, program development, teacher training, parental involvement, and continuous evaluation. By addressing the issue from multiple angles, guidance counselors play a crucial role in creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students, thereby reducing the prevalence and impact of bullying in schools.

Effective Guidance and Counseling Strategies

Effective guidance and counseling strategies are critical in addressing this pervasive problem. These strategies not only aim to reduce bullying incidents but also to create a supportive school environment that fosters positive student relationships. The following are some of the key strategies:

1. Implementation of Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programmes

Schools should adopt comprehensive anti-bullying programmes that include policies, education, and intervention strategies. These programmes should be designed to educate students about the consequences of bullying and promote a culture of respect and empathy. According to Adekoya and Ayodele (2019), effective anti-bullying programmes incorporate both preventive and reactive measures, ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to resist and report bullying.

2. **Counselor-Led Workshops and Seminars**

Workshops and seminars led by school counselors can significantly impact students' attitudes towards bullying. These sessions should focus on educating students about the different forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, and how to deal with them. Nwosu and Nwokolo (2018) suggest that such programs should also involve parents and teachers to ensure a unified approach to tackling bullying.

3. **Peer Mediation Programmes**

Peer mediation involves training students to act as mediators in conflicts among their peers. This strategy empowers students to resolve disputes amicably and can be particularly effective in curbing bullying. Adewale (2020) notes that peer mediation not only reduces the incidence of bullying but also promotes leadership and conflict resolution skills among students.

4. **Individual and Group Counseling**

Counselors should provide both individual and group counseling sessions for victims and perpetrators of bullying. These sessions help in addressing the psychological effects of bullying on victims and in reforming the behavior of bullies. As observed by Okafor and Chukwu (2021), individualized counseling allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying issues that contribute to bullying behavior, while group counseling fosters peer support and collective responsibility.

5. **Incorporation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into the school curriculum can significantly reduce bullying by teaching students empathy, emotional regulation, and effective communication skills. SEL programs help students develop positive relationships and make responsible decisions. According to Uche and Adeyemi (2020), schools that incorporate SEL see a marked improvement in student behavior and a reduction in bullying incidents.

6. Regular Monitoring and Evaluation

Schools must regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their anti-

bullying strategies. This involves collecting data on bullying incidents, student feedback, and the overall school climate. Nwankwo (2019) emphasizes that continuous assessment helps in identifying areas that need improvement and ensures that anti-bullying strategies are effective and relevant to the students' needs.

7. **Parental Involvement**

Engaging parents in anti-bullying initiatives is crucial. Schools should provide parents with resources and training on how to recognize and address bullying. Collaboration between school counselors and parents ensures that students receive consistent messages about bullying both at home and in school. Adebayo and Omisore (2021) argue that when parents are actively involved, students are more likely to report bullying and adhere to the school's anti-bullying policies.

Addressing bullying in Nigerian secondary schools requires a multi-faceted approach that involves the entire school community. Effective guidance and counseling strategies, such as comprehensive anti-bullying programs, counselor-led workshops, peer mediation, individual and group counseling, SEL integration, regular monitoring, and parental involvement, are essential in creating a safe and supportive school environment. These strategies not only reduce the incidence of bullying but also promote the overall well-being and academic success of students.

Challenges in Addressing Bullying Through Guidance and Counseling in Nigerian Secondary Schools

While the challenges outlined in addressing bullying through guidance and counseling in Nigerian secondary schools are significant, they also underscore the complexity of creating a supportive and effective anti-bullying framework. These challenges not only reflect systemic issues but also highlight areas where targeted interventions can make a substantial difference. Understanding and addressing these obstacles is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies that foster a safer and more inclusive school environment.

1. **Lack of Awareness about Bullying**: Many students, teachers, and parents are not fully aware of the different forms of bullying and its impact. This lack of awareness can lead to underreporting and inadequate responses (Adewale, 2020).
2. **Inadequate Training for Counsellors**: Counselors may not receive sufficient training in dealing with bullying, which can limit their effectiveness in addressing and managing bullying cases (Okafor & Chukwu, 2021).
3. **Cultural Stigma**: In some Nigerian communities, discussing mental health and counseling may be stigmatized, making it difficult for students to seek help (Uche & Adeyemi, 2020).
4. **Limited Resources**: Many schools lack the necessary resources, such as counseling materials and trained staff, to effectively implement anti-bullying programmes (Adekoya & Ayodele, 2019).

5. **Resistance from Stakeholders:** Teachers, parents, and students may resist anti-bullying programs due to traditional beliefs or a lack of understanding of the program's benefits (Nwosu & Nwokolo, 2018).
6. **Inconsistent Policy Implementation**: Anti-bullying policies may be inconsistently implemented across schools, leading to varying levels of effectiveness (Nwankwo, 2019).
7. **High Student-to-Counselor Ratio**: The high student-to-counselor ratio in many schools can overwhelm counselors and limit their ability to address bullying cases effectively (Adebayo & Omisore, 2021).
8. **Lack of Student Involvement**: Students may not be sufficiently involved in anti-bullying initiatives, which can reduce the effectiveness of such programs (Adewale, 2020).
9. **Limited Parental Involvement**: Parents may not be adequately involved in anti-bullying efforts, affecting the overall success of these programs (Nwosu & Nwokolo, 2018).
10. **Short-Term Focus**: Many anti-bullying programs may focus on short-term solutions rather than long-term, sustainable changes (Uche & Adeyemi, 2020).

Challenges in Addressing Bullying Through Guidance and Counseling in Nigerian Secondary Schools

1. Increase Awareness and Education: Implement comprehensive awareness campaigns to educate students, teachers, and parents about the different forms of bullying and its impact. Regular workshops and informational sessions can help.
2. Enhance Counselor Training: Provide specialized training for counselors on handling bullying situations, including strategies for intervention and support.
3. Address Cultural Stigma: Promote open discussions about mental health and counseling in schools and communities to reduce stigma and encourage students to seek help.
4. Allocate Resources: Invest in counseling resources, such as materials and professional development, to support effective anti-bullying initiatives.
5. Engage Stakeholders: Involve teachers, parents, and community leaders in the development and implementation of anti-bullying programs to ensure buy-in and support.
6. Standardize Policy Implementation: Develop and enforce consistent anti-bullying policies across schools to ensure uniform application and effectiveness.
7. Reduce Student-to-Counselor Ratio: Increase the number of counselors or provide additional support to manage the high student-to-counselor ratio effectively.
8. Foster Student Involvement: Encourage student participation in anti-bullying initiatives through peer-led programs and involvement in policy development.
9. Increase Parental Engagement: Provide parents with resources and training to support anti-bullying efforts and encourage their active participation in school programs.
10. Focus on Long-Term Solutions: Design and implement anti-bullying programs with a focus on long-term impact, including

regular evaluation and adjustments based on feedback and outcomes.

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