

Research Article

Peer Victimization as Correlate of School Attendance among Senior Secondary School Students in Uromi Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study investigated the influence of peer victimization on school attendance among male and female senior secondary school students in Uromi metropolis. One research question was raised and one hypothesis was formulated to provide direction for the study. The study used an ex post facto survey design. The research participants were 589 public senior secondary schools sampled in Uromi metropolis. The instruments used in this study were school attendance checklist and an adapted questionnaire titled: "Influence of Peer Victimization on School Attendance among Male and Female Senior Secondary School Students in Uromi Metropolis", which was completed by the participants. The result showed that there is no significant difference in school attendance between male and female victims of peer victimization. The study has as one of its recommendations the establishment of Guidance Committee in schools towards the creation of a collaborative platform between the school and family, which is an important link of socialization in the life of students.

Keywords: metropolis, Victimization, socialization, students.

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INTRODUCTION

Behaviour is considered deviant, abnormal or anti-social if it is different from the norm and does not conform to what society expects. In the traditional African society to which Nigeria belongs, Ndagi (2010) holds that Nigeria was famous overtime with a distinct model of values illustrated by deep-rooted fraternity, solid human relations and respect for elders. However, the behavioural pattern of contemporary Nigerian youths as could be observed by the rate at which youths get involved in one crime or another reveals the high proportion of anti-social behaviour among youths. It is either a teenager is a suspect in a murder case, rape, fight, smoking or their seeming lack of good sense of discipline which is becoming a source of worry to members of the older generation.

This behavioural pattern such as peer victimization makes life miserable for those around them. Such youths usually have no regard for the moral of ethical rules of the society or the rights of others, thus manipulating people and situation for their own benefits. They display little guilt when they have injured someone else and even understand that they may have caused a person some harm but feel no remorse (Roberts, 1981) (cited in Nwankwo, Nwoke,

Ckukwuocha, Obanny, Nwoga, Iwuagwu & Okereke, 2009).

Regrettably, this idiosyncrasy of an average Nigerian youth cuts across cultural, socio-economic and religious divides. Children of the rich and poor, children of elite and the illiterate, children of traditional and religious leaders have all joined the crammed train of scoundrels and deviants (Ndagi, 2010). On this note, he opined that the rate of increase in anti-social or deviant behaviour such as peer victimization in the society is alarming and reveals the high proportion of maladjusted personality among young boys and girls. This is also evidence in the number of people who die of suicide, rape, murder and sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS (Loeber 1990; Jamieson & Flanagan 1987) (cited in Nwankwo *et al.*, 2009) and Ndagi (2010).

Peer victimization or bullying which is a conscious, deliberate hostile activity intended to terrorize and harm others through the threat of further aggression is a common occurrence in most of our schools. According to Brock & O'Malley (2016), peer victimization is the consequence of acts of intentional aggression by a peer (or group of peers) operating from a position of strength or power and directed at a victim who is viewed as relatively weak. They are also of the

view that the aggressor's goal is to damage status and/or social relationship of the victim. The desire is expressed in an action that is directed by a strong person against a weaker person either on the account of size or strength, or because the victim is outnumbered or less psychologically resilient. To this end, Rana (2012) asserted that scholars in their determination to establish evidence of peer victimization have identified two key components of peer victimization, which are repeated physical and verbal attacks against a victim who cannot properly defend himself. On this note therefore, peer victimization is said to have occurred when a student is harassed in a hurtful manner by a more powerful peer in whom he has no defenses against.

Peer victimization can also be explained as an active label for the violation of one person's right by another. It cuts across generations as it affects every segment of the society and it is particularly common among school age adolescents. Today, school violence is one of the most important problems facing children and their families, since a growing number of students perceive their school context as an unsafe environment (Aluede, 2004). 22.6% of children in one kindergarten sample reported moderate to high levels of peer victimization, while 10% of 8 – 12 years old in another sample were nominated by their peers as "extreme victims" (Brock & O'Malley, 2016).

School attendance, is attendance at any regular accredited educational institution or programme, public or private, for organized learning at any level of education at the time of census or, if the census is taken during the vacation period at the end of the school year during the last school year (United Nations, 1998). However, in Nigeria the term secondary school is used to refer to the secondary stage of education, and it is defined as the form of education children received after primary education and before the tertiary stage and for six years duration given in two stages; namely, Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School stages; each for three years duration (National Policy on Education, NPE, 2004). It is at this stage that children between the ages of 12 and 18 are provided for in the Nigerian educational system.

The secondary school level of education coincides with the adolescence stage of human development and the students at this level of education are considered as representing Nigeria's most lively, ambitions and energetic population. To this end, stakeholders in the teaching and learning process must ensure regular school attendance by engaging and making sure that students come to school regularly and on time because it is an important factor in the determination of students' school success.

The Problem

Research on students' academic performance has been plagued with much attention being placed on causes of high rate of failure such as inconsistency in government policy on education, examination malpractice, quality of teacher education, socio-economic status of parents and parenting style. Influence of peer victimization has largely been ignored. Peer victimization is an aspect of anti-social behaviour that bothers on school violence. Therefore, peer victimization is a form of school disturbances which is capable of threatening the conducive environment in school because bullying affects victims' sense of security.

The victims of peer victimization cut across gender divide. Many of the boys and girls have been victims of peer victimization and are growing at an increasing rate. To this end, bullying is one of the deviant behaviours the adolescent must be discouraged from exhibiting. According to Rana (2002), studies in other countries during the 1980s and 1990s generally found that between 8 and 38% of students are bullied with some regularity and that between 5 and 9% of students bully others with some regularity. Chronic victims of bullying bullied once a week or more generally constitute between 8 and 20% of the students reported to have been bullied within a period of one year; while 58.8% of female students were also bullied within the same period of time thus indicating evidence of peer victimization across gender divide.

It is on this premise that this research is being carried out to investigate the negative effect of peer victimization on victims among school age youths who are male and female students at the senior secondary school level as it affects their willingness to regularly attend school.

The main purpose of the study is to examine the influence of peer victimization on school attendance among senior secondary school male and female students in Uromi metropolis. Specifically, it will:

1. Describe the school attendance rate of senior secondary students in Uromi metropolis.
2. Find out the influence of peer victimization on male and female students' school attendance.

The result of this study will help the teachers to know how peer victimization could influence students' school attendance thereby encouraging teachers and educators to direct such students to the school counselors or psychologists. Moreover the result of this study will assist the government to understand the adverse effect peer victimization has on society at large thereby enabling government to put in place adequate policy measure at checking high rate of absenteeism in our schools among adolescents.

Research Question

What is the school attendance record of senior secondary students in Uromi metropolis?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in school attendance record between male and female victims of peer victimization.

Concept of Peer Victimization

Peer victimization is a type of violent act that occurs either inside or outside the school. Peer victimization can be physical, verbal or emotional and is usually repeated over a period of time.

Peer victimization, according to various scholars can be defined in many different ways. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, peer victimization is an abusive treatment, the use of force or coercion to affect others, particularly when habitual and involving an imbalance of power. Peer victimization has also been defined as the experience among children of being a target of aggressive behaviour of other children who may not be siblings and necessarily age mate (Hawker and Boulton, 2002). Smith (2000), described peer victimization as an unprovoked attack that causes hurt of a psychological, social or physical nature on the victim. Olweus (1994) also described peer victimization as a problem that occurs when a student is exposed repeatedly and overtime to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.

Despite variations in defining peer victimization among scholars, there are however, conceptual agreements on what constitute peer victimization. It could be deduced from the various definitions that peer victimization has two key components: repeated harmful acts, it means that the victims who is sometimes referred to as target is subjected to repeated physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidation. While, on the other hand, imbalance of power could mean that there is a power differential; that is, an asymmetric power relation between the perpetrator of the harmful act and the victim or target. This power may be social and/or physical in nature. It is on this note that peer victimization is seen to be characterized by an individual behaving in a certain way to gain power over another person (Besag, 1989). Similarly, Olweus (1994), explained negative action in his definition of peer victimization as when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contacts, through words or in other ways.

However, a number of suggestions have indicated that despite country and cultural differences, certain similarities by gender, age, location, and type of

victimization appear in bullying in the U.S and elsewhere (Rana, 2002). For example, punching, pushing, slapping, fighting, spreading of malicious rumours about people, harassment, social isolation, provocation, ignoring people on purpose, directing foul language (profanity) at the victim, tormenting, name calling amongst others are examples of types of peer victimization. To this end, Rana (2002) gave an apt summary of these certain similarities as follows:

- Bullying more often takes place at school than on the way to and from school.
- Boy bullies tend to rely on physical aggression more than girl bullies, who often use teasing, rumour-spreading, exclusion, and social isolation. These latter forms of bullying are referred to as “indirect bullying”. Physical bullying (a form of “direct bullying”) is the least common form of bullying and verbal bullying (which may be “direct” or indirect”) the most common. Some researchers speculate that girls value social relationships more than boys do, so girls’ bullies set out to disrupt social relationships with gossips, isolation, silent treatment and exclusion. Girls tend to bully girls, while boys bully both boys and girls.
- Consistently, studies have indicated that boys are more likely to bully than girls.
- Some studies show that boys are more often victimized, at least during elementary school years; others show that bullies victimized girls and boys in near equal proportions.
- Bullies often do not operate alone. In the United Kingdom, two different studies found that almost half the incidents of bullying are one-on-one, while the other half involves additional youngsters.
- Bullying does not end in elementary school. Middle school seems to provide ample opportunities for bullying, although at lesser rates. The same is true of the beginning years of high school.
- Bullying by boys declines substantially after age 15. Bullying by girls begin to decline significantly at age 14. So, interventions in middle and early high school years are important.

Peer victimization is often mistakenly viewed by both peers and adults as a narrow range of anti-social behaviour among youth of school age hence victims of peer victimization were usually viewed as passive recipients of violent acts. They were people considered to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. On this note, most students do not report bullying to adults, while peers who are witnesses to occurrence of violent acts also fail to tell teachers or even parents due to the following reasons summarized by Rana (2002):

- Fearing retaliation
- Feeling shame at not being able to stand up for themselves
- Fearing they would not be believed

- Not wanting to worry their parents
- Having no confidence that anything would change as a result
- Thinking their parents' or teachers' advice would make the problem worse
- Fearing their teacher would tell the bully who told on him, and;
- Thinking it was worse to be thought of as a snitch.

Peer victimization or bullying is an important aspects of school violence which more than any other school disturbances threatens the conducive environment in school because bullying affects students sense of security. Researchers have shown that violence is used in response to conflicts and it is common among adolescents (Coloroso, (2002); O'Connell, Pepler and Craig, 1999).

Ehindero, (2010), opined that peer victimization is not a problem that should be left unsolved but one that requires urgent attention that should be focused on, because at times, the perpetrators willfully and unconsciously desire to hurt another student and put him under tension. The tension is caused not only by what actually happens but also by constant fear of what might happen. In other words, victims who are repeatedly been victimized may likely experience anxiety and sense of insecurity as well as poor self-esteem, which in extreme cases can harm themselves or attempt suicide.

It involves repeated physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidation directed against a victim who cannot properly defend him or herself because of size and strength, or because the victim is outnumbered. Bullying includes fighting, teasing, intimidation, rumor spreading and isolation, extortions, destruction of property, theft of valued possessions, destruction of another's work, name calling etc. However, not all fighting among students constitutes bullying, because two persons of symmetric power relations, that is, balance of power, both physically and psychologically that are fighting cannot be regarded as bullying. Rather, bullying or peer victimization entails repeated acts of violence or intimidation by someone perceived as physically and psychologically more powerful.

Peer victimization can occur in any context in which human beings interact with each other. This context among others is school. In schools, bullying occurs in all areas like the playground, at recess, hallways, school buses, bus stops, classes that require group work and/or after school activities. Bullying in school sometimes consists of a group of students taking advantage of a student or students and gaining of the loyalty of bystanders. Kerbs & Jolley (2007), in their study, suggested that significant number of students may not appreciate enough the negative impact of

bullying as much as adults generally do and may even derive enjoyment from it, and they may thus not see a reason to prevent it if it brings them joy on some level. The study also indicated that the tacit approval by bystanders is due to wanting to avoid becoming the next victim.

Peer victimization is a common occurrence in most school and a few empirical studies have examined this level of occurrence among students. 25% of students as bystanders encourage bullying (Great schools, 2011). Often bullying takes place in the presence of a large group of reactively uninvolved bystanders. In many case it is the bully's ability to create the illusion that he or she has the support of the majority present that instills the code of silence that prevents protestation of the bullying activities being observed by the group.

Rigby (1996), suggested that an estimated number of Australian students (between the ages of 9 and 17) that is one student in five is bullied at least once a week. He interpreted this to mean that, 20% of Australian students get bullied each week and the report indicated that verbal victimization or indirect victimization was the most common form of peer victimization. Olweus (1991) reported that about 15% or one out of seven Norwegian primary and high school students was a victim of bullying either as bullied or as victim. Nesbitt (1999) reported that 10% of student in the United States are victimized by bullies. It was reported that peer victimization is a pervasive phenomenon and Olweus (1991), found that boys were more often the victims of direct or physical victimization, whereas girl were more often the victims of indirect or verbal victimization. The study also reported that most students who are bullied either do not report the bullying to adults or they wait for a very long time before doing so. The reasons for not reporting include feeling of shame, fear of retaliation and fear of being disciplined by parents.

The higher the class levels in school or socio-economic class the lower the level of victimization. Olweus (1991) reported that many children have been bullied by older student and this underlines power differentials in bullying. This implies that students of 12-14 years and in junior classes experience high level of victimization than students of above 15 years and in senior classes. However, the study of Hunter, Boyle and Warden (2007), examined the perceptions and correlates of peer victimization and bullying in which the extent to which peer victimization and bullying were empirically similar on a sample of 1,429 pupils (50.2% males) aged between 8 and 13 years attending mainstream Scottish schools. In that study, peer victimization and bullying were operationalized as repeated aggression, but definition of bullying additionally emphasizes the importance of aggressor

intent and imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. Almost one-third (30.7%) of pupils reported experiencing peer victimization, and of these 38.1% (11.7% of whole sample) were categorized as victims of bullying. The study noted that the victims of bullying perceived higher levels of threat and lower levels of perceived control, in addition to reporting higher levels of depressive symptomatology. On this note, Hunter *et al.*, (2007) indicated that victims of bullying reported using more Wishful Thinking and Social Support Coping Strategies, but did not differ on Problem Focused Coping. To this end, peer victimization and bullying appear to be qualitatively different experiences for children and adolescents, with bullying being the more serious phenomenon.

In a national survey of more than 15,000 sixth through tenth grade U.S. students, nearly one of every three students said that they had experienced occasional or frequent involvement as a victim or perpetrator of bullying (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). In this study, bullying was defined as verbal or physical behaviour intended to disturb someone less powerful. Boys and younger middle school students were most likely to be affected. The study indicated that being belittled about looks or speech was the most frequent type of bullying. Children who said they were bullied reported more loneliness and difficulty in making friends, whereas those who did the bullying were more likely to have low grades and to smoke and drink alcohol.

Victims of bullies can suffer both short-term and long-term effects (Baldry and Farrington, 2004; Hay, Payne, and Chadwick, 2004; Rigby, 2004). They opined that in the short-term, victims can become depressed, lose interest in school work or even avoid going to school. Whereas in the long-term Olweus (1993), indicated in a longitudinal study of male victims who were bullied during childhood that in their twenties they were more depressed and had lower self-esteem than their counterparts who had not been bullied in childhood.

Ehindero (2010), investigated the types and prevalence of peer victimization among secondary school students in Osun State. This was with a view to improving peer relationship among secondary school students. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The findings revealed that there were at least four types of peer victimization among secondary school students in Osun State. These are physical victimization, social manipulation, verbal victimization and attack on property. These types coincide with the items in Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (MPVS) developed by Maynard and Joseph (2000). It was shown that these four types of peer victimization were prevalent and their reactions could make victims of peer victimization to be fearful of school because

school environment would no more be conducive and this could make the victims to become truants.

Gender and Peer Victimization

Violence cuts across generations, it affects every segment and it is particularly common among school going adolescents. It is a serious problem for school age children and for which they received limited adult help and in whatever form usually result in problems like students protest and unrest (Ehindero, 2010).

Girls tend to internalize problems displaying anxiety and depression, whereas boys tend to externalize behaviours displaying aggression and anti-social behaviour. In all, both male and female students who are exposed to victimization may exhibit more anxiety, depression and anger as well as lower self esteem than those students without exposure.

Gender is a factor that plays a role in human aggression. Males are historically believed to be more physically aggressive than female (Coie and Dodge,1997; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). This is arguably the most reliable behavioural gender differences, and it has been discovered among many cultures. There is evidence that males are quicker to aggression and are more likely than females to express their aggression physically (Bjorkquist, Kaj, Kirsti and Karin, 1994). When considering indirect forms of non-violent aggression, such as teasing, taunting, devaluing, isolation from the group and spreading malicious rumors, some experts argue that females can be quite aggressive although female aggression is rarely expressed physically (Archer, 2004, Card, Stucky, Sawalani and Little,2008). In other words, indirect methods such as verbal, emotional and social rejection are preferred by girls.

However, some studies on gender indicated that boys showed more aggressive behaviour than girls following experiences of victimization. Girls were found to show more distress than boys during simulation of victimization. Girls were also described as having an increasing assortment of physiological symptoms and are more likely than boys to become withdrawn, passive, clinging and anxious (Carlson,1990).

Although, anger is the most frequently cited motive for both male and female adolescent, females more often cite self defence while males cite the desire to control one's partner (Kolbo, Blakely and Engleman, 1996). On this note, boys use bullying tactics to make a reputation and girls use bullying tactics to protect their reputation.

METHOD

The study was based on an ex post facto survey design where a self report instrument was administered to participants. The basic assumption of the researcher in the choice of this approach was based on the contention of Lammers (2005), who maintained that any investigation using existing data rather than new data gathered specifically for the study, the ex post facto design is important. The research area was Uromi metropolis comprising one local government area. This area of study is situated in Edo State. The area has a total of nine (9) public senior secondary schools with students' population of eleven thousand seven hundred and seventy (11,770).

Multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used in selecting (5) public senior secondary schools. A sample size of five hundred and eighty nine (589) or 5% of the total population of 11,770 senior secondary school one-three (SSS I-III) in the five (5) public senior secondary school in the metropolis was drawn. The 589 students were randomly selected based on the sample population in a particular school. While a simple sampling technique was adopted in the selection of five (5) schools in the metropolis out of a total nine (9) public senior secondary schools.

The instruments that were used in collecting data for this study are the student school attendance

checklist and a questionnaire. The researcher collected the school attendance performance data of the selected sample of respondents from their school attendance register as recorded by their class teachers in each of the selected school covering a period of nine (9) weeks in a school academic term. On the other hand, the Multi-dimensional Peer Victimization Scale, (MPVs) originally developed by Maynard and Joseph (2000) and modified by the researcher was adapted into Likert type response format ranging from 1-4 to meet the purpose of this study. It has a co-efficient alpha of 0.86. As a standardized instrument, the validity of the instrument has been ensured by developers of the instrument.

The questionnaire was administered by the researcher in conjunction with research assistants. All completed questionnaires were collected, collated and the scores for research questions were analyzed using frequency count, percentage and ranking while the scores for the hypothesis was tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

For the purpose of this study, any respondent with a mean score of 2.5 or above was identified as a victim of peer victimization. While, 75% of attendance was used as benchmark for school attendance therefore, any student with a mean score of 63 or above was identified as having a good school attendance rate.

Research Question One:

What is the school attendance record of senior secondary students in Uromi metropolis?

The breakdown of the respondents according to students' school attendance performance is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' School Attendance Performance

SCORE RANGE	GRADE INTERPRETATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Less than 62	Poor	55	9.3
63-66	Good	115	19.6
67-75	Very Good	151	25.7
76-Above	Excellent	267	45.5
TOTAL		588	100%

The above table indicated that respondents consist of 588 participants in the SSS I-III classes in the sampled public senior secondary schools. In addition, 55 of the participants scored less than 62 in the score range indicating poor school attendance rate, while 115 of the participants scored between 63-66 in the score range

thus indicating good school attendance performance. Also, 151 of the participants scored between 67-75 in the score range indicating very good school attendance performance and the remaining 267 participants scored 76 and above in the score range which indicated excellent school attendance performance.

Presentation of Result

The hypothesis states that there "there is no significant difference in the school attendance record

between male and female victims of peer victimization". A summary of the analysis is presented in the table 2.

Table 2: T-test Analysis of Significant Difference in School Attendance Record of Male and Female Victims of Peer Victimization

Variable peer victimization		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	F	Sig	Decision
		Male	Female					
	Male	27	77.41	21.002	50	3.067	0.086	Not significant
	Female	25	81.40	14.267				

*Alpha level of 0.05

In the data in Table 2, the t-test analysis carried out indicated that the variable had p-value of 0.086 and since this is greater than the confidence level of 0.05 ($p = 0.086 > 0.05$), which means there is no significant difference in school attendance record between male and female victim of peer victimization.

DISCUSSION OF RESULT

Influence of Gender of Victims of Peer Victimization on school Attendance.

The study found out that there is no significant difference between male and female victims of peer victimization in their school attendance records. The study showed that although there is an evidence of incidence of peer victimization, male and female victims of peer victimization exhibited good attendance rate in their school attendance record. This may be hinge on the significant adult help the victims are getting.

Girls tend to internalize problems displaying anxiety and depression, whereas boys tend to externalize behaviours displaying aggression. However, more recently, effective coping strategies being adopted by school authorities and significant others appear to have stemmed this tide.

These strategies have greatly assisted in restoring confidence in the students who are victims of peer victimization to report the occurrence of bullying. In this sense, there is an improved communication between school authorities, parents, teachers and students which is responsible for making adults know what is happening to the students. This engagement has largely contributed to elimination of the effect of peer victimization such as depression, low self-esteem and truancy on the victims of peer victimization. The result of this current research is inconsistent with previous researches by Ehindero (2010); Rana (2002); Baldry and Farmington (2004); Hay, Payne and Chadwick (2004) and Rigby (2004).

Recommendations

It has been observed that peer victimization is prevalent among senior secondary school students in Uromi metropolis and this could cause depression, anxiety and truancy among victims of peer victimization. It is therefore necessary for the researcher to make the following recommendations to check the occurrence of bullying in our schools. Parent Teacher Association should be resuscitated and invigorated in the school so as to foster mutual collaboration between the school and the family which are important link to socialization in the life of students.

1. The school should work closely with the parent with a view to adopting appropriate child rearing pattern especially one that engenders close supervision or support a child that needs to eliminate deviancy.

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