Relationship between Parenting Styles and Tendency to Bullying Behaviour among Adolescents

Anthony Efobi[1] & Chinyelu Nwokolo, Ph.D.[1]

Abstract

This study assessed the relationship between parenting styles and tendency to bullying behaviour among adolescents in Awka, Nigeria. The design for the study was correlational survey. The sample for the study was 1000 senior secondary students selected through simple random and disproportionate stratified random sampling techniques. Three research questions guided the study. Two questionnaires termed 'Modified Parenting Style Questionnaire' (MPSQ) and 'Adolescents Tendency to Bullying Questionnaire' (ATBQ) were used for data collection. Mean and Pearson r were used for analyses of data. The findings of the study showed that authoritative parenting style is more common among parents than other methods of parenting. In addition, the study indicated that there is a moderate tendency to bullying among adolescents. Also the study revealed that there is a moderate positive relationship between parenting style and adolescents' tendency to bullying behaviour. Based on the findings, recommendations were made including that parents should be encouraged to adopt the best parenting practices in the upbringing of their children because it has been proven that authoritative parenting style is the method that yields the best result in child upbringing.

Key Words: Relationship, parenting styles, bullying behaviour, adolescents.

1. Introduction

1.1 Bullying Behaviour

Bullying has since been regarded as a global behavioural problem that occurs in schools.

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[1] Department of Guidance and Counselling, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Indeed, the phenomenon of bullying behaviour has increasingly become a worldwide problem that demands the attention of all stake holders in the educational system. This situation appears to have reached a stage where it can be said that almost every student has been bullied or involved in bullying at one time or another during their educational programme or career. Researchers in their different studies have observed that bullying is a regular occurring behaviour problem that is present in almost every school (Rigby, 2007; Neto, 2005; Olweus, 1993; Limber & Nation, 1997).

Bullying is a distinct form of aggression characterised by a repeated and systematic abuse of power (Olweus, 1999; Rigby, 2003). Bullying occurs when one or more students seek to have power over another student through the use of verbal, physical or emotional harassment, intimidation or even isolation (Zirpoly, 2009). According to Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias (2013), bullying is an intentional, continual aggressive behaviour towards a person, the victim, who cannot defend himself, and this usually involves an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. Any behaviour a person exhibits, with the intention to hurt another person physically or psychologically, for no just cause, is considered an act of bullying (Nwokolo, Ayamene & Efobi, 2011). Giving reference to British legal definition, Kim (2004) saw bullying as a long-standing violence, physical or psychological, carried out by an individual or a group and directed against an individual, who is not able to defend himself in the actual situation, with a conscious desire to hurt, threaten or frighten the individual or put him under stress.

From the definitions, it is clear that not all aggressive behaviour is referred as an act of bullying. Hence there are basically three elements that make a behaviour an act of bullying. i. There is an intention to hurt another person, the victim. ii. There is an imbalance of power: bullying occurs between a stronger and a weaker person. iii. This occurs repeatedly, not just once. Bullying is believed to be continually present in the schools apparently because the students involved do not consider it as aberrant behaviour or because most teachers and parents do not recognize it as a serious problem (Neto, 2005; Limber & Nation, 1997; Nwokolo, et al, 2011).

Bullying is not a distinct behavioural problem that is peculiar to a particular culture, rather it is prevalent worldwide (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim & Sadek, 2010; Kanetsuna & Smith, 2002).

Research indicated that between 10% to 30% of children and youths are involved in bullying at different prevalent rates (Cook, et al, 2010; Solderg & Olweus, 2003). Similarly research in different countries reported bullying and victimization rates at 9% to 32% and 3% to 27% respectively (Berger, 2007). Also a World Health Organization, WHO, survey of 35 countries indicated that rates of bullying and victimization are both 11% among school children (Craig & Harel-Fish, 2004). According to Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias (2013), 15 to 20% of students in America experience repeated bullying and victimization at some time during their school career.

Bullying can take different forms or patterns among students. Some of this patterns or kinds of bullying, according to Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias (2013) include: direct/physical/verbal attack, indirect aggression (via a 3rd party), relational aggression (damage to peer relationship), social aggression (damage to self-esteem or social status). The following are some specific examples of bullying. Physical bullying: hitting, kicking, pushing, taking or damaging others personal belongings; verbal bullying: name-calling, threatening; indirect bullying: excluding, isolating, gossiping, malicious rumour spreading, withdrawal of friendship (Kim, 2004; Nwokolo, et al, 2011). Other forms of bullying include use of technology like sms, internet chatting, emails, phone calls (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Basically, two parties/categories of people are involved in bullying behaviour namely, the bully and the victim. There could be a third party known as the bystander or witness (Nwokolo, et al, 2011; Neto, 2005). These will be discussed briefly.

The bully also known as the aggressor is the architect or the initiator of the bullying behaviour. The bully derives joy or satisfaction in inflicting pain on others. According to Neto (2005) and Nwokolo et al (2011), bullies are generally characterized by the following antisocial behaviours or attitude: impulsiveness, high opinion of self, popularity among peers, proneness to violence, supportiveness of violence, less satisfaction with the school and family, readiness to fight, tendency to take drug or alcohol.

The victim, otherwise known as the bullying target, is the student who is exposed to repeated negative actions on the part of one or more students (Neto, 2005).

The victims are usually oppressed and subjected to pain and stress by the bullies because the former in one way or the other seem less important and less advantaged than most of the students. The bullying victims are associated with the following characteristics: physical weakness, lower self-esteem, passiveness in social activities, shyness, depression, anxiety, lack of social skills and friends, tendency to avoid school and social activities (Neto, 2005; Zirpoly, 2009;). Victims of bullying do not usually reveal their ordeal apparently because they feel embarrassed, afraid or even doubtful if the school authority will come to their aid.

The witness or *the bystander* refers to the category of students who are usually present in the bullying environment but do not directly get involved. According Neto (2005), the bullying witness can be classified as *helpers* if they partake in bullying behaviour; *supporters* if they support the bullies; and *defenders* if they defend or protect the victims and call the attention of adults to help out.

Obviously bullying behaviour brings with it a lot of negative effects, not only for the victims, but also the perpetrators. According to Kim (2004) the victims of bullying experience lasting behavioural and psychological problems which include depression, high anxiety, and low self-esteem. Also Rigby (2000) observed that victims experience low social support, higher anxiety, and social dysfunction. Some victims try to avoid the bullying environment by staying away from school.

A number of factors can be responsible for the development of the attitude of bullying in students. According to Neto (2005), the world outside the school is reproduced within the school. Also Cook, et al (2010) believe that factors like family home environment, school climate, community factors, peer status and peer influence can be related to bullying behaviour.

Fielder (2008) believed that the development of bullying can be viewed as part of a large process of interaction, with the home at its root. Thus he opined that bullying behaviour is to a great extent believed to be a by-product of family dynamics. Likewise researchers observed that the quality of the environment and the family can be linked to the adolescents' relationship and behaviour at the school (Joronen & Astett.kurki, 2005; Fielder, 2008, Cook, et al, 2010). All these point to the possible link between bullying and familial factors. Thus the present study seeks to specifically look into the relationship between parenting style and bullying tendency among students/adolescents.

1.2 Parenting Style

Parenting style refers to the ways or techniques parents employ in the upbringing of their children. According the psychologist, Diana Baumrind (1991), there are four parenting styles or dimensions namely, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting styles. In explaining these dimensions of parenting, two important features are judged to be essential namely, parental responsiveness and parental demandingness (Gurian, ND). While responsiveness implies the willingness and availability of the parents to show care, concern and provide for the children; demandingness connotes the tendency of the parents to control the child and limit his freedom almost in everything. It is how a parent applies either or both of these two features that decides the parenting style such a parent is using.

Authoritative parenting style – this is the parenting style in which the parents direct their children's activities in a rational, issue oriented manner, exercising control when necessary, but gives the children freedom to act independently and responsibly (Baumrind, 1991). This is a kind of democratic style of parenting, where the parents are attentive and explains the reasons for the rules set for the children to obey. According to Greenwood (2013), authoritative parents set clear expectations and high standards, as well as monitor the children's behaviour, using discipline based on reasoning. They also encourage their children to make decisions and learn from their mistakes. Authoritative parents are warm and nurturing, and they treat their children with kindness, respect and affection. It was observed (by Kopko, 2007) that adolescents of authoritative parents are more likely to be socially competent, responsible and autonomous because they have learned to employ negotiation.

Authoritarian Parenting Style– Baumrind (1991) saw authoritarian parents as those who attempt to shape, control and evaluate the behaviour of the child without considering the feelings of the child. In this style of parenting, the children are required to follow rules without any explanations from the parents (Cherry, 2013). Parents practicing this style of parenting demand too much from their children while they seem to neglect their responsibility toward their children. According Gurian (ND), such parents are extremely strict and highly controlling; they dictate how their children should behave without giving room for any dissenting opinion or behaviour from their children. There is little communication between parents and children. Kopko (2007) observed that adolescents of this type of parenting may become rebellious, or aggressive or dependent on their parents.

Permissive Parenting Style – permissive parents according to Baumrind are parents who are non-punitive, accepting and affirmative in their relationship towards their children. Such parents make few or no demands for household responsibility and allow the children to behave the way they want. According to Kopko (2007), permissive parents are warm but not demanding; indulgent and passive. Such parents apparently believe that the way to prove their love is to allow their children to have all they desire, not minding the consequences. Greenwood (2013) view permissive parents as being openly affective and loving but setting no limit, even when the children's safety is at stake. In the words of Baumrind (1991), permissive parents are 'more responsive than they are demanding'.

Uninvolved Parenting Style – Baumrind (1991) refer to uninvolved parents as disengaged parents who are neither demanding nor responsive. These parents do not monitor their children's behaviour and also do not support them. An uninvolved parent is characterised by few demands, low responsiveness as well as little communication between parent and child (Cherry, 2013). In extreme cases, uninvolved parenting may entail neglect and rejection of the child from the parents (Greenwood, 2013).

Obviously, Parenting plays a very important role in the transition of children from one stage of life to another: from childhood to adolescence; from adolescence to adulthood (Okorodudu, 2010). According to Utti (2006), parenting is an essential instrument in the socialization of children. Thus parenting style apparently stands out as an important factor that can have significant effect on a child's behaviour, as opined by Baumrind (1991).

Parenting style, that is the behaviour and attitude of parents, have lasting effect on their children's overall wellbeing. This goes beyond the family (immediate environment) and touches every aspect of the child's life: in school, playground, etc. Thus Fielder (2008) believed that for a well-adjusted child, the parents need to have a balanced approach to parenting.

Research indicates that harsh parenting techniques, especially inconsistent punishment, often lead to child aggression (Loeber & Stouthamer-laber, 1989). Hence Georgiou (2008) was of the opinion that bullying starts at home. Children may learn to be aggressive towards others, especially those less powerful, by observing the daily interactions of family members.

Likewise, Perry, Perry & Kennedy (1992) found out that there are evidences showing that children who experience victimization problems are more likely to come from families with histories of child abuse, poor attachment and poorly managed conflict. Also Georgiou (2008) observed that parents tend to encourage or reinforce negative behaviour of their children by attending, laughing or approving of such behaviours, while ignoring positive behaviour when it is exhibited.

Some studies (Hagan & McCarthy 1997) also show that delinquent behaviour, like bullying, is associated with parental rejection, weak parental supervision and inadequate involvement with the child. Thus paying attention to children as well as a close supervision helps in reducing aggressive behaviour in the family and outside – in the school. In the same vein some authors like Perren & Hornung (2005) and Georgiou (2008) also contended that maternal behaviour, like over protection can sometimes be positively related to bullying behaviour and victimization.

Research shows that permissive parental behaviour (high responsiveness and low control) predicts the experience of victimization by the child, while authoritarian parenting style (low responsiveness and high control) best predicts bullying behaviour in children (Balry & Farrington, 2000; Georgiou, 2008).

Likewise it was observed that children who perceive their parents as having positive attitude towards them, settings limits but respecting their children's independence as well as being responsive to their needs were less likely to engage in bullying. Also children who describe their parents as being less cohesive, more conflictual and less organized tend to indulge in bullying behaviour (Rigby, 2003; Rican, Klicperova & Koucka, 1993; Georgiou, 2008).

According to Georgiou (2008), victimized children view their parents as being overprotective. In the same vein, children who bully their peers are more likely to come from authoritarian parents with harsh and punitive child rearing practices (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2000; Georgiou, 2008).

Thus many researchers seem to agree that parental practices at home (like harsh and inconsistent punishment; too little or too much involvement; responsiveness and permissiveness for aggression) are related to child bullying and victimization experiences at school. This study therefore focuses on examining the relationship between parenting style and tendency to bullying behaviour among adolescents in Awka, Anambra State.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Which parenting style is the most commonly used by parents as perceived by adolescents?
2. What is the (level of) tendency to bullying behaviour among adolescents?
3. What is the relationship between parenting style and adolescents' tendency to bullying behaviour?

2. Method

2.1 Design

The study is a correlational survey as it seeks to assess the relationship between two variables, namely parenting style and tendency to bullying behaviour among adolescents. The study was carried out in Awka Education Zone(which comprises Awka South, Awka North, Anaocha, Dunukofia and Njikoka Local Government Areas).

2.2 Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of 10,041 senior students of the 60 government owned secondary schools in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State, Nigeria. The sample of the study comprised 1000 students. Simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting 20 schools, 4 from each of the five LGAs of the Awka Education Zone. Then a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was further employed in selecting 50 senior students from each of the already chosen twenty schools. This yielded a total of 1000 students which served as the sample.

2.3 Instrument for Data Collection

The instruments for the study were two structured questionnaires namely, Modified Parenting Styles Questionnaire (MPSQ) and Students Tendency to Bullying Questionnaire (STBQ). The MPSQ was used to assess how the students perceive the parenting used for them at home. This was a modification of the Parenting Dimensions Inventory (PDI) originally developed and used by Slater and Power (1987). The STBQ was developed by the researcher. The items of the questionnaire were structured to ascertain the students' tendency to bullying behaviour.

The MPSQ was 20 items questionnaire designed to obtain information on the 4 parenting styles; each style had 5 questions. Authoritative parenting was reflected in items 1, 11, 12, 14 and 19, while Authoritarian style had items 2, 6, 10, 15 and 17. Permissive parenting style questions were 3, 7, 9, 16 and 18 while uninvolving parenting style questions were items 4, 5, 8, 13 and 20. The students were requested to respond to questions based on the parenting they receive at home. The STBQ also had 20 items which seek to ascertain the students' tendency to bullying behaviour (based on the following levels: low tendency, moderate tendency, high tendency and very high tendency). Both MPSQ and STBQ had 4 point response options which range from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree with weighted values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

2.3 Validation of Instrument

The structured questionnaires were given to two experts in the fields of Guidance and Counselling from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. They checked the items of the instrument to ensure they were relevant, clear and capable of eliciting the required responses. Their corrections were effected before using the instruments.

2.4 Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the sampled students and were collected back by the researcher with the help of two research assistants. This was done in two weeks.

2.5 Method of Data Analysis

All the collected data were scored and analysed. The research questions 1 & 2 were analysed using mean scores. Research question 1 reviewed the parenting style used on the students at home as perceived by the students. Research question 2 sought to find out the level of the students' tendency to bullying behaviour, and the scores from the data were judged as representing low tendency (1.0 -1.49 or 20.0 – 29.8), moderate tendency (1.50 -2.49 or 30.0 – 49.0), high tendency (2.50 – 3.49 or 50.0 – 69.0) and very high tendency (3.50 – 4.00 or 70.0 – 80.0). The product moment correlation coefficient was used to answer research question 3.

3. Results

3.1 Table 1: parenting styles reported by the adolescents to be used by their parents.

Parenting Styles	Mean	Min. Scores	Max. Scores	Rating	Acceptance
Authoritative Style	16.92	5	20	1st	12.50
Authoritarian Style	15.74	5	20	2nd	12.50
Permissive Style	11.14	5	20	3rd	12.50
Uninvolved Style	7.52	5	20	4th	12.50

N = 1000

Table 1 showed that authoritative parenting had a mean of 16.92; authoritarian parenting had a mean of 15.74;while permissive parenting and uninvolved parenting had means of 11.14 and 7.52 respectively. Only two of the four parenting style were above the acceptance point of 12.50. This implies that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles were more common with the students' parents than permissive and uninvolved parenting styles which were below the acceptance mean.

3.2 Table 2: the levels of adolescents' tendency to bullying behaviour

Range of scores	N	%	Remark
20 – 29.8	240	24%	Low tendency
30 – 49.8	660	66%	Moderate tendency
50 – 69.0	100	10%	High tendency
70 – 80.0	0	0	Very high tendency
Total	1000		

Table 2 above revealed that out of a sample of 1000 students, 100 had high tendency to bullying behaviour; 660 students had moderate tendency to bullying behaviours, and 240 students had low tendency to bullying behaviour.

3.3 Table 3: Relationship between parenting style and students' tendency to bullying

Source of variation	N	Parenting style	Tendency to bullying	Remark
Parenting style	1000	1.00	0.52	Moderate positive
Tendency to bullying	1000	0.52	1.00	

Table 3 indicated that there is a moderate positive relationship between parenting style and adolescents' tendency to bullying behaviour.

4. Discussion

The study revealed the different parenting styles or methods used by parents in bringing up their children as reported by school adolescents. Four basic parenting styles were assessed in this study, namely, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting styles. It was discovered that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles were more commonly used by parents than the other two parenting styles. However authoritative parenting style is slightly more common than authoritarian parenting style; while the uninvolved parenting is reported to be the least used parenting style. This shows that parenting style can be hierarchically arranged in terms of popularity of usage with authoritative being on top, followed by authoritarian; while permissive style is at lowest level of popularity. This could be seen in table 1 above. This finding conforms to the work of Osisioma (2003) which also found that authoritative parenting was more common among parents than other parenting styles. She also discovered that uninvolved parenting style was the least used parenting style.

The study also showed the level of the adolescents' tendency to bullying behaviour. The findings of the study indicated that majority of the adolescents (over 70%) have from moderate to high tendency to bullying behaviour. From table 2 above, it could be seen that 66% of the sampled adolescents has moderate tendency to bullying behaviour. This implies that more than half of the students are potential bullies. In other words, they would likely indulge in bullying or at least approve of bullying as a normal behaviour among students. This finding was in agreement with the observations of Rigby (2007) and Neto (2005) who both reported that bullying was discovered to be a regular occurring behaviour problem present almost in every school in which it was investigated.

If more than half the population of students have good disposition towards bullying, it will not be a surprise to discover that a good number of students experience bullying in the school. In line with this, Mitsopoloulou and Giovazolias (2013) had discovered that about 20% of students experience repeated bullying during their school days.

In addition, the study revealed that there is a moderate positive relationship between parenting style and tendency to bullying behaviour among adolescents. This implies that the method of upbringing adolescents receive at home is related to their tendency to bullying behaviour. In other words the kind of home environment a child comes from, has connection with the way the child behaves outside the home. A child that grows up in a home with poor and harsh parent-child relationship, where punitive measures are consistently used by the parents will likely turn out to be a bully. On the other hand, where there is understanding, warm and loving relationship between the parents and kids, the resultant effect will be children with good social skills who relate well with other students at school. This corroborates the earlier finding of Cook, et al (2010) that factors like home environment is related to bullying behaviour. Likewise Fielder (2008) had observed that the quality of environment adolescents come from is linked to their relationship and behaviour at school. In the same vein, Rigby (2007) had observed that inadequate parenting is a contributing determinant of bullying behaviour.

5. Conclusion

The study discovered that most parents make use of authoritative style followed closely by authoritarian style than the other two parenting styles. The study also revealed that most of the adolescents have moderate tendency to bullying behaviour. Finally the finding of the study showed that there is a moderate positive relationship between parenting styles used on adolescents and their tendency to bullying behaviour. The way adolescents are raised at home has significant relationship with their social life outside their home.

6. Recommendations

From the findings of the study the following recommendations are made.

1. The parents should be encouraged to adopt the best parenting practices in the upbringing of their children. It has been proven that authoritative parenting style is the method that yields the best result in child upbringing.
2. Counsellors should organize regular seminars and conferences for parents to enlighten them on the importance of adopting good parenting practices in their homes.
3. A good way of reducing bullying behaviours among students would be to be to ensure that the students have a healthy home environment that encourages the development of good social skills. In other words, paying attention to children as well as parental supervision helps to reduce aggressive behaviours.

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