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Psychosocial challenges and coping strategies of bully-victims among students in Kwara state, Nigeria

Desafíos psicosociales y estrategias de afrontamiento de las víctimas de acoso entre estudiantes en el estado de Kwara, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the psychosocial challenges and coping strategies of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey was adopted. With a sample of 396 bully-victims which were selected using proportionate, stratified and snowball sampling techniques. The findings revealed that they experienced more psychological challenges than social challenges, such as anxiety, anger control issues, and difficulty forgetting bullied experiences. Bully-victims adopted more aggressive, social, and cognitive coping strategies than helpless strategies. There were no significant differences in psychosocial challenges based on age and school type, but differences existed based on gender. Significant differences also existed in coping strategies based on gender, age, and school type. The study recommended developing problem-solving strategies for bully-victims and addressing their psychological, social, and behavioral issues concurrently.

Keywords: *psychosocial, challenges, coping strategies, bully-victims, students.*

Resumen

El estudio investigó los desafíos psicosociales y las estrategias de afrontamiento de las víctimas de acoso entre estudiantes de secundaria en el estado de Kwara, Nigeria. Se adoptó una encuesta descriptiva. Con una muestra de 396 agresores-víctimas que fueron seleccionados mediante técnicas de muestreo proporcional, estratificado y de bola de nieve. Los hallazgos revelaron que experimentaron más desafíos psicológicos que sociales, como ansiedad, problemas de control de la ira y dificultad para olvidar las experiencias de acoso. Las víctimas de acoso adoptaron estrategias de afrontamiento más agresivas, sociales y cognitivas que estrategias de impotencia. No hubo diferencias significativas en los desafíos psicosociales según la edad y el tipo de escuela, pero sí según el género. También existieron diferencias significativas en las estrategias de afrontamiento según el género, la edad y el tipo de escuela. El estudio recomendó desarrollar estrategias de resolución de problemas para las víctimas de acoso y abordar sus problemas psicológicos, sociales y de comportamiento al mismo tiempo.

Palabras clave: *psicosocial, desafíos, estrategias de afrontamiento, agresores-víctimas, estudiantes.*

Introduction

Bullying of school aged children is not a new phenomenon and it has been well established as a common and serious problem in society. It has been noticed as a phenomenon disrupting school climate, and of course have long-term consequences on its victims. It is likely that most children and adults have stories to share about either their own experiences of bullying or victimization or witnessing acts of aggression toward others. According to Aluede et al. (2008), bullying is defined as a physical, verbal, or psychological attack or intimidation intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to the victim. It can be either direct, such as physical or verbal abuse, or indirect, such as social exclusion.

Mustapha and Adeboye (2022) identified different forms of bullying in schools as direct bullying, indirect bullying, and sometimes cyber-bullying. Kontak et al. (2019) stated that students assume different roles in bullying interaction. For instance, those who perpetrate the act are referred to as “bullies” others include victim or bullied, supporters and bully-victim. A victim or bullied is someone who sustains repeated and intentional acts of aggression from someone holding more power in the situation (Kontak et al., 2019). The bully supporters, supports the bullying behaviour but does not take an active role in the bullying (Guerra et al., 2011). In this way, the bystander who supports the bully by not intervening or even supporting the bully after the incident, can stay in the popular group (for example) but not commit the acts that the leader of the group commits in order to stake a claim to the leadership role.

The bully followers, take active part but do not start the bullying. The follower takes active part in bullying the target but often falls back on the excuse that she did not start it and so she is not to be blamed (Guerra et al., 2011). Bully-victims are people who have not only been targeted by bullies but have also bullied others (i.e. those who bully others but are also victimized) (Yang et al., 2016). Of particular concern among different bullying roles are bully-victims. Bully-victims are often impulsive, high in reactive aggression, and have been reported to have poor social skills; including biases in social information processing (Guy et al., 2017).

Studies have shown that if a child has been previously attacked or bullied, there is an equal chance that he or she will become an aggressive or pure victim (Bettencourt & Farrell, 2013; Cillessen & Lansu, 2015). Cooley and Fite (2016) reported that, about 30% of the bullied junior high school students behave aggressively. They used violence as revenge against bullying and ultimately became bully-victims; because they have been bullied or hurt by others before. Bully-victims often appear to be highly anxious and nervous and frequently have thoughts of revenge (Kokkinos et al., 2016; Reijntjes et al., 2010).

Bully-victims are vulnerable to psychosocial problems (Hager & Leadbeater, 2016). World Health Organization (2017) described psychosocial challenges as the difficulties faced by adolescents in different areas of psychological and social functioning. Bully-victims generally experience the most problems and have the highest risk of adverse outcomes. There is a vast amount of evidence linking bullying experiences to development of emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioural problems (Le et al., 2019). The significant psychosocial harms from bullying among adolescents create major challenges for mental health promotion programs and services in schools (Smith & Slonje, 2010).

Bully-victims have been found to be more maladjusted than either pure bullies or pure victims (Perren & Alsaker, 2016; Stein et al., 2017). Their adjustment difficulties include both internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and poor self-esteem, and externalizing problem, such as being aggressive, highly emotional, hot tempered, and hyperactive (Juvonen et al., 2013; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2011). Bully-victims seem to score low on social competence and problem-solving skills, as well as have poor performance concerning school achievement and peer interactions (Cook et al., 2010; Nansel et al., 2014). It has been suggested that bully-victims have deficits in self-regulation, which makes it difficult for them to control their impulsivity and irritability, and to form goal oriented social strategies (Perren & Alsaker, 2016). Boys are much more likely to be bully-victims than girls (Veenstra et al., 2015).

Bully-victims also tend to break more rules, have more attention and conduct problems, and are more socially disintegrated in primary school than in secondary school (Solberg et al., 2010). Girls also form tighter interactive networks than boys, which makes it more likely for them to facilitate indirect or covert forms of aggression than boys (Schwartz et al., 2011). Björkqvist et al. (1992) found that direct bullying decreases with age, whereas indirect bullying increases with age. It is nonetheless difficult to speculate the same on bully-victims, as they lack the social intelligence, networking and manipulation skills required by implementing indirect forms of bullying (Björkqvist et al., 1992).

Shiba et al. (2018) found that both bully-victims and those being bullied demonstrated poorer psychosocial adjustment than their peers; however, differences in the pattern of maladjustment among the groups were found to include poorer relationships with classmates (45.6%) and increased loneliness (59.6%) were associated more with bullied and bully-victims. On accessing the amount of depression among the bullying victimization, it was found that 17.5% suffered low depression, 33.3% had moderate depression and 49.2% developed severe depression. However, some

of the bullying victims developed adjustment strategies that assist them to cope effectively with the aftermath of bullying incidence.

Coping strategies are generally defined as an individual's behavioural, emotional, and cognitive responses to stress or bullying (Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Coping strategies are defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as tasking or exceeding the resources of the person (Naylor et al., 2001). Thus, coping characterise an individual's action-oriented and intrapsychic efforts to manage environmental stress (i.e., directly manage the stressor) and the resulting emotions (i.e., regulate emotions arising as a consequence of the stressful encounter), by minimizing, mastering, or tolerating environmental and internal demands (Lazarus, 2006). Coping or adjustment strategies serve to eliminate or modify a problem by neutralizing its negative character, which helps the individual regulate his or her emotional response (Smith & Frisén, 2012).

Riebel et al. (2009) identified adjustment strategies of bullied to include social coping (i.e. seeking help from family, friends, teachers, peer supporters); aggressive coping (retaliation, physical attacks, verbal threats); helpless coping (hopelessness, passive reactions, such as avoidance; displays of emotion); and cognitive coping (responding assertively, using reason; analysing the bullying episode and the bully's behaviour). Smith and Frisén (2012) study indicated that some children can deal with bullying experiences by using their inner resources to cope with the distress of being bullied; others try out a range of social strategies to escape the bullying.

In a context of bullying, a large body of research suggests that bully-victims use different coping strategies such as active coping, social support seeking and so on (Craig et al., 2017; Hansen et al., 2012; Hunter & Boyle, 2004). Smith et al. (2019) found that the most common coping strategies reported by bully-victims were, aggression, ignoring the bullies, walking away, telling them to stop, and standing up for themselves. However, qualitative and quantitative research on victims' coping during adolescence has yielded inconsistent findings. For example, while qualitative research has shown that social support seeking is the coping strategy most commonly reported by bully-victims, especially girls, (Evans et al., 2017; Tenenbaum et al., 2011), some authors adopting a quantitative approach have found that social support seeking (approach strategy) was a protective coping strategy in peer victimization, especially among girls (Machmutow et al., 2012; Skrzypiec et al., 2011). Avoidance strategies such as distancing and externalizing for their part are more frequently used by bullies and bully-victims, especially boys (Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Keith, 2018).

Garnefski and Kraaij (2007), & Aldao and Nolen-Hoeksema (2010) underlined the importance of individual differences in the cognitive coping strategies - i.e. cognitive emotion regulation strategies - used to regulate the negative emotions related to a stressful or negative event, such as victimization by peers. Nine cognitive emotion regulation strategies have been identified include: (1) self-blame (blaming oneself for what has happened); (2) blaming others; (3) acceptance (accepting that the event has happened and resigning oneself); (4) refocus on planning (thinking about the next steps and how to manage the negative event); (5) positive refocusing (focusing on positive experiences); (6) rumination (being preoccupied by thinking about the feelings and thoughts generated by the negative situation); (7) positive reappraisal (assigning a positive meaning to the negative situation); (8) putting into perspective (minimizing the importance of the negative event); and (9) catastrophizing (having recurrent thoughts about the severity of the event and how it is the worst experience that could happen to someone).

Garnefski and Kraaij (2007) suggested making a distinction between adaptive cognitive emotion regulation (acceptance, refocus on planning, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective), associated with emotional problems in adolescents; and maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation (self-blame, rumination, blaming others, and catastrophizing) strategies, associated with greater resilience. Coping strategies may depend on the type of bullying behaviour experienced and/or exhibited by victims. There is dearth of literature on bully-victims in Nigeria, existing ones such as such as Mustapha and Adeboye (2022), Owuamanam (2015), Owoaje and Ndubisi (2009) and many others only focused on bullied in different locations of Nigeria and there is no conclusive study on bully-victims in Kwara State, Nigeria. The main focus of this study was to investigate the psychosocial challenges and coping strategies of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State. Basically, the study further investigated the prevalence of bully-victims in Kwara State and differences in the psychosocial challenges and coping strategies of the respondents across gender, age and school type.

Methodology

The population for the study comprised 241,000 secondary school students in Kwara state, while the target population consisted of secondary school students who are bully-victims selected from various secondary schools in 3 Senatorial Districts of Kwara State (i.e. Kwara North, Kwara South and Kwara Central). Therefore, with reference to the Research Advisors (2006), a sample size of 384 is recommended as the minimum sample size for a population of this magnitude. Hence in order to

cater for attrition the researcher added 5% (19) of the recommended sample, therefore the sample used for this study was 403 bully-victims in secondary schools. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in the selection process. Multi-stage procedure is the process by which many sampling techniques are used in carrying out a study. At the first stage, proportionate sampling was used to select seven Local Government areas from all the 16 Local Governments Areas across the three Senatorial Districts in Kwara State (Kwara South has 7 Local Government Areas, Kwara North 5 Local Government Areas And Kwara Central has 4 Local Government Areas). The selection was in ratio 3:2:2 respectively (that is 3 LGAs from Kwara South & 2 LGAs each from Kwara North and Kwara Central). At the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select two (2) urban secondary schools with highest population of students and it involves one (1) public and one (1) private school from each of the selected Local Government Area to make a total of sixteen (16) secondary schools. A purposive sampling is a procedure in which a researcher purposively selects certain groups because of their relevance to the investigation under consideration (Palys & Atchison, 2014).

At the third stage, purposive sampling procedure was also used to select twenty-five (25) students from each of the sixteen (16) secondary schools. It involves identifying students who are bully-victims. The identification was done by administering Bullying Behaviour Scale on them. The instrument has 20 items with 4 points Likert Type rating scale of “5 times/more” – 4 points, “ $\frac{3}{4}$ times” – 3 points, ‘Once/twice’ – 2 points and “Never” – 1 point. Therefore, those who picked “5 times/more” and “ $\frac{3}{4}$ times” in any two items among the first 10 items and any two items among the second 10 items were considered as bully-victims. Therefore, a total number of four hundred and three (403) respondents were selected across the three (3) Senatorial Districts in Kwara State.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study were 2 researcher-designed questionnaire forms entitled “Psychosocial Challenges of Bully-Victims Questionnaire (PCBQ); Coping Strategies of Bully-Victims Questionnaire (CSBQ) and an adopted scale which was Bullying Behaviour Scale (BBS). Each of the questionnaire comprised two sections (Sections A & B). The first section of each questionnaire comprised the demographic data of the respondents such as gender, age and school type, section B comprised statements on the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims. Section B of the CSBQ instrument contained statements on coping strategies of bully-victims which include cognitive coping (self-appraisal e.g. I tell myself that I am worthy and unique; letting out emotions in an appropriate way; think about how

to manage negative experience of bullying; blame others around me for the bullying perpetration; I focus on positive experience; blame myself for bullying experience; crying; and using humour); helpless coping (avoiding the bullies; staying away from school; leaving school early; ignoring or trying to forget about the situation; hoping the situation will change and the bullying will end); aggressive coping (bullying other people; and venting my anger on those that I can overpower); social coping (seeking help from adults; reporting to school authority; seeking professional help; relying on friends for protection; developing interpersonal relationship skills; learning how to talk without being rude; and joining a support group) while BBS has statements on bullying perpetrations and victimizations. For section B of PCBQ and CSBQ, four point Likert-type scale was used with the scoring format of: Very True of Me (VTM); True of Me (TM); Not True of Me (NTM); Not Very True of Me (NVTM). For section B of BBS, four point Likert-Type Scale was also be used with the scoring format of: 5 times/ more; 3 or 4 times; Once/twice; Never with rating points of 4-1.

The Bullying Behaviour Scale (BBS) was adapted from Bullying Identification Questionnaire (BIQ) developed by Mustapha (2012) to identify different roles assumed in bullying interaction and has reliability coefficient of 0.70. PCBQ and CSBQ were validated by 5 lecturers in the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. These two instruments have reliability coefficients of 0.73 and 0.82 after being subjected to test re-test reliability.

Method of data analysis

The data analyses of the study were done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data obtained from the demographic data (Section A) was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage, while the data obtained from Sections B and C were analyzed using mean scores and inferential statistics of t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed in testing the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic data

Out of 403 questionnaire administered to the respondents only 396 (98.3%) were retrieved and analysed in this study. This section presents the results of data obtained from the respondents in frequency and percentages.

Table 1 shows the distribution of demographic data of the respondents. The table reveals that 157 (39.6%) of the respondents were male, while 239 (60.4%) of the

respondents were female. 149 (37.6%) of the respondents were between 11-13 years of age, 215 (54.3%) of the respondents were between 14-17 years of age, while 32 (8.1%) of the respondents were 18 years and above. Based on school type, the table reveals that 122 (30.8%) of the respondents were from private schools while 274 (69.2%) of the respondents were from public schools. This indicates that there are more female bully-victims in this study. The age range of the bully-victims were between 14-17 years and most of them were from public schools.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the respondents' demographic data

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	157	39.6
Female	239	60.4
Total	396	100
Age		
10–13 years	149	37.6
14 – 17 years	215	54.3
18 years & above	32	8.1
Total	396	100
School Type		
Private	122	30.8
Public	274	69.2
Total	396	100

Research Question 1: What are the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State?

Table 2 indicates the respondents' psychosocial challenges. The table indicates that item 1 which states that as a result of being a bully-victim, I: develop anxiety ranked 1st with a mean score of 2.95. Items 20 and 5 which state that I: "find it difficult to control my anger" and "often feel unhappy for a long period" ranked 2nd with a mean score of 2.65 each. Ranked 4th is item 15 which states that I: "find it difficult to forget bullied experience" with a mean score of 2.62. On the other hands, item 16, 7 and 11 which state that as a result of being a bully-victim, I: feel like dropping out of school; feel worthless and think of committing suicide ranked least with the mean scores of 2.06, 2.05 and 1.91 respectively. Only seven items out of twenty items ranked above 2.50 mean score, this implies that bully-victims experienced more psychological challenges than social challenges which include

develop anxiety; find it difficult to control their angers; often feel unhappy for a long period; find it difficult to forget bullied experience among others.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and rank order analysis on the respondents' psychosocial challenges

Item No	As a result of being a bully-victim, I:	Mean	S.D.	Rank
4	develop anxiety	2.95	1.01	1 st
20	find it difficult to control my anger	2.65	1.17	2 nd
5	often feel unhappy for a long period	2.65	1.05	2 nd
15	find it difficult to forget bullied experience	2.62	1.12	4 th
6	feel lonely	2.61	1.12	5 th
9	develop hot temper	2.53	1.06	6 th
1	often feel tired even after resting	2.52	1.04	7 th
13	have trouble falling asleep because of thoughts of being bullied	2.48	1.03	8 th
8	am being aggressive to others	2.47	1.04	9 th
14	always have the thought of revenge	2.46	1.02	10 th
19	find it difficult to concentrate in class	2.43	1.09	11 th
17	fight with classmates	2.30	.967	12 th
12	fill with vengeance	2.27	.965	13 th
2	have difficulty carrying out daily activities	2.25	.961	14 th
3	loss interest in friends	2.23	.979	15 th
18	lack confidence in myself	2.17	1.06	16 th
10	develop a school phobia	2.15	.962	17 th
16	feel like dropping out of school	2.06	.935	18 th
7	Feel worthless	2.05	.933	19 th
11	think of committing suicide	1.91	.937	20 th

Research Question 2: What are the coping strategies adopted by bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State?

Table 3 presents the mean and rank order of the coping strategies adopted by the respondents. The table showed that aggressive coping ranked first with a cluster mean score of 3.54, while social coping, cognitive coping and helpless coping ranked 2nd, 3rd and 4th with the average mean scores of 2.99, 2.79 and 2.44 respectively.

Table 3. Mean and Rank Order of the Coping Strategies Adopted by the Respondents

Item No.	I develop the following strategies in coping with bullying:	Cluster Mean	Rank
3	Aggressive coping	3.54	1st
4	Social coping	2.99	2nd
1	Cognitive coping	2.79	3rd
2	Helpless coping	2.48	4th

Hypotheses testing

Six null hypotheses were postulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4. Summary of t-test and ANOVA showing differences in the psychosocial and coping strategies of the respondents across gender, age and school type

	Hypotheses	Variable	Mean	Cal. t-value/F-ration	p-value	Decision
Psychosocial challenges	1	Gender Male	51.46	6.19*	0.00	Rejected
		Female	45.34			
Psychosocial challenges	2	Age	224.92	2.23	0.108	Accepted
			100.47			
Psychosocial challenges	3	School Type	Private	1.89	.059	Accepted
			Public			
Coping strategies	4	Gender	Male	4.44*	0.00	Rejected
			Female			
Coping strategies	5	Age	3199.78	30.25*	0.00	Rejected
			105.74			
Coping strategies	6	School Type	Private	4.77*	.000	Rejected
			Public			

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies in the tested hypothesis 5, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown on Table 5.

Table 5. Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Age

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
18 years & above	32	50.13		
14 – 17 years	215		59.36	
10–13 years	149			64.74
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000

Table 5 shows that respondents who were 18 years and above have a mean score of 50.13 (in subset 1), thus who were between 14-17 years have a mean score of 59.36 (in subset 2) while those who were between 10-13 years have a highest mean scores of 64.74 (in subset 3), thus contributed to the significant difference.

Table 4 shows that in hypotheses 1, 4, 5, 6 were rejected since there calculated p-values are less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that for hypothesis 1, there was significant difference in the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on gender.

For hypotheses 4, 5 and 6, it implies that there were significant difference in the coping strategies of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on gender, age and school type. On the other hand, for hypotheses 2 and 3, the finding showed that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on age and school type

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that there are more female bully-victims than male bully-victims. This could be that females often engage in more relational aggression, which includes behaviors like social exclusion, gossiping, and spreading rumors. This study corresponds with conducted in Nigeria by Alex-Hart et al. (2015) who found that more females to be bully-victims. On a contrary, another study from Netherlands reported that boys were much more likely to be bully-victims than girls (Veenstra et al., 2015). Based on the age range, the bully-victims who were between 14-17 years of age participated more in the study than other age groups. This could be that respondents between 14-17 years would not want to look weak to their colleagues and they would transfer their aggression unto weaker people. The finding relates to the study of Walters (2020) who stated that there may be higher rates of bully-victims with an increasing age.

Based on school type, it was found that there were more bully-victims from public schools than private schools. This could be as a result of the fact that public schools often have larger student populations than private schools with more students, there may be a higher likelihood of encountering various forms of bullying roles incidents. The finding corroborates with the finding of Espelage et al. (2016) found that students in public schools were more likely to fall into the “bully-victim” category than their counterparts in private schools.

The study revealed that bully-victims experienced more of psychological challenges than social challenges which include develop anxiety; find it difficult to control their angers; often feel unhappy for a long period; find it difficult to forget bullied experience among others. This finding of the study supports the studies of Juvonen et al. (2013), and Salmivalli and Nieminen (2011) who identified adjustment difficulties of bully-victims to include both internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and poor self-esteem, and externalizing problem, such as being aggressive, highly emotional, hot tempered, and hyperactive. In studies conducted by Haynie et al. (2017) and Schwartz et al. (2011), it was found that self-reported bully-victims exhibited worse self-control/irritability and self-esteem, lower social competence, and higher level of depression and anxiety than pure bullies and pure victims. The

finding is similar to those of Haynie et al. (2017) and Schwartz et al. (2011) because they all considered psychological and social challenges of bully-victims.

The finding also showed that bully-victims adopted more of aggressive coping, social coping and cognitive coping than helpless coping strategies. The reason for the finding could be that these adopted coping strategies enable them to have less psychosocial challenges. This finding of the study is in line with the studies of Juvonen et al. (2013), and Schwartz et al. (2011) found that bully-victims are at the greatest risk for various psychosocial problems and many of them adopted aggressive coping. Andreou (2011) found that bully-victims were similar to bullies in their use of externalising strategies (such as swearing; venting anger on others). Riebel et al. (2009) identified adjustment strategies of pure victims and bully-victims to include social coping; aggressive coping; helpless coping; and cognitive coping.

Finding also revealed that there was a significant difference in the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on gender. This implies that psychosocial challenges encountered by male and female respondents were different. This could be that in comparing emotional stability of males and females, males are emotional stable than female and since female victims participated more in this study their engagement in perpetrating bullying acts on another people are more than males. The finding supports the studies of Kaltiala-Heino et al. (2010) and Klomek et al. (2011) who observed gender differences in the psychosocial challenges. Their studies revealed that female bully-victims are more susceptible to internalizing issues such as depression and anxiety, while male bully-victims could exhibit externalizing behaviours like aggression.

The finding revealed that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on age. This implies that psychosocial challenges of the respondents were no different across age groups. The finding corroborates with the study of Smith and Jones (2022) who reported that students who were consistently identified as bully-victims experienced persistent difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships, regardless of their age. The study revealed that the psychosocial challenges faced by the students persisted over time, suggesting that the effects of being a bully-victim may extend well beyond adolescence.

Finding also revealed that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial challenges of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on school type. This means that respondents from public and private schools were not significantly different in the encountered psychosocial challenges. The reason for this finding could be an indication that both private and public schools have

not yet develop any concrete intervention to address the situation and that most common place of bullying is schools and also follow similar trend in both public and private schools. The finding relates to the study of Rigby et al. (1997) who found no significant difference in the consequences of bullying act on the victims in Australian government and private ownership schools. Shiba et al. (2018) found similar psychosocial outcomes among school going bullied adolescents in government and private schools. Kaltiala-Heino et al. (2010) found that students in all schools who reported being victims of bully are more likely to develop psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.

Another finding showed that there was a significant difference in the coping strategies of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on gender. This means that male and female respondents adopted different coping strategies. This might be due to the fact that bullying has different effects on male and female secondary school students which could make them adopt different coping strategies. The finding relates to the study of Matud (2004) who found gender differences in strategies for coping with stressful life events, with males bully-victims socialized to use more instrumental problem-solving strategies and females socialized to use more emotional or passive coping strategies or to seek social support. Olafsen and Viemerö (2000) found male bully-victims to use significantly more aggressive strategies than female bully-victims.

Another finding revealed that there was a significant difference in the coping strategies of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on age. This implies that coping strategies adopted by the respondents were different across age groups. The Scheffer post-hoc result revealed that respondents who were between 10-13 years contributed more to the significant difference. The reason for this finding might be due to the fact that bully-victim students who were between 10-13 years might probably not be emotionally matured thereby using more of social coping than other two groups. This finding relates to the studies by Garcia and Martinez (2021) highlighted that both younger and older bully-victims who engaged in positive reframing and emotional regulation exhibited different levels of psychological resilience that suit the level of maturity which lower levels of internalizing and externalizing problems. Modecki et al. (2014) stated that older bully-victims are more likely to engage in problem-focused coping, seeking social support from peers and adults, and attempting to rectify the situations in which they are involved.

The finding also revealed that there was a significant difference in the coping strategies of bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State based on school type. This implies that differences were found in the coping strategies of

the respondents from public and private schools. The significant difference was in favour of respondents from private schools. The reason for differences noted in the study could also be that secondary school students from private schools are well informed and enlightened on bullying and adjustment strategies than those from public schools. The finding supports the study of Smith and Jones (2022) who found that in public schools, bully-victims predominantly exhibited avoidance-based coping strategies and conversely, bully-victims in private schools leaned toward approach-based coping strategies. The study of Johnson (2020) found notable differences in coping strategies between bully-victims from public and private schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara State face more psychological challenges than social challenges, such as developing anxiety, difficulty controlling anger, prolonged unhappiness, and persistent memories of bullying experiences. The coping strategies employed by these bully-victims predominantly include aggressive coping, social coping, and cognitive coping, with a lesser reliance on helpless coping strategies. Notably, the research findings indicate gender-based variations in psychosocial challenges and coping strategies among male and female bully-victims. While age and school type do not significantly influence the psychosocial challenges faced by the respondents, there are distinct differences in coping strategies employed by individuals from private and public schools, irrespective of their gender and age. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced experiences of bully-victims and provide valuable information for the development of targeted intervention and support programs in the educational context.

Implications of findings for counselling

The findings of this study have several implications for counsellors. The finding of the study revealed that bully-victims experienced more of psychological challenges than social challenges which include develop anxiety; find it difficult to control their angers; often feel unhappy for a long period; find it difficult to forget bullied experience among others. The bully-victims were found to adopt aggressive coping strategies. Therefore, Counsellors can adopt a holistic approach that addresses the complex interplay of victimization and aggression in bully-victims' lives. Counsellors can identify and orientate bully-victims who are struggling to adopt good coping strategies and teach them more adaptive coping strategies different from aggressive coping. In achieving this, school counsellors can use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to assist bully-victims to develop effective coping strategies. School

Counsellors can use counselling technique such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to help bully-victims understand themselves and effect of bullying on other victims, school and society at large.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Bully-victims among secondary school students in Kwara state should be encouraged to develop problem-solving strategies that can empower them to handle situations constructively, thereby reducing the likelihood of resorting to aggressive behaviours
2. Counsellors should concurrently address the psychological and social problems arising from victimization and the behavioural patterns associated with bullying.
3. Counsellors can adopt a holistic approach that addresses the complex interplay of victimization and aggression in bully-victims' lives
4. Counsellors should identify and orientate bully-victims irrespective of gender, age and school type engaging in aggressive coping and teach them different coping strategies different from aggressive coping
5. All stakeholders in Kwara State especially Ministry of Education, principals, teachers, parents and counsellors should develop comprehensive mainstream Anti-Bullying policies that will eradicate bullying behaviour in school settings completely.

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