Parenting practices as predictors of bullying behavior among pupils in selected Primary schools in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

Bullying behavior among children has become a matter of concern to all stakeholders. While studies have confirmed an increased prevalence of bullying behavior among school children in Nigeria, not much is known about the contribution of parental practices to the development of the behaviour in children. This study, therefore, investigated the relationship between parenting practices and bullying behavior among primary school pupils in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria. An ex-post facto research was adopted. Two instruments: "Sociometric Peer Nomination" and "Parenting Practices Assessment Scale (PPAS)" were used. Data collected was analyzed using multiple regression. The composite relationship (R=0.670) of parental practices investigated with bullying behavior was positive and significant (P<0.05). Parental affection and supervision were found to have highest contributions (β = -0.806 and 0.678) respectively, to bullying behavior. Parenting education that teaches positive parenting skills should be initiated in order to have less incidence of bullying behavior.

Introduction

Bullying is a troubling aspect of students' misbehavior that had become a matter of great concern among parents, teachers as well as other children workers. It has been observed to occur in all schools, at all grade levels and most frequently at elementary level (Sampson, 2004; Olweus, 1991.) Bullying is a form of interaction where a pupils or group of pupils is repeatedly abused overtime by another pupil or group of pupils and this can occur in different forms (Olweus, 1991; Smith & Wilson, 1991). Bullying behavior often involve physical threatening such as punching, hitting, verbal forms of aggression as in the case of ridicule and 'name calling,' deliberate exclusion or other behaviors that are meant to hurt. Bulling tends to affect school and society in many ways. It creates an atmosphere of fear among students and as such violates their rights to learn in a safe environment that is devoid of fear and anxiety (Egbochukwu, 2007). Bullying has made some children to hate school, play truancy and drop out of school early (Gboyega, 2000; Rigby, 1998; Swearer et. al., 2009).

The problem of bullying does not end in the school. It has been observed to have negative life-long consequences on bullies and their victims. Children who bully have been observed to be bullies at adulthood and also raise children who bully (Farrington, 1993). Bullies had also been reported to be involved with drugs and alcoholism, as well as engage in delinquent and criminal behaviors (Farrington, 1993). The damaging effects of bullying on victims have been highlighted in many studies. Children who are bullied have been shown to have higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, illness and an increased tendency to suicide (Cox, 1995; Rigby, 1998; Lyznicks et. al, 2004). Victims of bullying have also been reported to have decreased self-esteem (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Gboyega (2000) discovered that 15% of absenteeism in Nigerian schools was due to the incidence of bullying. These findings point to the fact that Nigerian schools are not immuned to this particular

behavior. In fact, Egbochukwu (2007) noted that bullying is a threat that no school can dismiss. It is therefore necessary to recognize the absolute centrality of bullying as an issue to address.

Bullying is a behavioural problem and so is notoriously difficult to correct in any society, hence increasing emphasis is usually land on its preventive and early corrective intervention. In order to intervene and deal with bulling effectively, an understanding of the factors influencing the development of bullying behaviour in children is vital. One of the main factors implicated in the development of bullying in children is parenting (Egbochukwu, 2007). Although parenting is a broad construct consisting of many dimensions ranging from discipline to affection, certain practices within the family have been found to predict bullying behavior in children.

Parental monitoring defined as parental awareness and supervision of a child's activities has been shown to be one of the most consistent predictors of behavior problem in children (Barrera et. al, 2002; Osanyin, 2004). Over the years in Nigeria, the extended family pattern which used to be an effective means of training children had given way to a new family structure in which larger percentage of parents especially mothers whose primary role used to be child care leave home to hustle for daily existence. Statistics showed that approximately 80% of Nigerian families are in one sort of labor force or another. This means that Nigerian parents today spend many hours each work day away from their children. As such they have less time for quality supervision of their children's activities. This may have been responsible for increased prevalence of bullying behavior among children in our schools.

This style of parenting has been strongly linked to bullying behavior in children (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1994). A long term study conducted by Social Development and Statistics in Canada confirmed that children parented with fewer incidence of hitting, yelling or threatening at home were later found to be less aggressive as pre-teens and less likely to be involved in fighting and bullying at school. Families are the earliest and most fundamental socialization institution for a developing child. As such, they provide many of the pivotal foundation and experiences for later life including behavior pattern. Oftentimes, discipline among Nigerian parents is directed at conformity with long established family morals with minimal opportunity for discussion and little interest in reasoning with the child. The relationship pattern that children learned at home are further extended to the school environment. For instance, it was reported that children who observed their parents behaving aggressively began to behave in the same way, as they come to believe that aggression is the norm in the home and outside (Ahmed, et. al., 2001). Some children begin their schooling already possessing a bullying mentality. Hence children who become bullies may have been bullied by their parents.

Parental warmth includes expression of verbal and physical affection towards the child as well as praise and acceptance. Low parental warmth (criticism, disapproval and rejection of the child) has also been associated with bullying behavior in children (Fried & Fried, 1996; Berdondini & Smith, 1996). In contrast, a child that is parented in a home environment that is peaceful, loving, caring and harmonious is likely to grow into a non-violent and aggressive person. Public acknowledgement of children good deeds or behaviors facilitates good behavior but this is rare in African setting.

Parental permissiveness also describes a situation whereby parents give their children complete freedom and lack discipline. These parents avoid confrontation and are very lenient. They often attribute any misbehavior of children to childishness (kids would be kids). Children from permissive parents have been found to have problem with self control or with the rights of others (Berstin, et. al., 2000). This characteristic has increased their tendency to bully their peers. The long absence of both parents from the home on daily basis may be

tantamount to permissiveness even when parents do not deliberately desire it.

Research on relationship between parenting practices and bullying behavior of Nigerian children are limited in number particularly at the primary level. This has necessitated the present study which investigated aspects of parenting practices in Nigerian homes associated with bullying behavior in children in the primary schools. An understanding of this kind will be vital in the development of preventive intervention strategies that could put an end to parenting practices that have had negative consequences on the behavioral outcome of children. By this, the cycle of bullying behavior can be broken and as such responsible and caring children who would grow up into responsible adults can be raised.

Bullying behaviour among children is undesirable in every sense, studies have shown that bullying is a widespread problem in our schools and tends to affect the school, student(s) and society in many ways. Bullying has been observed to have negative effect on the social environment of a school and creates an atmosphere of fear among students. It also reduces student ability to learn. Some of the negative consequences of bullying on the bullies and victims include anti-social behaviour in later life, poor psychosocial function, truancy at school, severe emotional problems including suicide, physical problems and mental health issues. The increasing prevalence of bullying among children in Nigerian schools requires an understanding of the factors, especially within the family, that predisposes children to bullying. There is however a dearth of information on the contribution of the factors which more important, at the elementary level of education in Nigeria.

The objective of the present study was therefore; investigate practices and bullying behaviour in Nigerian school children.

Hypotheses

One hypothesis and one research question were raised and tested at 0.05 level of significance

H_{01}: There is no significant composite effect of parental affection, parental supervision, harsh parental disciplinary measures and parental permissiveness on bullying behavior in primary school children.

Research Question

What is the relative contribution of each of the four parental practices to the bullying behavior of the pupils?

Materials and Methods

Descriptive survey of an *ex-post facto* type was adopted in this study. Bullying behavior and parenting practices are existing variables. The researcher did not manipulate any of the variables but just observed them as they existed.

The population for this study was all primary 4 and 5 pupils from selected schools. Six primary schools (3 public and 3 private schools) were randomly selected within the Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. A total of 250 primaries 4 and 5 pupils consist 126 females and 124 males with mean age of 10 years were purposively selected for the study. Primary 4 and 5 pupils were chosen because they have spent a considerable number of years in the school and have mature enough to make objective reports on bullying behavior of their mates.

Instruments

Two self-designed research instruments were used to collect data in the study. The instruments were:

(a) A Sociometric Peer Report of Bullying Behavior (SPRBB) was used to identify children with bullying behavior via group-administered peer nominations in the classroom setting. Unlimited nominations were used in the study based on the research evidence that this method decreases error variance and improves stability and reliability in the measurement of children peer relation (Rodkin and Hodges, 2003). Children (i.e. Pupils) were asked to nominate

peers in their class who matched each of the following description of children who: fight, hit or push others a lot; like to call others names; say nasty things to others; keep other pupils out of their group. For each sociometric nomination, children indicated their choice on a roaster of the names of all the children in their class. The number of nominations a child received for each item was summed and standardized per school. Children with a score of or above 1 standard deviation above the class mean on peer nomination were identified as having bullying behavior. In this study, 88 pupils out of the 250 sampled were identified as bullies.

(b) Parenting practices assessment scale (PPAS) is a child's report measure that assesses parenting practices along 4 dimensions: parental affection, parental monitoring/supervision, parental permissiveness and harsh parental disciplinary strategy. The PPAS comprised two sections (i.e. A and B). Section A consisted of two demographic data of parents (i.e. educational qualification and marital status). Section B consisted of 25 items composed of the four dimensions of parental practices investigated in the study and were rated on 5 point scale ranging from 1 (Hardly ever) to 5 (Always). Parental affection consisted of 8 items, lower score on this scale indicated low affection; parental supervision consisted of 7 items, lower score indicated poor supervision monitoring; harsh parental disciplinary strategies consisted of 5 items, higher score indicated more use of harsh disciplinary strategy; parental permissiveness consisted of 5 items, higher score indicated more permissiveness. The PPAS scale was tested for reliability using the Cronbalch alpha technique. The instrument yielded reliability coefficient of 0.85.

Procedure for Data Collection

A letter was taken to each of the selected schools to ask for permission to carry out the study in their schools, after the consent of the parents, the pupils, head teachers were obtained; names of pupils on the register were used to prepare the sociometric nomination instrument. With the assistance of the teachers, the sociometric nomination was done and that lasted average of 40 minutes, during the period of nomination pupils were instructed to keep their nominations secret. Thereafter, pupils were given parenting questionnaire to fill and they were guided to appraise and respond adequately on the extent to which the statements in the questionnaire were true for them and their parents. The filled questionnaires were collected immediately. The administration of the instrument lasted for 4 weeks and it was carried out by the researchers with the assistance of the class teachers of the selected schools.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics of multiple regression were used to analyze the data.

Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant composite effect of parental affection, parental supervision, harsh parental disciplinary measure and parental permissiveness on bullying behavior among primary school children in Ibadan North Local government.

Table 1 shows that there was a positive joint relationship between the parental practices and bullying behavior of the pupils. The coefficient of determination (adjusted $R^2 = 0.448$) indicate that the four parental practices accounted for 44.8% of the total variance in the bullying behavior of the pupils (R^2 x 100= 44.8). This joint relationship was found to be significant on

the pupils bullying behavior ($F_{(4, 83)}$ = 16.86; P < 0.05).

Table 1: Summary of Multiple regression showing joint relationship between parental practices and pupils' bullying behavior

R = 0.670
R^2 = 0.448 (i.e. 44.8%)
Standard error of estimate = 0.02354
F change = 16.86 (P<0.05). Hence the hypothesis is rejected.

Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	.031	4	.008			
Residual	.053	83	.001	16.86	.000	Significant
Total	.083	87				

Non-Bullies	162	15.46	2.57				
Parental Permissiveness Bullies	88	17.85	7.43	248	6.451	.000	Significant
Non-Bullies	162	13.65	2.73				

Table 2 shows that parental affection has the highest contribution (β = -0.806), this is followed by parental supervision, harsh parental discipline and lastly parental permissiveness.

Table 2: Relative contribution of the four parental practices to pupils bullying behavior

Parental practice	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	β	t	
Constant	.035	.012		2.797	.006
Parental affection	-.003	.000	-.806	-6.497	.000
Parental supervision	-.003	.001	-.678	-5.938	.000
Harsh parental discipline	.001	.000	.122	1.387	.700
Parental permissiveness	.000	.000	.037	.387	.171

Discussions

The multiple regression analysis as presented under hypothesis 1 and table 1 showed that there was a high and positive relationship (R = 0.670) between the development of bullying behavior and the parental practices. This result indicates that these parental practices are strong determinants of bullying behavior in pupils. The list of parental practices investigated in this study may not however be exhaustive as there are other factors that are not parental, but that are capable of contributing to the development of bullying behavior in pupils. The study also showed that 44.8% of the variability in bullying behavior could be explained by variability in these parental practices investigated. This implies that 44.8% of the ways, manners, types or extent of bullying shown among pupils in this study is affected by the variability in parental affection, supervision, harsh discipline and permissiveness to which bullies have been exposed. These observations show that the combination of these four parental practices have a significant influence on the development of bullying behavior in pupils.

The implication of this is that the higher the parental affection towards children, the less their tendency to become

bullies and vice-versa. Children who experienced high level of parental affection are likely to be more caring and sensitive to the feelings and needs of others and thereby not likely to intimidate or infringe on the rights of their peers. The observation between harsh parental discipline and bullying implied that exposure of children to harsh disciplinary measures in the growing up years will increase their tendency to bullying. It should be noted that discipline is an essential ingredient in the home and at school for young children but its application must be properly tailored if it is to bring the desired result in our wards. Harsh disciplinary measure is a negative parental attribute which will only increase aggression in children. This view is in support of the finding of Olweus (1993); Rigby (1994) and Bowers et. al, (1994). Children brought up in homes where the parents were permissive will most often times believe that they should have their way in every circumstance. As a result, they show little or no regard to the rights of other children who happen to be their peers both at school and in the neighborhoods. They believe that their feelings are faultless and their judgments final and as a result they vehemently resist every move to contest their position in every matter. This upbringing increases their tendency to become bullies. This is similar to the observation in the present study where an increasing permissiveness of parents increased the tendency to bullying in the children. This finding is also in agreement with the work of Macoby, (1992); Baumrind (1991) and Berstein et. al, (2000).

The relative contribution of each of the parental practice as presented in Table 2 showed that parental affection had the highest contribution (β = -0.806) followed by supervision (β = -0.678) while permissiveness had the least contribution. These imply that the development of bullying behavior in Nigerian children is more related to lack of parental affection and supervision. These findings further stress the importance of parental affection and supervision to the overall development of a growing child, suggesting that the duo is deficient in the families of bullies and this is in agreement to the finding of Dishion and McMahon, (1998). This may be as a result of the long absence of both parents away from their children in a bid to finding solution to the unfriendly economic condition prevalent in the country. The cultural deficiency and misbelieve that too much praise and affection leads to swollen headedness and misbehavior in a child may also account for the level of affection shown by parents towards their children. These factors may account for the observed contribution of affection and supervision to the development if bullying behavior in this study.

Conclusions

This study showed that all parental practices investigated in the study contributed to the development of bullying behaviour in children; however, low parental affection was the most important factor.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that parents should give attention to their children by way of playing and saying lovely words to them in order to foster closer relationship. Parents should also publicly reward good behaviors of their children and show them affection. Parents should also spend quality time with their children and carefully supervise their activities. They should learn to set and enforce rules, avoid the use of harsh punishment styles especially when such are not commensurate with the gravity of offence.

It is also recommended that the government should initiate and sponsor family-based prevention and intervention programmes that would teach parenting skills that will help parents to be more affectionate, consistent, firm, available and less harsh in their discipline practices. This programme can be done through home visitation to teach parenting skills or through parent sessions on the media that will address certain aspects of parenting

that are capable of predisposing children to behavior problems. These programmes will be beneficial in preventing future behavioral problems.

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