

## **Teachers' Attitude towards Bullying among Boarding Secondary School Students in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State**

**\*<sup>1</sup>Amaka. H. Ononuju, <sup>2</sup>George Usman Kato, <sup>1</sup>Oluebube. F. Emenike**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka

<sup>2</sup>Department of Education Psychology, Faculty of Education, Bingham University, Karu Nasarawa State.

\*Correspondence: amaka.ononuju@unn.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

Bullying is a social and public health problem in form of anti-social behaviours seen occurring mostly among adolescents, particularly, those in boarding schools. The study investigated attitude of teachers towards bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA), Enugu State. The population for the study consisted of 385 secondary school teachers in the seven public boarding secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area. The population was considered manageable, therefore, there was no sampling done. A valid and reliable structured Teachers' Attitude towards Adolescent Bullying Questionnaire (TAABQ) was used to collect data. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, while a One –way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent samples t-test were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that teachers in boarding secondary schools in Nsukka LGA., Enugu State had positive attitude towards bullying ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ,  $SD = .544$ ). There was a significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying based on years of teaching experience ( $p$ -value =  $.047 < .05$ ). There was no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying based on gender ( $p$ -value =  $0.116 > .05$ ). The authors concluded that in boarding schools in Nuskka LGA, bullying in all its forms receives collective intervention by teachers and recommended that schools should have a clear anti-bullying policy that encourages sustained teachers' positive attitude towards bullying irrespective of their years of teaching experience and gender.

**Keywords:** Bullying, Attitude, Teachers, Boarding school, Students

### **Introduction**

Bullying is a social and public health problem in form of anti-social behaviours seen occurring mostly among adolescents globally. Bullying in all of its forms has been substantially described as one of the most highly prevalent antisocial behaviours globally, having mental and behavioural health adverse effects on its victims (Fei et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2023). In Nigeria, Raji et al. (2019) reported that 51.10 per cent, 22.70 per cent, 8.40 per cent, and 35.80 per cent in-school adolescents had experienced physical, verbal, relational, and damage to-property victimization, respectively. Ajuwon et al. (2019) described bullying as a common occurrence in Nigerian schools. Overall, 65.60 per cent of students had experienced at least one type of bullying victimization. Cases of bullying among secondary school students have been reported in media. Oyerinde (2021) reported a bullying incidence St. Joseph boarding school VOM, Jos, Nigeria, that led to traumatising and near death experience of a student in 2021.

Bullying has been variously defined. Bullying is regarded as an intentional repeated overt or covert inappropriate behaviour from one person to another with the intention to intimidate and cause harm to the other person (Younan, 2019). Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm, it can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening (National Centre Against Bullying, 2023). Bullying can be experienced in any setting including schools. In schools, a student is bullied when directly or indirectly exposed repeatedly and over time, to negative actions or words by one or more other students with the intention of inflicting injuries, harm or intimidation. Ekwelundu (2022) stated that bullying is a maladaptive behaviour that can occur anywhere and could happen to children or adults at home, public facilities, buses, parks, neighbourhoods, schools, the internet, or through phone communication, such as texting and photo manipulation on social media sites, such as Facebook. Contextually, bullying is an intentional negative action by a student to another student with the intention to hurt the student in any way. Anton-Erxleben et al. (2016) posited that negative actions, or bullying, can be direct or indirect and include physical, verbal, or psychological and relational acts that cause children to be systematically excluded from social activities by their peers. Thus, bullying can come in different forms.

Forms of bullying have been identified. Pfeiffer and Piquart (2014) revealed that the forms of bullying include: verbal, physical, relational, and cyber bullying. Williams et al., (2023) categorized bullying into traditional (verbal, physical, and relational) and cyber bullying. Verbal bullying is a kind of intimidation through words, such as threatening, taunting, which are intended to humiliate or destroy the victims (Isernhagen & Harris, 2018). Verbal bullying is carried out in the form of dubbing, insulting, swearing, and mocking (Widaningtyas & Sugito, 2022). Physical bullying involves the use of physical force to harm or intimidate others. It can take the form of hitting, pushing, or kicking. Relational forms of bullying include more subtle and of aggression, such as spreading untrue rumours, and social exclusion, while cyber bullying is a new possibilities of relational bullying arising in new media by using the internet or social networks (Pfeiffer & Piquart, 2014). Cyber bullying is related to traditional school bullying, but there are important differences (Baldry et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2017). For example, traditional bullying of physical, verbal and relational bullying is face-to-face, while cyber bullying occurs in social media platforms. Physical verbal and relational bullying appears to be more common in school settings and can be easily noticed by the teachers unlike cyber bullying. Thus, the study focused on physical, verbal, and relational bullying among students in Nsukka boarding secondary schools because cyber bullying occurs on social media platforms and secondary school students, particularly those in boarding schools seem not to officially have access to social media platforms and teachers may not be able to monitor what goes on in social media platforms of students, including those in boarding schools.

Boarding school system offers students from various background and upbringing a temporary live-in accommodation for learning, housing, food and recreation. This arrangement creates a new experience which the students are expected to adjust to. The arrangement also increases interaction among boarding students who are of different ages, strength and experiences, and who are away from their parents and left in the care of teachers. Thus, students at boarding schools have been reported to experience more bullying than those at day schools (Nugrohoand & Ainyfardhana, 2018; Pfeiffer & Piquart, 2014). Similarly, Raji et al. (2019) reported that students in boarding schools when compared to those attending day schools were five times more probable to be victims of bullying.

Bullying is a pervasive and destructive behaviour that can have serious and long-lasting negative effects on individuals and communities. Modecki et al. (2021) reported that victims of bullying are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. Also, bullying can have an impact on academic performance. Juvonen et al. (2020) reported that students who are bullied are more likely to experience academic problems, such as poor grades and school absences. Victims of bullying may have trouble making friends and maintaining social relationships (Olweus & Limber, 2020). Victims of bullying are more likely to experience physical health problems, such as headaches and stomach aches (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2021). Bullying can result from a number of factors.

Some social-ecological and environmental factors, such as family relationships, peer relationships, school climate, school policies, teacher-student relationships and broader societal factors can contribute to bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2019). School-related factors include a lack of adult supervision, a competitive and aggressive school culture, and a lack of effective school policies to address bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2010). Student-teacher relationships have been shown to influence bullying-related behaviours in students (Longobardi et al., 2018). Bullying cases in schools, particularly in boarding schools, are usually reported to teachers who are the adults present in the school as the guardian and care givers to the boarding students. Therefore, teachers are often the first line of defence in preventing and addressing bullying in schools, particularly in boarding schools. It becomes imperative to investigate attitude of teachers towards bullying. An individual's dispositions towards an issue often influence the individual response to that issue. This disposition is referred to as attitude.

Attitude can be defined as a psychological construct that represents an individual's evaluation of a particular object, person, or situation (Eagly & Chaiken, 2020). Cherry (2018) posited that attitude has three basic components namely: cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Cognitive components (thinking and beliefs about the topic), affective components (the feeling of the object, persons, problems or events) and behavioural components (how the attitude influences behaviour). Contextually, attitude refers to the disposition a teacher has towards bullying. It involves how a teacher evaluates bullying behaviours of students and their responses to such behaviours. Attitude of teachers towards bullying can be positive or negative. A teacher expresses positive attitude towards bullying when a teacher appears to have unfavourable disposition towards negative actions of a student or group of students towards another student. A teacher expresses negative attitude towards bullying when a teacher appears to have favourable disposition towards negative actions of a student or group of students towards another student. For example, if a teacher feels that repeatedly hitting a student by another student or group of students or manipulating friendship to cause harm intentionally, is allowed and therefore no need to intervene, the teacher is said to have favourable disposition towards bullying and thus, a negative attitude towards bullying. However, if a teacher feels that repeatedly hitting a student by another student or group of students or manipulating friendship to cause harm intentionally is bullying and that teachers should intervene, the teacher is said to have unfavourable disposition towards bullying and thus, a positive attitude towards bullying on the part of the teacher.

Teachers play an influential role in securing favourable school climate, promoting healthy relationships, and preventing bullying behaviour among students (De Luca et al., 2019). As socialization agents and key adults in the classroom, teachers have the potential to play a crucial role in bullying prevention and intervention, because they are usually the first adults that students contact when bullying behaviour occurs (Wachs et al., 2019). Teachers may gain knowledge about bullying through a variety of sources, including hearing news, reading articles, training, and personal experience (Bukhari & Authar, 2017). This can mean

that different teachers will view bullying differently, and these differences in perception can lead to differences in the way teachers deal with bullying. A positive teacher-student relationship has been found to affect students' attitudes toward bullying, and in turn, their engagement in bullying behavior (Shahrour et al., 2023). Research has shown that students are more willing to report bullying incidents and have less pro-bullying behaviour and more defending the victims when teachers actively respond to bullying behaviour (Demol et al., 2020).

Teachers' attitudes towards bullying can be associated with years of teaching experience and gender. Teachers' years of teaching experience might be a factor that influences teachers' attitudes towards bullying. Borg and Falzon (2020) reported that teachers with longer teaching experience tend to be more tolerant of misbehaviour and perceive less behaviour as problematic. Teachers' gender can be associated with teachers' attitudes toward bullying. Female teachers are more likely to take action when confronted with a bullying incident, compared to male teachers; also, female teachers were found to work with the pupil who bullied other pupil(s) than male teachers did (Burger et al., 2015).

Ideally, the school environment should be free from bullying in order to ensure a safe learning environment for students for improved healthy academic performance. However, studies have shown that bullying is more common among boarding students. Teacher-student relationships among other societal and environmental factors have been noted to contribute to bullying. Studies conducted on bullying focused more on prevalence of bullying and ways of preventing bullying with little or no attention to the attitude of teachers towards bullying. The researchers, therefore, investigated the attitude of teachers towards bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nsukka LGA, Enugu State. Specifically, the study determined attitude of teachers towards forms of bullying and associated socio-demographic factors of years of teaching experience and gender. It was hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying among boarding school students based on years of teaching experience and gender. The findings of the study will significantly benefit students, teachers and schools in enacting anti-bullying policies that will encourage positive attitude of teachers towards bullying and reduce students' bullying experiences for improved students' general wellbeing and academic performances.

## **Methods**

**Design of the Study:** The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. The cross-sectional survey research design collects data to make inferences about a population of interest at one point in time.

**Area of the Study:** The study was conducted in Nsukka LGA, Enugu State. Nsukka LGA is one of the 17 LGAs in Enugu State, located in the South-East, Nigeria. The LGA has a land area of approximately 1,287 square kilometres. There are 33 public secondary schools in Nsukka LGA, which consists of seven public boarding schools and 26 day schools. The teachers in Nsukka secondary schools, those in boarding schools inclusive, comprise of males and females aged 21 - years and above. The teachers have different years of teaching experience. Some of the teachers in the boarding schools live in the school quarters and take turns in overseeing the activities of the students in their care. Also, cases of bullying among secondary students have been reportedly common in boarding schools. Nsukka LGA has a number of boarding schools, thus, students in those boarding schools appear to be exposed to bullying. Based on these facts, the researchers considered the area appropriate for the study.

**Population for the Study:** The population for the study consisted of 385 teachers in the seven public boarding secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State (Post Primary Schools Management Board Nsukka, 2023).

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** The sample size for the study was 385 teachers in the seven public boarding secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. There was no sampling because the population for the study was considered manageable.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** A self-developed Teachers' Attitude towards Adolescent Bullying Questionnaire (TAABQ) was used for data collection. It consisted of two sections: A and B. Section A consisted of two items measuring the bio-data (years of teaching experience and gender) of the respondents. Section B consisted of 14 items, presented in three clusters (clusters A, B, and C). Cluster A consisted of five items measuring the attitudes of teachers towards physical bullying, cluster B consisted of five items measuring the attitudes of teachers towards verbal bullying, while cluster C consisted of four items measuring relational bullying. Items are assigned a 4-point Likert-type response option of, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)". Face validity of the instrument was carried out by three experts from the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach's alpha was used to compute the internal consistency (reliability) of the instrument, and a reliability index of 0.74 was obtained for the instrument. This was adjudged high enough for the study in accordance with Cohen et al. (2011) reliability index guidelines.

**Data Collection:** A total of 385 questionnaires were administered to the respondents by who?, out of which 354 copies were returned, which gave a return rate of 99.1 per cent. Out of the returned 354 questionnaires, 342 copies were properly completed and used for data analyses.

**Data Analysis:** Data collected were screened for completeness of responses, and coded into Internal Business Machine Statistical Package for Social Science, IBM-SPSS (version 25 statistics for windows). The research questions were analysed and answered using mean and standard deviations, while the null hypotheses were tested using a One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Independent samples T-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. To determine attitudes of teachers towards bullying, the criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted. Therefore, an attitudinal item less than 2.50 (item  $\bar{x} < 2.50$ ) was interpreted as negative attitude, while an attitudinal item mean greater than 2.50 (items  $\bar{x} > 2.50$ ) was interpreted as a positive attitude towards bullying.

## Results

**Table 1: Attitude of Teachers towards Forms of Bullying among Boarding School Students in Nsukka Local Government Area (n = 342)**

S/N	Attitude item statements	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
<b>Physical Bullying</b>				
1.	Student(s) repeatedly hitting another student with closed fists during a disagreement is bullying	3.64	.600	Positive
2.	Teachers need to encourage students to report to school authority when hit by fellow student(s).	3.64	.498	Positive
3.	Teachers can punish students that uses physical threats or intimidation to coerce another student into giving up their personal belongings.	3.64	.493	Positive
4.	A Student intentionally tripping another student in the hallway can be termed bullying.	3.52	.566	Positive
5.	Teachers may take immediate action when witnessing a student physically pushing or shoving another student.	3.59	.526	Positive
<b>Cluster Total</b>		<b>3.65</b>	<b>.491</b>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>Verbal Bullying</b>				
6.	Name calling and insults, among boarding school students are serious issue that requires immediate attention of teachers	3.44	.623	Positive
7.	Teachers actively listening and providing emotional support to students who have been verbally abused by other students.	3.46	.439	Positive
8.	Spreading rumours or engaging in gossip can be considered as bullying	3.48	.616	Positive
9.	Teachers need to intervene promptly when they observe students using hurtful or insulting language towards their peers	3.49	.597	Positive
10.	Teachers may provide education and guidance to students on the importance of empathy, kindness, and respectful communication to reduce incidents of verbal bullying	3.54	.505	Positive
<b>Cluster Total</b>		<b>3.52</b>	<b>.550</b>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>Relational Bullying</b>				
11.	Teachers need to intervene promptly when they observe students deliberately excluding another student from social activities or groups	3.47	.576	positive
12.	Spreading rumours about fellow students should be cautioned	3.31	.692	positive
13.	Teachers need to intervene when students manipulate friendships to intentionally hurt others	3.49	.577	positive
14.	Teachers may intervene when students ignore or snub other students	3.48	.551	positive
<b>Cluster Total</b>		<b>3.44</b>	<b>.599</b>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>Grand Cluster</b>		<b>3.54</b>	<b>.544</b>	<b>Positive</b>

**Key:** positive attitude,  $\bar{x} \geq$  or = 2.50; Negative attitude,  $\bar{x} <$  or = 2.50

Table 1 shows that overall, teachers in boarding schools in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State had positive attitude towards bullying ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ,  $SD = .544$ ). Also, the table also shows that all the sub items had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that teachers in boarding schools are more likely to intervene during physical, verbal and relational bullying incidence among students.

**Table 2: Summary of One-Way ANOVA on the Attitude of Teachers towards Bullying among Boarding School Students in Nsukka LGA, based on Years of Teaching Experience**

S/N	Variable	source of variance	sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-value	p-value	Decision
1.	Physical bullying	Between group	2.094	2	1.047	4.431	.013	Rejected
		Within group	80.096	339	.236			
		Total	82.190	341				
2.	Verbal bullying	Between group	1.996	2	.998	3.339	.037	Rejected
		Within group	101.317	339	.299			
		Total	103.313	341				
3.	Relational	Between group	1.051	2	.525	1.695	.091	Not Rejected
		Within group	105.034	339	.310			
		<b>Overall</b>						

Note. F = F-ratio value; df = Degree of freedom.

Table 2 reveals that overall, there was a significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying among boarding school students based on years of teaching experience (overall F-value 3.155,  $p$ -value = .047 < .05). The null hypothesis was rejected since the overall p-value is less than .05 level of significance at 2 degrees of freedom. This implies that years of teaching experience is statistically significant in the attitude of teachers towards bullying in boarding schools in Nsukka LGA.

**Table 3: Summary of Independent Samples T-test Analysis on the Attitude of Teachers towards Bullying among Boarding School Students in Nsukka LGA, based on Gender**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
<b>Physical bullying</b>						
Male	135	3.56	.527	4.54	0.211	Not rejected
Female	207	3.70	.459			
<b>Verbal bullying</b>						
Male	135	3.46	.557	5.77	0.073	Not rejected
Female	207	3.57	.544			
<b>Relational bullying</b>						
Male	135	3.41	.565	5.31	0.066	Not rejected
Female	207	3.45	.554			
<b>Overall</b>				<b>5.21</b>	<b>0.116</b>	<b>Not rejected</b>

Note. F = F-ratio value; df = Degree of freedom.

T-test results in Table 3 reveals that overall, there was no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying based on gender (overall t-value = 5.21,  $df= 2$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.116 > .05). The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the attitude teachers towards bullying among boarding school students based on gender was not rejected since the  $p$ -values are greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that no significant difference existed in the attitude of teachers towards bullying based on gender.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study in Table 1 showed that teachers in boarding schools in Nsukka LGA, Enugu State have positive attitude towards bullying. This implies that teachers in boarding schools in Nsukka LGA are concerned about students' wellbeing. This finding is expected and not surprising because teachers are often the first adults the children contact and expect to actively intervene when bullying takes place. Therefore teachers are usually the first to see the injuries and emotional pains that victims of bullying go through. Again, teachers tend to get first hand information on how bullying disorganises the victims and causes chaos among the students. This helps them understand how disruptive bullying can be and how it interrupts learning and living activities in the boarding schools. This finding agrees with those of Duy (2013), Wijtenburg (2015), Cheng et al. (2018), and Dawes et al. (2023) in which teachers considered bullying behaviours to be serious and were also more likely to intervene in bullying behaviours incidence. The findings of the study further aligns with Nguyen, Nguyen, Ha, and Nguyen (2022) assertion that support from teachers led to attenuation of bullying among secondary school students. The study however, contradicts the finding of Farahat (2019) in which teachers expressed negative attitude towards bullying and those of Aihie and Okei (2022) in which teachers had negative perception towards bullying among secondary school students in Benin City, Nigeria. Furthermore, Amir et al. (2023) found a somewhat negative attitude towards bullying among teachers. These findings have implication for the government and non-governmental agencies including ministry of education to create awareness on what constitute bullying, and to empower teachers to recognize bullying as a serious pervasive antisocial behaviours capable of inflicting pains, injuries and even death on victims of bullying as documented in Media.

Table 2 showed that overall, there was a significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying among boarding school students based on years of teaching experience. This finding is expected and therefore not surprising because teachers with many years of teaching experience are more likely to identify bullying and intervene unlike teachers who are assumingly inexperienced and unexposed to cases of bullying within the school. This finding aligns with those of Burger et al. (2015) which indicated that teachers with more years of teaching experience expressed positive attitude towards bullying when compare with teachers who are inexperienced. The finding however contradicts with those of Borg and Falzon (2020) in which teachers with longer teaching experience tend to be more tolerant of misbehaviour and had negative attitude towards bullying, and that of Boulton (2016) who found that teachers with greater length of service expressed more negative attitude towards bullying.

Table 3 revealed that there was no significant difference in the attitude of teachers towards bullying based on gender. This result was not expected and therefore surprising. This is because females seemingly pay more attention to children than males. Again, the different gender roles men and women play in the society shows that females are more concern with children wellbeing than men. This finding contradicts the findings of Duy (2013) in which gender was significant in the attitude of teachers towards bullying. Also, the findings disagrees with Burger et al. (2015) assertion that female teachers were found to be more likely to take action when confronted with a bullying incident, compared to male teachers. The reason for this disparity could be that men are becoming more concerned with what happens around them given the fact that men and women are becoming more responsible in catering for the wellbeing of children.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the study have shown that teachers had positive attitude towards bullying. The findings show that teachers of various years of teaching experience differ in



their attitude towards bullying. However, teachers irrespective of gender are more likely to intervene during bullying incidences. The study concluded that in boarding schools in Nuskka LGA, bullying in all its forms receives collective intervention by teachers.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Schools should have a clear anti-bullying policy that encourages sustained positive attitude of teachers to intervene and report bullying when they see it.
2. Teachers irrespective of their gender and years of teaching experience should be trained on how to identify and respond to bullying in all its forms
3. Students should be encouraged to report bullying incidences to both male and female teachers and be assured that there will be no negative consequences for doing so.
4. Schools should provide support and resources for teachers to intervene during bullying irrespective of their years of teaching experiences

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