

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NARCISSISM AND BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILORIN WEST, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between narcissism and bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State. A descriptive design, correlational type was adopted for this study. The population consisted of all senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State. The sample consisted of 360 students from senior secondary schools in Ilorin West. Two questionnaires were used to collect data: the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-40) and the Bullying Participant Behaviour Questionnaire (BPBQ). Mean ratings and percentages were used to answer research questions 1 and 2, while Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Findings indicate that the main form of bullying among senior secondary school students in Ilorin-West was verbal bullying, the level of narcissism among them was moderate, and there is no significant relationship between narcissism and bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made: schools should implement comprehensive, culturally-sensitive interventions that include educational programs, counselling, and peer support to reduce narcissistic traits and prevent bullying.

Keywords: Narcissism, bullying behaviours, senior secondary school students

Introduction

Schools serve as institutions that impart knowledge, morals, and values to individuals of different ages. A key factor parents consider when enrolling their children is safety and security. Schools must offer a safe environment that promotes academic success. Currently, Nigerian institutions face major challenges from vices like substance abuse, cultism, and bullying, which distract students and hinder their academic progress. These issues can impact students physically,

emotionally, socially, and psychologically. Secondary school students, mostly adolescents, experience various physical, mental, social, and emotional changes. During this stage, they seek to establish their identity, which can lead to behaviours like bullying.

Bullying and Narcissism are key areas that have been extensively studied. Bullying involves physically, verbally, or psychologically attacking or intimidating someone or a group with the aim of instilling fear, distress, or harm (Olweus, 1993). It is characterised by repeated, intentional aggressive acts where there is a clear power imbalance between perpetrators and victims (Olweus, 2010). Bullying is considered a distinct form of aggressive behaviour, setting it apart from general peer conflict, due to its specific traits of recurrence and power dynamics (Vitoroulis & Vaillancourt, 2018). In bullying situations, children and adolescents assume different roles: perpetrators (bullies), their supporters (bully-assistants), victims who are repeatedly targeted, and bully-victims; those who are both bullied and bully others often due to prolonged abuse. Some bystanders do nothing, some act as outsiders, and others may inadvertently support or facilitate the bullying. Defenders who try to help the victims also play a role (Zych et. al. 2016).

Bullying behaviour can take two forms: Direct and Indirect. In direct bullying, victims can recognise their aggressors, as the bullies do not hide their identity. This usually occurs face-to-face, with overt actions such as physical, verbal attacks, or tampering with the victim's property. When bullying happens online, perpetrators often identify themselves through texts or visuals because they want to be recognised. In contrast, indirect bullying involves perpetrators concealing their identities from victims, often using covert, strategic actions that are typically relational or electronic. These bullies prefer not to be identified by victims and may use assistants to hide the ring leader's identity (Mattys, 2017). Farrell et. al. (2020) suggested that as adolescents grow more independent from their parents, they become more integrated into their peer networks. Peer relationships play a vital role in the adolescent microsystem, serving as immediate social environments beyond individual traits that can influence bullying. Those at the top of the peer hierarchy often have the most social resources, such as dominance, influence, and power. Bullying is frequently linked to social dominance and being perceived as popular among peers. Typically, bullies are supported by friends who either encourage or imitate their behaviour (Reijntjes et. al. 2018). This indicates that teenagers might engage in bullying to attain or maintain social advantages like popularity, status, influence, friends, and support. When highly popular individuals bully, it can set the social norms within a class and influence who is accepted or rejected by the larger peer group.

Despoti et. al. (2020) identified a pattern of individual risk factors, such as personality traits, that may increase the likelihood of engaging in bullying or experiencing victimisation by peers. Psychopathic traits are among the most studied risk factors for bullying, being personality-related; they involve deficiencies in emotions, interpersonal skills, and behaviour (Poythress & Hall,

2011). In childhood and adolescence, research has focused on three psychopathic dimensions: callous–unemotional (CU) traits, characterised by a lack of remorse or empathy, callous use of others, and shallow emotions; narcissism, defined by grandiosity, a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy; and impulsivity, marked by uncontrolled and unplanned actions. Youth with high CU traits typically display limited emotional expression, reduced prosocial behaviour (such as affective empathy), a lack of guilt or concern for consequences, and low levels of fear and anxiety. These factors heighten the risk of engaging in bullying (Waller & Hyde, 2018). Bullying has been associated with personality traits indicating antisocial tendencies, such as a greater tendency toward narcissistic exploitation. Children and teenagers who are exploitative and feel entitled may deliberately harm peers they see as weaker. This kind of behaviour could lead them to bully more frequently over time to gain status and resources that enhance their inflated self-image (Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2020). Narcissism is strongly linked to a higher chance of engaging in bullying. Evidence shows that all three psychopathic personality traits, callous-unemotional traits, narcissism, and impulsivity, are directly connected to bullying in early adolescents, suggesting these traits may relate to various negative experiences (Fanti & Kimonis, 2012). In essence, bullying is often associated with children or youth who are callous, unempathetic, and narcissistic.

Narcissism is often associated with antisocial behaviour and psychopathy, typically seen as negative personal traits. It involves having an excessively positive and grandiose view of oneself, including an exaggerated belief in personal abilities, a sense of entitlement, and a willingness to exploit others for personal gain (Fanti & Henrich, 2015). Narcissistic traits can develop in childhood and tend to increase during adolescence (Carlson & Gjerde, 2009). Some traits, like overconfidence and a desire for attention, can be reliably measured in children and remain stable over time (Cramer, 2011). Therefore, narcissism begins early in development and can influence behaviour in educational settings (Fanti and Frangou, 2018). Fanti and Frangou (2018) argued that individuals with high narcissism levels display a strong sense of grandiosity, an excessive need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. This makes narcissism a risk factor for aggressive behaviour. People with narcissistic traits may be prone to bullying, as bullying involves deliberate actions aimed at gaining social dominance and advantage over peers through intimidation and force (Fanti & Henrich, 2015). The idea is that individuals high in narcissistic traits enhance their grandiose self-image by achieving social dominance and admiration through acts of bullying (Fanti & Henrich, 2015). Narcissism has been positively associated with various forms of aggressive behaviour in children and early adolescents, including bullying (Ang et. al. 2010).

Narcissism is a characteristic that reflects one's self-perception of entitlement, superiority, and exploitation (Fanti & Henrich, 2015). This trait indicates negative psychological functioning, as it involves an unrealistic view of oneself. Researchers have discovered that individuals higher in narcissism are

likely to react aggressively when their ego or goal attainment is threatened by peers (Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2019). Youth with higher narcissism levels may employ aggression to attract attention and boost their self-esteem, aiming to maintain their perceived superior yet delicate self-image (Fanti & Henrich, 2015). Bullying could serve as a means to enhance this self-image by dominating peers, gaining allies, achieving popularity, and discouraging rivals from interfering with their quest for dominance and status (Lee et. al. 2018). Due to their exploitative tendencies, narcissistic individuals might engage in bullying over time to secure status and resources that reinforce their already inflated self-image (Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2020).

Numerous researchers have examined the relationship between bullying behaviour and Narcissism in students, especially adolescents. Findings indicate that narcissism is both directly and indirectly associated with bullying (Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2020). Fanti and Henrich (2015) found that narcissism, when measured during adolescence, was positively correlated with bullying over a period of one year, even after accounting for earlier bullying behaviours. Similarly, Fanti and Kimonis (2013) identified a longitudinal link between narcissism and adolescent bullying, controlling for previous conduct issues and psychopathic traits such as callous-unemotional traits and impulsivity, via regression analysis. These studies strongly suggest that narcissism predicts bullying among youths both cross-sectionally and over time. Nonetheless, as these studies were conducted outside Nigeria, it is important to replicate similar research locally. Thus, it is essential to conduct this research to further explore the connection between bullying behaviour and narcissism among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West. The aim is to develop effective preventive and intervention strategies. If anti-social traits like Narcissism are not present, individuals might be less likely to engage in bullying; conversely, those who are victims of bullying may exhibit greater resilience and better coping mechanisms against its adverse effects. While existing studies have looked into the connection between Narcissism and bullying behaviour, there is limited knowledge regarding this relationship among secondary school students in Ilorin West, Nigeria. Consequently, this study aimed to address this research gap by examining the relationship between Narcissism and bullying behaviours among secondary school students in this region. Despite initiatives to reduce bullying in schools, it is still a widespread issue impacting both the physical and mental well-being of victims. There is a significant lack of research concerning the link between Narcissism and bullying behaviour within the context of Ilorin West, Kwara State, Nigeria. Therefore, the study focused on investigating the relationship between Narcissism and bullying behaviours among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State. Specifically, the study examined the:

- i. the level of Narcissism in senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State;
- ii. most common form(s) of bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin South, Kwara State;

Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the study, the study sought answers to the following questions:

- i. What are the levels of Narcissism in senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State?
- ii. What is the most common form of bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State?

Research Hypothesis

On the basis of the research questions above, the null hypothesis was formulated.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Narcissism and bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State.

Methodology

The research design employed in this study is a descriptive research design of the correlational type. Correlational research design is a non-experimental quantitative approach where the researcher utilises correlational statistics to evaluate and describe the degree of the relationship between variables or sets of scores (Creswell, 2012). This research design is considered relevant and applicable, as it facilitated the examination of the connection between Narcissism and Bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study's population consisted of all senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State. There are 80 secondary schools located in the Ilorin West Local Government Area, and a random sampling technique was employed to select 10 of these secondary schools. A total of 36 students from each selected secondary school were surveyed. The sample included 360 secondary school students from Ilorin West, Kwara State.

Questionnaires were employed to gather the required information. The Bullying Participant Behaviours Questionnaire (BPBQ) was adapted from the work of Demaray et. al. (2016). This self-assessment survey facilitates the exploration of different roles in bullying behaviour, including the roles of bully, assistant to the bully, victim, defender of the victim, and outsider. The adaptation focuses solely on the bully and assistant roles, as this study is specifically concerned with bullies, excluding victims and bystanders. Furthermore, the original response structure was altered from a 3-point Likert-type scale (often, sometimes, and never) to a 4-point Likert-type scale (Always, often, sometimes, and never) in order to provide respondents with a broader range of options.

Additionally, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) was adapted from Wang (2015). The NPI consists of 40 items that cover seven dimensions: superiority (NS), exploitativeness (NEXP), authority (NA), self-efficacy (NSE), self-esteem (NSF), entitlement (NE), and exhibitionism (NEXH). These

characteristics encompass a combination of both adaptive and maladaptive qualities that demonstrate one's ability to preserve a positive self-concept and personal identity. This self-report questionnaire is designed to identify narcissistic tendencies such as feelings of superiority and the inclination to exploit others. Eksi (2012). Experts in Educational Psychology, Counselling Education, and Measurement and Evaluation ensured the face and content validity of the instruments. The reliability and internal consistency of the measures were confirmed using the Cronbach's alpha method, yielding coefficients of .70 and .95, indicating good internal consistency. The mean rating was utilised to address research question 1, while frequency counts and percentages served to respond to research question 2, and PPMC was employed to test the hypothesis at a significance level of 0.05.

Research Question 1: *What is the common form(s) of bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State?*

In order to answer this research question, participants' responses on the bullying behaviour questionnaire were collated, and the summary of the results are as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Average Mean Score of Forms of Bullying Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Ilorin West, Kwara State

S/N	Bullying Behaviour	Mean	Ranking
1	Verbal	19.30	1 st
2	Relational	17.90	2 nd
3	Physical	17.60	3 rd

Results in Table 1 show that the main form of Bullying behaviour among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin West was Verbal bullying, which has a cumulative mean score of 19.30 ranked 1st, relational bullying with a cumulative mean score of 17.90 ranked 2nd, and physical bullying has a cumulative mean score of 17.60, ranked 3rd.

Research Question 2: *What is the level of Narcissism among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin-West, Kwara State?*

To answer this question, the response of students on items 1-40, which is based on Narcissism, was described and categorised into low, moderate and high levels, and the result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics showing the level of Narcissism among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin West.

Level of Narcissism	Frequency	Percentage
Low Level (40-82.7)	5	1.7
Moderate Level (83.7-125.4)	210	58.3
High Level (126.4-168)	144	40.0

The result in Table 2 shows the level of Narcissism among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin West. The computed scores were further categorised as 40-82.7 “low” level of Narcissism, 83.7-125.4 “moderate”, while 126.4-168 “High” level of Narcissism among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin West. From this result, the majority of students have a moderate level of Narcissism, 58.3% (210), 40% (144) have a high level of Narcissism, and 1.7% (5) have a low level of Narcissism in Ilorin West senior secondary schools. Therefore, there is a moderate level of Narcissism among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin West.

Research Hypothesis One: *There is no significant relationship between Narcissism and bullying behaviour among senior secondary School students in Ilorin West, Kwara State.*

Table 3: PPMC showing the relationship between Narcissism and bullying behaviour among senior secondary School students in Ilorin West.

Variable	Mean	SD	df	N	Cal. r	Sig.(2 tailed)	Remark
Narcissism	54.9	13.9					
Bullying behaviour	122.2	17.2	358	360	-.010	.852	H ₀₁ Not Reject

P < 0.05

The results of PPMC, as presented in Table 3: The correlation coefficient (R) of -0.010 indicates a weak negative correlation between Narcissism and Bullying behaviour. This suggests that as Narcissism increases, there is a tendency for Bullying behaviour to decrease. Given the p-value = 0.852, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. Hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and this

therefore means that there is no significant relationship between Narcissism and bullying behaviour among senior secondary School students in Ilorin West.

Discussion of findings

Finding revealed that the main form of bullying behaviour among Senior Secondary School students in Ilorin West, Kwara State, was Verbal bullying. This may be as a result of limited awareness and education about the harmful effects of verbal bullying. since most students do not engage in physical forms of bullying, they may not be aware that bullying other students verbally also has harmful effects. Students may not fully understand the different types of bullying, since most time, physical bullying may be more visible and easier to recognise compared to other forms, such as verbal or relational bullying. This lack of awareness and education may have been responsible for the students' ignorance about verbal bullying, making it more prevalent in this area. This corroborates the finding of Esther et. al. (2023) that Verbal bullying was the most prevalent form of bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Yenagoa, Nigeria. The study utilised a 46-item bully survey questionnaire to assess bullying behaviours and revealed that Verbal bullying, such as hurling of insults, was the most commonly reported type of bullying behaviour among students. Another study conducted by Balogun and Oke (2016) found that verbal bullying was the most prevalent form of bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Ilorin South, Kwara State. The study utilised a self-report questionnaire to assess bullying behaviours and revealed that verbal bullying, such as name-calling, teasing, and spreading rumours, was more commonly reported compared to physical bullying. Conversely, a study conducted by Raji et. al. (2019) found that physical bullying was the most prevalent form of bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Sokoto Metropolis, North-West, Nigeria. The study utilised a self-report questionnaire to assess bullying behaviours and revealed that physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, and pushing, was more commonly reported compared to verbal bullying.

Finding also reveals that the main level of Narcissism in Ilorin West, Kwara State, was moderate. This indicates that students have a moderate level of Narcissistic personality traits such as a limited need for admiration, moderate feelings of entitlement, a certain degree of empathy, and relatively stable relationships. They probably care about how they are perceived by others and seek approval or admiration from others, explaining the presence of some narcissistic traits in them. Their upbringing and social environment may also affect their level of Narcissism. Finding is corroborated by Jumag and Moneva (2020), who in their study found a moderate level of Narcissism. The study utilised a rating scale questionnaire to assess the level of Narcissism among high school students in the Philippines. Conversely, A study by Fanti and Henrich, (2015) reveals a high level of Narcissism among adolescents. This study utilised a self-report questionnaire to determine the level of Narcissism, which indicates a high grandiose self-image among adolescents.

Finding as well reveal that there is no significant relationship between narcissism and bullying behaviours among secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State. This finding may be attributed to the moderate level of narcissism observed among students in Ilorin West. This moderate narcissism suggests a prioritisation of relationships and social connections, making the engagement in bullying behaviours likely to strain these relationships, leading to social isolation. Narcissistic individuals, particularly those with moderate levels, appear to favour non-aggressive and socially acceptable means to seek attention or admiration; rather than resorting to bullying, they tend to focus on demonstrating competence or leadership. This aligns with the results of a study by Thakkar et. al. (2020) that showed a negative correlation between narcissism and bullying. This finding differs from the findings of Permatasari and Wu (2021), of a positive relationship between narcissism and cyberbullying among university students. This discrepancy emphasises the nuanced nature of the relationship between narcissism and bullying, as highlighted in various studies, including those conducted by Farrell and Vaillancourt (2020), Van Geel et. al. (2017), and Despoti et. al. (2020).

Conclusion

This study concluded that a moderate level of narcissism in the population of secondary school students in Ilorin West, Kwara State, is associated with a prioritisation of relationships and a preference for non-aggressive dominance tactics like demonstrating competence or leadership. While students' engagement in verbal bullying suggests a lack of awareness that could strain social ties. No significant relationship was found between narcissism and bullying behaviours overall within this specific group. This highlights the unique and context-dependent nature of the narcissism-bullying dynamic.

Recommendations

Based on the findings presented, the following recommendations were made: Addressing verbal bullying through targeted communication skills and empathy training, as well as prioritisation of programs that enhance students' ability to express themselves constructively, emphasising the profound impact of their words on others and the importance of respectful dialogue, thereby fostering a more positive and less harmful social environment.

To proactively channel inherent narcissistic traits into constructive, pro-social avenues, by creating genuine opportunities for students to lead, demonstrate skills, and gain recognition through positive contributions, thereby fostering healthy self-assertion and mitigating any potential for maladaptive behaviours.

To prioritise comprehensive anti-bullying interventions that address bullying behaviours directly, rather than solely focusing on narcissistic traits as a root cause. Concurrently, future research should intensively investigate other, more prominent drivers of bullying within this specific student population and context to truly understand its underlying mechanisms.

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