Peer Victimisations as Correlates of Sexual Behaviour Among Senior Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The influence of peer victimisations on sexual behaviour among senior secondary students has not been attracting proper attention from researchers probably because of the fact that it is not perceived as a serious social or educational problem. However, in recent time there has been a growing concern on the increasing level of student unrest, sexual victimisation, violence and cultism in Nigeria secondary schools, thus portend a great danger for the nation. This study therefore examined the influence of peer victimisations on the sexual behaviour of the students with a view of finding out the relationship and suggested ways of coping with the problem. The sample consisted of three hundred participants drawn with random sampling technique from ten selected senior secondary schools in both Oyo and Bayelsa states of Nigeria. Two valid and reliable instruments constructed by the researchers were used for data collection: Peer Victimisation Scale (PVS) ($r=0.70$) and Sexual Behaviour Scale (SBS) ($r=0.72$). The administration lasted four weeks, using simple percentages and correlation analysis. The results show that peer victimisations contributed to sexual behaviour of the students. On the strength of the findings, the need to foster good peer relations to enhance positive sexual behaviour among students was stressed and advocated.

Keywords: Peer Victimisations, Peer Relations, Sexual Behaviour.

1. Introduction

The influence of peer victimisations on sexual behaviour among senior secondary students have not been attracting proper attentions from researchers probably because of the fact that it is not perceived as a serious social or educational problem. However, in recent time there has been a growing concern on the increasing level of student unrest, sexual victimisation, violence and cultism in Nigeria secondary schools, thus portend a great danger for the nation. This study therefore, examined the influence of peer victimisation on the sexual behaviour...
Peer victimization, also referred to as bullying, can be defined as a situation when a powerful person or group of people recurrently and frequently oppressing a less powerful person in a physical and psychological manner (Griffiths, Wolke, Page, & Horwood, 2006). It may be in form of insults, taunts, verbal attacks as well as physical assault (Maroon & Saufler, 2000), and affects individual in different ways, some resilient while some emotionally upset (Rigby, 1998). Peer victimization can be a result of permissive parenting and inconsistent discipline from authorities (Maroon & Saufler, 2000), behavioural disorders and asserting social authority (Perren & Hornuing, 2000). It occurs both at home and in the school (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2007) and is associated with several adjustment problems, including compromised academic achievement, school avoidance, peer rejection, behaviour problems and aggression (Hanish & Guerra, 2002). This study is interested in the one that occurs in the school.

Rigby (1998) said bullying is any behaviour that intends to hurt another person physically or emotionally. It includes not only the more obvious actions like punching and kicking, name calling and teasing, but also spreading rumours, pointing out physical handicaps, shouting racial taunts, excluding victims from groups, humiliating or spreading stories that a child wants to keep private (Salmon, James, Cassidy, & Jarovoyes, 2000). Bullying occurs when a person wilfully and repeatedly exercises power over another with hostile or malicious intent (Lumsden, 2000). Bullying can include insulting, teasing, abusing verbally and physically, threatening, humiliating, harassing and mobbing (Ross, 2006). The Nation Institute of health (2001) concludes that students who are bullied report having greater difficulty making friends and have poor relationship with their peers. Solving a problem such as bullying does not simply means stopping the act of aggression. It means building positive social relationship between bullies, victims and others in the school community and most importantly, building relationship of trust.

Studies on the actual impacts of bullying in the school setting are few. Scholars have worked on various aspects of bullying, bullying and school truancy (Reid, 2005); bullying and educational achievement (Beran, 2009); bullied and dropping out of school (Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008), however, little research appears to have been done on how bullying affects the sexual behaviour of the senior secondary school students especially in Nigeria.

Most senior secondary school students are adolescents. Adolescence is an age of exploration during which most teens begin dating and exploring the sexuality. There have been no known studies that specifically investigated the relationship between bullying experience and sexual behaviour among adolescents in Nigeria. For too many adolescents, however, early romantic experiences involve sexual coercion. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed that 7.4% of adolescents report being forced to have sexual intercourse (Eaton et al., 2010). When the definition of sexual coercion is expanded to include unwanted sexual contact due to verbal pressure, alcohol or drugs, or physical force (Koss & Gidycz, 1985), as many as 43% of adolescent girls and 36% of adolescent boys report experiencing such victimization (Hickman, Jaycox, & Aronoff, 2004). Adolescents who become victims of peer sexual coercion experience increased externalizing and internalizing symptoms, including depression and risk for suicide (Howard & Wang, 2005). Young and Furman (2008) reported that, after an initial incident of sexual coercion, adolescents’ risk for subsequent incidents increased more than sevenfold. Multiple or ongoing experiences of sexual coercion may have cumulative effects upon psychological adjustment and likely impact on the health of future romantic relationships (Hedtke et al., 2008).

2. Research question

What is the relationship between peer victimization and sexual behaviour of senior secondary school students in Nigeria?
3. Methodology

Ex-post facto research design was adopted in this study. The researcher is only interested in knowing the correlations of peer victimization on sexual behaviour of the senior secondary school students. The target population were all the senior public secondary school students in Oyo and Bayelsa states of Nigeria. Multi stage sampling procedure was used in stratifying the two states along the three senatorial zones. From the three senatorial zones of Oyo state two schools were randomly selected from each of the zones based on inclusion criteria (because of larger number of local government areas (33). From the three senatorial zones of Bayelsa state, two schools were randomly selected from the first senatorial zone while a school was randomly selected from each of the two other zones (because of smaller number of local government areas (8)). In all 10 senior secondary schools were used for the study. From each of the selected schools, simple random sampling technique was used to select thirty (30) students to participate in the study. In all a total of three hundred (300) students participated in the study. Two valid and reliable instruments were used in this study.

3.1 Peer Victimization Scale (PVS)

This researcher developed instrument provides information on peer victimization of the participants. It has 5 items of two sections. Section A deals with personal information like sex, age, class, religion, state and name of the school, while section B deals with items on peer victimization. The response patterns ranged from 0 = Never to 4= Always. Total score ranges from 0 to 20 with the higher score indicating victimisation. The instrument was subjected to assessment by experts and validated by the researcher by administering it on 300 students that are not part of the study sample. The reliability coefficient of (0.70) was obtained using Cronbach alpha.

3.2 Sexual Behaviour Scale (SBS)

This researcher developed instrument provides information on sexual behaviour of the participants. It has 5 items of two sections. Section A deals with personal information; like sex, age, class, religion, state and name of the school while section B deals with items on sexual behaviour. The response patterns ranged from 0 = Never to 4= Always. Total score ranges from 0 to 20 with the higher score indicating negative sexual behaviour. The instrument was subjected to assessment by experts and validated by the researcher by administering it on 300 students that are not part of the study sample. The reliability coefficient of (0.72) was obtained using Cronbach alpha.

3.3 Procedure and data analysis

Consent of the principals of the selected schools was officially sought as well as that of the selected students. One guidance counsellor from each of the selected schools assisted in the administration of research instruments. The instruments were administered a week after the other in each of the states. This made it easy to collect them back after response. These were coded and analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Statistical Analysis.

4. Results and discussion

| State     | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Oyo       | 180       | 60%        |
| Bayelsa   | 120       | 40%        |
| Total     | 300       | 100%       |

Table 1. Descriptive statistics showing the number of respondents across the states
The result on table 1 shows the distribution of the participants according to their state of origin. 60% of the respondents came from Oyo state while the rest 40% were from Bayelsa state, all in Nigeria.

Table 2. Correlation co-efficient of relationship between peer victimisation and sexual behaviour

| Variable          | Peer Victimisation | Sexual Behaviour |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Peer Victimisation| 1.000              | .211 ***         |
| Sexual Behaviour  | 1.000              |                  |

***Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results show a significant relationship between peer victimisation and sexual behaviour (r = .211; P < .01). This means that peer victimisation increases negative sexual behaviour of the respondents, that is the more the victimisations by the peers, the more the exhibition of negative sexual behaviour.

What is the relationship between peer victimization and sexual behaviour of senior secondary school students in Nigeria?

Table 3. Relationship between peer victimisation and sexual behaviour

| Variable          | N   | X   | SD  | DF  | r    | P    | Remark   |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|----------|
| Peer Victimisation| 300 | 14.56| 4.56| 598 | 0.372| <0.05| Significant|
| Sexual Behaviour  | 300 | 11.35| 3.21| 598 | 0.372| <0.05|          |

The results show that peer victimisation has a significant relationship with the respondents’ sexual behaviour. This result is not surprising considering the fact that most of the adolescents experience their first sexual behaviour through coercion and deceit. Also, it implies that peer victimisation significantly contributed to negative sexual behaviour among the respondents. This confirmed the earlier findings of Olweus (1999) who found a positive relationship between peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment. La Greca and Harrison (2005) corroborated the above results in a study on adolescent and romantic relationship when they linked peer victimisation, with adolescents’ report of depression and anxiety which are among the major causes of negative sexual behaviour. Therefore, peer victimisation should be seriously addressed in order to enhance the development of positive sexual behaviour among adolescents.

5. Implications, limitations and conclusions

The findings of this study implied that peer victimisations significantly contributed to negative sexual behaviour among the participants. Therefore, enhancing positive sexual behaviour among the adolescents will entail proper care of peer victimisations. This may be in form of intervention programmes that will train both the students and the teachers on how to go about the problem.

This study is limited to the fact that it was restricted to the school environment without considering the manifestation of the behaviour outside the school setting. Hence future researchers may address this.

In conclusion, the results of the study have laid credence to the need to control victimisation in schools and build positive sexual behaviour among the students.

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