



Efficacy of Therapeutic Role-Play on Bullying Perpetration among Secondary School Students in Lagos State

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Abstract

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BACKGROUND: School bullying has become worrisome all over the world. There is no adequate information on bullying in schools in Nigeria, especially regarding the prevalence and treatment programme. Therefore, this descriptive study examined the efficacy of therapeutic role-plays on bullying perpetration among secondary school students in Lagos State.

AIM: This descriptive study examined the efficacy of therapeutic role-plays on bullying perpetration among secondary school students in Lagos State.

METHODS: The study adopted both survey and experimental designs. The study was in two phases and covered the two of the six educational districts of Lagos State. One thousand, four hundred and forty (1440) participants took part in the prevalence study, while one hundred and thirty-eight participated in the second phase, which was an experimental study.

RESULTS: The finding revealed a significant effect of therapeutic role-play in treating bullying perpetrations among secondary school students ($t = 72.822$, $df = 68$; $p < 0.05$).

CONCLUSION: The study concluded that therapeutic role-play effectively reduces bullying perpetrations. Therefore, counsellors should adopt psychological interventions like therapeutic role-play to reduce bullying perpetrations in secondary schools

Introduction

Bullying behavior among secondary school students is a global phenomenon and public health concern. Bullying is present in most settings, particularly in schools, but the experience varies [1]. School bullying has attracted many national and international concerns in recent years because of its multi-dimensional destructive effects on schoolchildren and society [2]. Researchers have found that bullying has adverse impacts on children and adolescents' growth and development and can be a traumatic experience with negative consequences in all areas of a child's life, persisting well into adulthood [3]. Studies have shown that character traits and inherent aggressive tendencies, especially in boys, are essential precursors to students' bullying [4], [5]. Factors such as hostile school environment, overcrowded classrooms, stressful curriculum, and inadequate supervision of learners are associated with bullying behaviors [6]. Bullying is also associated with many adverse effects such as poor academic performance, anxiety and depression, suicide ideation, self-harm, low self-esteem, and violent behaviors that continue into adulthood [7].

Research on bullying perpetration has not been given adequate attention in Nigeria mainly because

bullying is seen as a typical encounter in schools. Failure to see bullying perpetration as a problem in Nigeria has increased the frequencies, thereby causing the high prevalence of cultism in Nigerian universities. There are no anti-bully programs, laws, and policies that address bullying in Nigeria. Studies of the prevalence of bullying perpetration in Benin City, Osun and Port-Harcourt, and Sokoto in Nigeria to be 85%, 33.1%, 64.9%, and 78.7%, respectively.

Bullying behavior is characterized by power differential within a social circle which desires to create a domineering power structure within a social group, where one person or several persons establish their commanding position over others. In addition, children who witness violence in their homes and communities are more prone to bullying behaviors. Another form of bullying occasioned by the advent of the new media/information technology (IT) is cyberbullying. This is the intimidation perpetuated through photographs, short messages, videos, and pictures using IT to embarrass a target. Several traditional ways have been used to reduce and control the occurrence of bullying behaviours, especially in schools, some of which have proved ineffective such as flogging, kneeling, standing up, raised hands and facing the board among others. Hence, there is a need to seek a more effective means

of reducing bullying incidences.

Therapeutic role-playing involves stipulating scenarios that showcase roles and contexts in real-life situations [8]. Role-play is a strategy that enhances learning's effectiveness in three areas, namely, cognitive, behavioral, and affective [9]. By making students act in another person's role, they learn to empathize and understand issues from the character's perspective. Promoting empathy is very relevant in this study as it has shown that bullies are characterized by a lack of understanding [10]. Bullying perpetration has become a global menace that makes schools unsafe because of the negative effects, from psychological problems to suicidal ideation and even death. Despite these grave consequences of bully perpetration, Gaffney *et al.* [11] disclosed that Sub-Saharan Africa, where UNESCO reported disturbing levels of bullying, lacks existing anti-bullying programs. Treating or reducing bullying by traditional methods like using corporal punishment (now prohibited in Lagos State) has proved ineffective in reducing bullying. Hence, there is a need to seek a more effective means of reducing bullying incidences [12]. Based on this background, the study investigated the efficacy of therapeutic role-play on bullying perpetrations.

The Concept of Bullying

Bullying is any recurring behavior projected to harm somebody either emotionally or physically. Bullying is described as the undesired, continuous harassment of a target by a perpetrator due to dominance, whereby the bullies are more powerful than their targets. This power imbalance affects the interpersonal relationships between perpetrators and targets, with the victim developing feelings of despair and frustration [13]. Olweus [14] defines bullying as recurring hostile behaviors meted on a weak individual by a more powerful one. Bullying can occur at home, school, or work. It causes grief, physical harm, and mental health issues.

Scholars have identified several factors that can lead to bullying behaviors [15]. According to Espelage [16], low self-confidence, anxiety, lack of empathy, students with a dominant personality, peer pressure and desire to fit in, students without teacher and staff support, and those who have friends who bully can get involved in bullying.

Olweus [14] identified a bullying circle as comprising the following:

1. Students who bully: These are the perpetrators of school bullying
2. Followers or Henchmen: Members in this category are pragmatic toward the bullying and play an active role but hardly instigate it or take a head position
3. Supporters or passive bullies: Students in this group deliberately and freely promote bullying

by laughing or enabling the situation but do not participate

4. Passive supporters or possible bullies: The people in this group enjoy bullying but do not physically participate in the act
5. Disengaged onlookers: These are the passive witness who does nothing to either incite or quell the situation
6. Possible defenders: These students have the desire to defend the victim but do not act on their desire
7. Defenders: They hate the behavior and do help the victim.

According to Jonny [17], bullying can be classified according to types as follows as displayed in Figure 1:

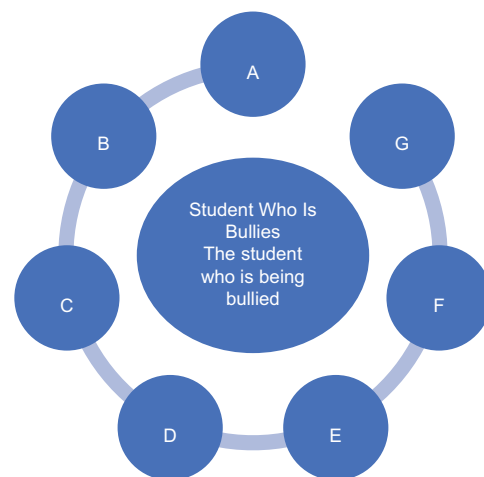


Figure 1: Bullying cycle with participant players. Olweus, 2013 [14]

1. Physical bullying involves pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, knocking on the head, kicking, punching, and property vandalization
2. Verbal bullying: This may take the form of a name-call, the use of derogatory words about one's physical appearance, dress, race, sex, sexuality, religion, and/or disability
3. Gesture bullying: This is non-verbal aggression in the form of intimidating habits such as an icy glare, violent gestures, obscene stares, and mockery
4. Exclusion/relational bullying happens when an individual is banned from joining social circles to play or get involved in other social activities
5. Extortion bullying occurs in the form of extortion of money, possessions, or gargets. Victims may also be forced to participate in belligerent acts
6. Cyberbullying: Can include the use of internet technologies to hurt victims
7. Sexual bullying: This type of bullying involves continuous, hurtful, humiliating sexual actions against a target. It may include the use of sexual language against the victims. Bullies in this category can forcefully kiss or touch their targets in the manners that depict sexual harassment.

Therapeutic role-play

Azina and Raj [18] noted that role-play exercise promotes thinking and innovation for students; helps students in an inoffensive environment to build and practice new language and behavioral abilities; and provides the incentive and engagement needed for learning. Role-play is a productive and robust tool for educating children and adults. It is usually modified within the range of basic to complex concepts to achieve a target educational goal. The performance of role-playing lies with cautious facilitation in construction and distribution. Role-play encourages students' ideas and imagination and helps students create and practice new vocabulary and competencies reasonably and in a harmless manner. It is also a viable tool to set up and build the requisite encouragement and learning participation. Role-play is a robust and efficient instructional tool for children and adults, and it is tailored to meet all learning goals, from fundamental to complicated ideas. It is suitable for teaching communication skills, discussing difficult ethical problems, or exploring attitudes and opinions. Acharya *et al.* [19] added that construction and delivery with careful facilitation are significant for the effectiveness of role-playing.

Educational drama encourages knowledge exchange and open dialogue to debunk misconceptions and baseless assumptions, recognize perceptions, and provide options for creating multiple viewpoints on a topic/subject. Through this method, bullies can appreciate the feelings of victims and better understand the pains they inflict whenever they engage in bullying: Enabling victims to develop resistance and response mechanism, and onlookers would be able to understand the best action to take during such incidents [20]. Likewise, respondents will understand that bullies are also victims and not the worse offender. Learning these skills through experience is the best way to overcome conflict [20]. Besides, the educational drama occurs in a friendly environment, allowing participants to freely express their views and make valuable judgments [21]. The education that integrates drama is always very engaging for children and requires lesser time in knowledge transmission. In other words, children grasp concepts faster when they act them out [20].

Therapeutic role-play and bullying

There is a dearth of studies that combine role-play and bullying. Donohoe and O'Sullivan [20] investigated the impact of role-playing using two schools; while one school made up the experimental group, the other was the control group. The research lasted for 2 years. The study group comprised 231 male elementary school pupils and 13 teachers involved. Due to the impact of role-playing, bullying victimization drops by 50% [20]. Thus, intervention in role-play affected bullying attitudes and caused bullying incidents to decrease. Similarly, Joronen *et al.* [22] school-based drama program aimed

at strengthening social interactions and decreasing bullying at school found an increase in social interactions and a reduction in bully victims, with a decrease of 20.7% in bullying victimization. Among the high points of the school-based drama program was using a control group to measure long-term effects and parents' participation throughout the period of the drama program. However, the study did not consider the entire school community; thus, a limitation to generalizing the result.

In Australia, a whole-school anti-bullying initiative using qualitative approaches (questionnaires and interviews with students and teachers, detailed observations by researchers and teachers) showed that participants better understood the nature and causes of bullying. Besides, their curiosity and understanding of the implication increased significantly. Furthermore, the attitudes and actions of offenders, victims, and those watching the event were significant and positively correlated [23]. Thus, when it comes to applying to role-play, the shortage of qualified teachers and the wariness exhibited by the available ones are factors that cause difficulty [23].

Research hypothesis

There is no significant effect of therapeutic role-plays in treating bullying perpetrations among secondary school students in Lagos State.

Methods

This descriptive study was in two phases, and two research designs were used. A survey design was used to determine the prevalence and collect the baseline data. This design was deemed appropriate in line with Nworgu [24]. In this phase, systematic screening was carried out to identify bullying among secondary school students in Lagos State. The second research design used was an experimental design, a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design. A quasi-experimental design was selected to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between an independent and dependent variable.

Two educational districts (Educational District II and Educational District IV) were randomly selected from six educational districts in Lagos. Kosofe and Mainland Local Government Areas were chosen randomly. In the selected Local Government Areas, Kosofe Senior College Ketu and Surulere Senior Secondary Schools were selected by simple random sampling. The study population was estimated at 229,980 students from 307 public senior secondary schools. The sample consisted of 1440 senior secondary two students (720 participants from each of the selected locations). The research instruments were the Olweus bullying questionnaire-revised (OBQ-R) and

the teacher second rating opinion rating scale (TSORS). The identified bully perpetrators were assigned to two groups – the experimental and control groups, with 69 participants in each group.

Prevalence study

The selected schools were visited to introduce the study. We received approval both from the Ministry of Education and the School Principals. Students who signified interest were given consent for the endorsement of respective parents. The researcher administered the OBQ-R and parenting style scale to all the students with parental consent. The teachers were equally given TSORS, and all the instruments were collected during each visit.

Psychometric properties of the instrument

Most studies have proved the validity and reliability of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire Revised version (OBVQ-R). In studies in Chile to provide evidence of the validity and reliability of the OBVQ-R in Chile, results ascertained the two-factor structure of the OBVQ-R (victimization and perpetration subscales) and good reliability. In a study in Argentina, when used among students, the Cronbach's alpha for victimization scale was 0.9, while that of perpetration was 0.81. In Brazil, another study reported the Cronbach alpha for victimization scale as 0.85 and the perpetrator scale as 0.87. The researcher carried a pilot test with 20 participants who were not parts of the study and get the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient 0.75 for victimization scale and 0.81 for perpetration. The OBVQ-R fulfilled all the requirements of a valid and reliable scale as proposed by Odukoya *et al.* (2018) [25].

Experimental study

The participants were selected based on their scores on the scale OBQ-R. This intact group were categorized according to the already-formed group (Table 1).

The treatment process was developed and lasted for 6 weeks. The first experimental group was visited on Mondays and Wednesdays, while the second experimental group was visited on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the control group on Fridays only. The first meeting was for the session of the OBQ-R. This was done after norming session and rules setting. Each session lasted for 30 min out of 45 min for break time.

Table 1: Distribution of participants based on treatment groups and study area

Group	School	No. of sampled	No. of participated students	Perpetrators
Experimental	Kosofe senior college	720	717	69
Control group	Surulere senior school	720	682	68

The participants were allowed to observe 5 min before the commencement of the session and released 10 min before the expiration of lunchtime.

Ethical considerations

Permission was sought and obtained from the local school districts (LEDs). The research aims, confidentiality of data, and details of the study were clearly stated. Ethical approval was obtained from the Covenant University Health Research and Ethics Committee. Permission was obtained from all the school principals and signed consent from parents. Participation was voluntary.

Treatment package

An eight-session treatment package was employed for 6 weeks for the program and training sessions for the experimental groups, which lasted 30 min per session. The participants were exposed to a therapeutic role-play intervention program during this period, using the bullying prevention pack (BPP). The BPP is a system initiative for preventing bullying. It allows participants to understand and explore the notion of bullying through the articulatory utilization of role-playing. It aims to increase awareness of the impact of bullying on peers and help build defensive strategies and reduce the prevalence of bullying [19]. The activities described in Table 2 and as follows:

- Lesson I: Establishment of rapport with participants
- Lesson II: The researcher introduced the actors in the play
- Lesson III: The researcher assigned the roles of the onlooker and the defendant
- Lesson IV: The participants got training on understanding themselves and their capabilities
- Lesson V: With the help of teachers who knew the participants well, the researcher selected the participants to play the roles of defenders with confidence

Table 2: Summary of activities for the therapeutic role-play

Weeks	Session	Day	Hours	Activity
One	1	Monday	11:00 am–11:30 am	Establishment of rapport with participants
Two	2	Wednesday	11:00 am–11:30 am	The concept of bullying is explained
		Monday	11:00 am–11:30 am	The researcher introduced the actors in the play
Three	3	Wednesday	11:00 am–11:30 am	Explained the role activities
		Monday	11:00 am–11:30 am	The researcher assigned the roles of the onlooker and the defender
Four	4	Monday	11:00 am–11:30 am	The student that was most popular was chosen as the defender
		Wednesday	11:00 am–11:30 am	The participants got training on understanding themselves and potentials
Five	5 and 6	Monday	11:00 am–11:30 am	The participants carried out confident behavior exercise
		Wednesday	11:00 am–11:30 am	Role-play of defender with confidence
Six	7 and 8	Monday	11:00 am–11:30 am	Signing of contract and review of the previous sessions
		Wednesday	11:00 am–11:30 am	Wrap-up and post-test administration

- Lesson VI: The participants signed undertaking not to participate in bullying activities any longer.

Data analysis

This study examines the efficacy of therapeutic role-plays on bullying perpetrations among secondary school students. The hypothesis was analyzed using t-test of independent samples.

Hypothesis 0

There is no significant effect of therapeutic role-play in treating bullying perpetrations among secondary school students in Lagos State.

Hypothesis 1

There is significant effect of therapeutic role-play in the treatment of bullying perpetrations among secondary school students in Lagos State.

Table 3 revealed the effect of therapeutic role-plays in reducing bullying perpetrations among secondary school students. In the first experimental group, 69 bullying perpetrators responded to the bullying perpetration rating scale, and their responses were recorded and tagged pre-test. The same participants were exposed to therapeutic role-play, and at the end of this exposure, they were asked to respond to the bullying perpetration rating scale. The results revealed the pre-test mean to be = 31.6248, SD = 5.2734, and the post-test mean to be = 10.8774 with SD = 1.0070. This indicates higher bullying perpetration among participants before the treatment, with a mean difference of 20.7474. However, this difference was subjected to a paired t-test to determine whether therapeutic role-play had a significant effect on the treatment of bullying perpetrations. The finding revealed a significant effect of therapeutic role-play in treating bullying perpetrations among secondary school students ($t = 72.822$, $df = 68$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted, concluding the effect of therapeutic role-play on the treatment of bullying perpetrations among secondary school students in Lagos State.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the efficacy of therapeutic role-play on bullying perpetration among secondary school students in Nigeria. The present study

Table 3: Summary of pre-test and post-test showing the effect of therapeutic role-play in the treatment of bullying perpetrations

Variations	Frequency	Mean	SD	df	T	Sig.
Pre-test	69	31.6248	5.2734	67	72.822	0.000
Post-test	69	10.8774	1.0070			

revealed that role-play reduces bullying perpetration among students. It is observed that a well-organized role-play leads to the learner's comprehension of the world, sheds light on and positively influences it [10], and aids them in acquiring the ability to share their understandings and feelings [8]. The researcher agrees to the above reports for the role-play training had discussion sessions that enabled the actors share their experiences and feelings with other participants. The participants understood better the bullying concepts, the misconceptions underlying it, and the negative effects on victims and perpetrators. This awareness decreased the participant's involvement in bullying perpetration.

After role-playing, the kids try to bring themselves or others into a hypothetical scenario as a simple educational drama practice. One must take up the person, they act to play this role attempt to define themselves through the role and see the other in themselves. This would force the triggering of both their logical thinking and sensitivity in their attempt to metamorphose into the individuals they portray to convince and converse with others [20]. The researcher observed this theory come to manifestation during the role-play treatment sessions. During role-play, the child becomes the "other" [8], thus viewing the world from the perspective of others. This experience from a diverse perspective can help ease interpersonal frustration and help introduce people to social report.

There was a significant difference between the pre-test mean of participants exposed to therapeutic role-play and the post-test mean of those not exposed to treatment. However, the difference was subjected to a paired t-test to determine whether therapeutic role-play significantly affected the treatment of bully perpetrations. The findings revealed the significance of therapeutic role-play in the treatment of bully perpetrations among secondary school students. Therapeutic role-playing has components that could engender change among bullies. This finding are corroborated the result of Acharya *et al.* [19] that therapeutic role-playing is an effective therapy against bullying perpetration.

Conclusion

The present study examined the efficacy of therapeutic role-play on bullying perpetration among secondary school students. The possibility and efficacy of treating this behavioral deficit with therapeutic role-play were determined. Findings revealed that therapeutic role-play effectively reduced bullying behavior among students. The study recommends that secondary schools incorporate research-supported bullying prevention programs into the curriculum. These programs should address interventions for individualized subgroups of students, that is, bullying perpetrators and

victims. Teachers should take proactive steps within their classrooms to decrease perpetration and support victims and also be trained to identify bullying behaviors within the classroom. Children with an increased risk of becoming bullies or victims must be identified at a young age to facilitate timely prevention of bullying and victimization. Identification is enhanced by knowledge of determinants and predictors of bullying behavior.

Limitations of the study

The present study provides useful information on the prevalence of bullying in Lagos State. The study population is representative of secondary school students in Lagos State. Results will give rise to estimating prevalence of bullying among similar populations in Nigeria. However, there are some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, this includes only self-report measures that expose results to limitation due to social desirability bias. Quasi-experimental designs have some experimental treatment guaranteed causality, the ideal thing to have been done was to have at least two experimental or treatment groups and two control groups to presume greater causality. Despite these limitations, a number of clinical implications from this study as suggested could improve clinical practice and guide future research.

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