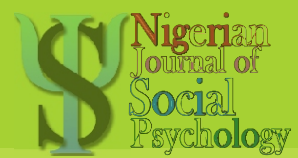


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Parental Psychological Control, Self-esteem, and Peer Influence as Predictors of Bullying Behaviour among Adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Bullying is an increasing issue in various societies, particularly in Nigeria, where adolescent violent behaviour is becoming culturally normalised. This trend is concerning, as it can contribute to crime and other social problems. Parents and caregivers often either tolerate or inadvertently encourage this behaviour, indicating a lack of attention to the well-being of young individuals. To address these challenges, the present study aimed to examine whether parental psychological control, self-esteem, and peer influence would predict bullying behaviour among adolescents. Two hundred and fifty secondary school students (n = 250; 98 (39.2%) males and 152 (60.8%) females; age = 13 to 19 years; M = 16.39, SD = 1.39) selected from public secondary schools in Anambra State through the use of a multistage sampling technique participated in this study. The data were collected using the Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Peer Influence questionnaire. A predictive correlational design was adopted for the study, while hierarchical multiple regression was employed to analyse the data. The result showed that parental psychological control ($\beta = .22, p < .001$) and peer influence ($\beta = .49, p < .001$). Positively and significantly predicted bullying behaviour among adolescents. In contrast, self-esteem ($\beta = -.54, p < .001$) negatively predicted bullying behaviour. All predictors significantly determined bullying behaviour ($F(3,243) = 26.50, p < .001$), explaining 38% ($R^2 = .38$) of the variation. The study highlights the importance of raising public awareness about the potential implications of bullying behaviour, particularly in schools, homes, and social environments.

Keywords: Parental Psychological Control, Self-Esteem, Peer Influence, Bullying Behaviour.

Introduction

Bullying behaviour remains a major problem in many societies due to its potential to influence crime and other social vices (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2020). Unlike other violent behaviours, bullying presents a significant threat to the victims of the aggression, their families and the entire society, as well as impacts other areas of development like education, health, occupation and quality of life (Daley, Waseem & Nickerson, 2023). This is perhaps why the lack of early identification of bullying behaviour may prolong victimisation and encourage unpredictable outcomes and

negative consequences. Thus, bullying perpetrators may be exposed to aggression and hostile behaviour even in adulthood, making them more vulnerable to violence and rebelliousness.

Prevailing evidence has shown that bullying poses serious public health concerns that can have long-term consequences for adolescents (Ighaede-Edwards et al., 2023; Nwafor et al., 2019). According to the American Psychological Association (2020), bullying is a type of hostile conduct in which someone purposefully and persistently causes damage or distress to another person. There are many forms of bullying, which include physical bullying, verbal bullying (e.g., name-calling and social exclusion), cyberbullying, sexual bullying (this involves aggressive sexual jokes, statements, or gestures that are legally defined as sexual harassment), and psychological bullying (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, Nwafor et al. (2019) have demonstrated that bullying is positively related to callous-unemotional traits, which could lead to aggressive behaviours. Also, bullying was negatively related to family competence. This, however, highlights that family parents could play a pivotal role in regulating bullying behaviour. Documentation on bullying observed highlighted that an estimated 246 million children worldwide experienced bullying and other social violence (UNESCO, 2017), with the Western countries reporting 5 to 45.2 percents for boys and 4.8 to 35.8 percent for girls (Modecki et al., 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Globally, bullying reports across regions showed that low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, have the second highest percentages of school-reported bullying of any region (UNESCO, 2017). For example, physical bullying accounted for the most reported cases by students who were bullied (22.9%), followed by sexual bullying, which is the second most prevalent kind of bullying reported by students, and psychological bullying is the third most prevalent kind of bullying (UNESCO, 2017). However, the incidence of various sorts of bullying does not differ significantly between sexes (UNESCO, 2017).

In a similar vein, cyberbullying has become a major concern among adolescents due to its impact on social media and other communication channels in Nigeria (Akanni, Olashore, Osasona, & Uwadiae, 2020). A recent UNESCO global assessment showed that over 30 percent of students have been bullied in the previous month, with severe implications for academic success, quitting school, as well as physical and mental well-being (UNESCO, 2020). Bullying in schools may violate the fundamental right of hundreds of millions of adolescents and younger individuals to quality education as well as their health and well-being (UNESCO, 2020). This may come with a negative influence on academic progress as well as future education and work opportunities for students. Bullying can lead to psychosocial challenges that adversely affect academic performance by creating anxiety, worry, and insecurity, ultimately compromising the quality of education for all students (UNESCO, 2017).

Available data from global research trends in schools has identified bullying as a major global issue that causes academic and clinical concern due to the negative effects it has on adolescents' psychological well-being (Ishak et al., 2023). Recently, there have been rapidly increasing reports of bullying cases in schools in Nigeria, which have shocked the entire public. For example, secondary school students bullying and sexual molestation reported in different cases in Nigeria showed that most of the affected students have experienced carnal and psychological ordeal, while some even died in the process (Asough, 2021). Among the victims of bullying, literature has shown that adolescents are more vulnerable to being bullied in school than adults (Costa et al., 2015; Fenny & Falola, 2020). In fact, bullying affects approximately 240 million adolescents and children across the globe (UNESCO, 2020). In

low-and middle-income countries, it is estimated that about 85 percent of adolescent students in Nigeria are affected by bullying that threatens their psychosocial and emotional development (Raji et al. 2021). Comparatively, the figure was higher in Nigeria (67.2% and 85%) among adolescents (Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF, 2007) than in South Africa, which amounts to 12 percent to 61 percent (Juan et al., 2018). Similarly, in a different observation, Fenny et al. (2020) reported that the prevalence of bullying behaviour among senior secondary school students in Nigeria is about 59.9 percent, with males being more likely to bully than females. In these views, the largest prevalence of bullying behaviour (55.1%) occurs in schools, which may explain why most national and international research has mainly handled bullying through school surveys (Costa et al., 2015).

There is no doubt that numerous issues are associated with the causative effect of bullying among adolescents. They include physical appearance (e.g., children who are seen to be different in any manner may be vulnerable to being bullied), ethnicity and so on (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, research on bullying has received substantial attention in recent times due to the implications of its negative consequences (Akanni et al., 2020; Raji et al., 2021). Despite various research interests in addressing bullying behaviour in schools, efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for every student subjected to violence and bullying in the classroom have not yielded a significant outcome in many societies (UNESCO, 2017). Thus, there is a need for more research in this area.

It has been emphasised that parental characteristics may likely influence bullying perpetration and victimisation in school-aged adolescents, since the home is the primary source of learning and socialisation (Ugwu et al., 2024). For instance, literature has suggested that parental factors, such as communication, discipline, and so forth, are significant predictors of bullying (Nocentini, Fiorentini, Di-Paola, & Menesini, 2019). Parents develop their parenting style based on various factors, which can significantly shape their children's personalities as they mature and navigate different life stages (Mustapha et al., 2023). As opined by Aurora et al. (2024), parental involvement can improve children's positive emotional states by assisting them in developing basic skills to effectively solve critical life problems.

Parenting style is among the factors that influence academic performance and the overall well-being of students (Rauf & Ahmed, 2017). According to Alegre (2011), there are four types of parenting styles that can impact a child's behaviour. They are parental responsiveness, parental positive demandingness, parental negative demandingness, and parental emotion-related coaching. The parental responsiveness, parental emotional guidance and positive demand from parents have been associated with better emotional intelligence in children, while negative demands made by parents were associated with poorer emotional intelligence in children (Alegre, 2011). This is, however, different from Baumrind's (1966) perspective of types of parental styles (authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive styles) that can determine a child's behaviour. For example, parents with an authoritative parenting style define the boundaries of their connection with their children and prioritise disciplinary measures (Loke & Low, 2021). Those with an authoritarian parenting style are less nurturing, with high expectations for children and minimal flexibility (Loke et al., 2021). On the other hand, permissive parenting methods encourage more loving and encouraging behaviours (Loke et al., 2021). The synergy between bullying and parenting styles has been well-established in the literature (Chen, Li, Lv, & Li, 2021).

In different empirical observations, many scholars have emphasised that parental factors such as parental awareness, punitive parenting, parental connection, parental warmth, and

acceptance are strong predictors of bullying and victimisation among adolescents (Ding et al., 2020; Smith & Norris, 2018). However, the role of parental behavioural control in bullying behaviour among adolescents is quite vague in the Nigerian milieu (Mustapha, Muhammed, Tihamiyu & Okesina, 2023).

Parental control involves the supervision and interference of a child's psychological or behavioural actions by the parents (Metre, Ehrenreich, Underwood, 2018). The psychological aspect of parental control comprises becoming engaged, instilling guilt, and withholding affection from the child, whereas behavioural control encompasses the rules, restrictions, and restraints that parents impose on their children (Shek & Law, 2014). In confirmation of the effect of parental control on children's behaviour, Metre et al. (2018) observed that psychological control has a negative impact on children's functioning, but behavioural control has a positive impact. Parental psychological control, in particular, has the potential to foster undesirable adolescent behaviours such as violence, drug use, and bullying (Pace, D'Urso & Zappulla, 2021; Rahmaputri et al., 2022). However, parental behavioural control may be able to attenuate such behaviours to some extent (Chen et al., 2021). Although this may vary in some situations, strong peer influence or pressure can alter the behavioural activities of adolescents who may be compelled to conform in order to gain the approval of peers and thereby engage in bullying behaviour (Chen, Li, Lv & Li, 2021). Also, peer pressure among students might increase their involvement in gambling, skipping classes, and engaging in socially deviant behaviour (Kadir, Atmowasdooyo, & Salija, 2018).

In Nigeria, it is believed that the concept of psychological and behavioural parental control over a child may apply differently due to a high level of tolerance and lack of attention given to the behaviour of teenagers in most communities. According to Mustapha et al. (2023), there is a considerable proportion of high levels of negative parenting in Nigeria in terms of punishment, parent-child connection, and attachment to parents, family violence, parental abuse and neglect, parental non-involvement, parental violent support, parental communication, and parental monitoring/supervision. Children raised with negative parenting practices such as insufficient monitoring and inconsistent, harsh treatment may be exposed to negative behaviour like bullying (Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012). Hence, poor parental control may be the reason for the rising trend of violent behaviour among adolescents that is gradually influencing the moral values of society, with parents and caregivers ignorantly encouraging such behaviours. To address these problems, the need for this study is inevitable.

Cross and Barnes (2014), in their system theory, asserted that parental factors and bullying behaviour are related. This is because a pleasant family atmosphere eventually leads to an agreeable school environment and a bully-free environment (Cross et al., 2014; Nwafor, 2019). Thus, children reared in a supportive household by supportive parents are more likely to be decent people with no bullying tendencies (Cross et al., 2014). In addition, social learning theory views bullying behaviour as a process of learning which may have a social history that starts from home (Bandura, 1986; Swearer & Shelley, 2015). This suggests that bullying behaviour may be learned through interactions within the environment and through observational learning processes.

Another important personality factor that could impact bullying behaviour in this study is self-esteem. Self-esteem has been a concept of much research interest over the years. It could be seen as the totality of one's sense of self-worth. As noted by Rosenberg (2015), self-esteem defines a positive or negative attitude toward oneself; this relates to how people perceive themselves and how much they accept themselves. People with high self-esteem

may tend to have a high degree of self-worth, while people who have a low sense of self-worth may tend to view themselves as somehow worthless and undeserving. Thus, low self-esteem has been linked to cyberbullying (Albikawi, 2023). A negative connection has been found between self-esteem and bullying in the literature (Álvarez & Szücs, 2022).

On the other hand, peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping bullying behaviour, influencing adolescents to engage in or refrain from such behaviours (Ugwu et al., 2024; Aboagye et al., 2021). For example, empirical evidence has shown that negative peer influence could reinforce aggressive behaviour among adolescents (Aboagye et al., 2021). Exposure to aggressive behaviour during childhood may internalising bullying actions as a way to comply with others. In line with the social learning theory, adolescents who experienced violence may likely exhibit aggressive behaviour (Sideli et al., 2020). Peer dynamics are linked with bullying behaviour among adolescents such that those who experience negative peer influence are more likely to participate in bullying, regardless of gender (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Jewkes et al., 2010; Nwafor et al., 2019; Ugwu et al., 2024).

Given the above-reviewed submission, little is known about the combined predictive effects of parental psychological control, self-esteem, and peer influence on bullying among adolescent school students in Anambra State.

Theoretical framework

To guide this study, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) was used as a theoretical framework. This theory emphasised that bullying behaviour is determined by the reciprocal interaction between the person (outcome expectations, moral disengagement, self-efficacy) and the environment/social factors (modelling, enactive experience, and direct tuition) transmitted by the major sources of influence: peers, parents, teachers, and the media. In brief, the theory emphasises that bullying is a product of observed behaviours and peer dynamics. This theory has been applied to anti-bullying initiatives and highlights the conceptual significance of taking into account social and environmental elements that are changeable (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). As noted by Bussey (2023), social learning theory explains the causes of school bullying and also provides directions for intervention programmes. This theory forms the basis or framework for this study.

In view of the above observations, the study aims to investigate the following hypotheses: a. Parental psychological control will significantly predict bullying behaviour among adolescents. b. Self-esteem will significantly predict bullying behaviour among adolescents. c. Peer influence will significantly predict bullying behaviour among adolescents. D. Parental psychological control, self-esteem, and peer influence will jointly and significantly predict bullying behaviour among adolescents.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and fifty (250) secondary school students selected from public secondary schools in Anambra State through the use of a multistage sampling technique participated in this study. They were drawn from 2 different secondary schools, namely Modebe Memorial Secondary School (n=179; 71.6%), and Dennis Memorial Grammar School (n=71; 28.4%),

located in Onitsha North Local Government Area, Anambra State. The participants included 98 males (39.2%) and 152 females (60.8%) with ages ranging from 13 to 19 years, a mean age of 16.39, and a standard deviation of 1.39. They were specifically selected from the students' population in the senior secondary schools' classes (SS1 – SS3). This selection aimed to gather more reliable information based on the experiences of students in senior secondary school classes (SS1 – SS3). The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants showed that 31 (12.4%) of them were in SS1 class, 30(12%) were in SS2 classes, and 189(75.6%) were in SS3 classes. Religion-wise, all the participants were Christians. Details about their family structure showed that 210(84%) of them were from monogamous families, while 40(16%) were from polygamous families. Regarding their living conditions, 211 participants (84.4%) reported living with their parents, while 39 participants (15.6%) indicated that they were not residing with their parents.

Instruments

Illinois Bully Scale (IBS)

This is an 18-item questionnaire designed to measure how individuals engaged in specific types of bullying behaviours in the past 30 days (Espelage et al., 2001). The scale was rated on a 5-point Likert response format, such as 0 = never, 1 = 1 or 2 times, 2 = 3 or 4 times, 3 = 5 or 6 times, and 4 = 7 or more times. The scale has 3 separate subscales, such as the victim subscale (items 4, 5, 6 & 7), the bullying subscale (items 1, 2, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17 & 18), and the fight subscale (items 3, 10, 11, 12 & 13). For this study, the 9-item bullying subscale was employed to measure bullying behaviour. All the derived scores are added together to obtain a total score that ranges from 0 to 16. The scale demonstrated good measurement consistency in the Nigerian sample, with a total scale reliability of 0.84 and a victimisation scale reliability of 0.78 (Eze et al., 2019).

Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (P-PASS)

Parental psychological control was measured using Mageau et al.'s (2015) Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale. It is a 24-item scale that measures the level of parental psychological control that an individual receives. It has two domains, which are autonomy support and psychological control. Under autonomy support, items 1, 4, 8, and 14 are for offering choice within certain limits; items 2, 9, 19, and 23 explain the reasons behind the demands, rules, and limits; items 7, 13, 16, and 24 being aware of, accepting, and recognising the child's feelings. In the psychological control domain, items 3, 10, 15, and 20 threaten to punish the child, items 6, 12, 18, and 21 induce guilt; and items 5, 11, 17, and 22 encourage performance goals. The psychological control domain consists of 12 items. The scale was rated on a 7-point Likert format ranging from 1 = Do not agree at all, 2 = Hardly agree, 3 = Slightly agree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly agree, and 7 = Very strongly agree. The scale is scored by totalling all the items together. Scoring higher on the psychological control domain showed a greater degree of parental psychological control that the participants experienced. The psychometric properties of the scale have been tested across research (Mageau et al., 2015). Among the Nigerian sample, Akintola (2023) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .91 for the scale. The present study obtained an alpha of .87.

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES)

Self-esteem was measured in the study using Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES). It is rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. Some of the items of the scale were negatively worded (1, 3, 4, 7, and 10) and positively worded items, including 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. A higher score showed a greater level of self-esteem. The scores ranged from 10 to 40. The scale is scored by adding all the scored items together after the reverse scoring of the negative items. The reliability coefficient of .93, indicating excellent internal consistency, was reported by Rosenberg (1976). The current study obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .80 for the Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES).

Peer pressure scale

This is a 10-item scale that measures vulnerability to peer pressure in certain areas of life, namely peer activities, misconduct, and conformity to norms (Clasen & Brown, 1985). The scale is rated in a five-point Likert-type response format where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The scale has 5 different domains, which are peer conformity, family involvement, peer involvement, school involvement and misconduct. The scores ranged from -3 to +3. The scale demonstrated reliability coefficients ranging from .70 to .85 using Cronbach's alpha (Brown et al., 1986). The domains are obtained by calculating the average of items that represent the scale. The peer influence is determined by adding all the subscales together. Higher scores represent a greater degree of pressure to engage in the behaviour. The scale has been validated among the African population (Fearon et al., 2017; Ugwu et al., 2024). Thus, the present study recoded a Cronbach's alpha of .89 to .92 across the domains of the scale.

Procedure

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from several authorities, including the Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, and the principals of the selected schools. This was feasible through the insurance of ethical protocol permission and a letter. Standard ethical practices were observed during the study. For example, rapport, informed consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw, as well as right to publish the data were obtained from the research participants. Participation was solely on a voluntary basis. The research instruments were administered to the participants who met the inclusion criteria in the respective classrooms by the researcher and a trained research assistant. The participants were informed that there was no financial reward attached to their participation, and their cooperative responses were solicited. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Thereafter, 260 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to them at a different interval, and they were given 45 minutes to respond to it. All the participants returned the questionnaires to the researchers after responding. During screening and sorting of the questionnaires, it was observed that 7 copies were wrongly filled due to multiple cancellations and omissions, while 3 copies were left blank. Hence, the 10 copies were discarded, and 250 copies of the questionnaire were used for data analysis.

Design/Statistics

A predictive correlational design was employed in this study. The statistical tools, such as Pearson's r correlation coefficient, were employed to test the direction and strength of the

relationship among the study variables, while hierarchical multiple regression was used to analyse the data to test the hypotheses. SPSS version 26 was used to manage the data.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive analysis and Pearson-moment Correlation Coefficients

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bullying behaviour	10.23	1.33	1						
Age	16.39	1.39	.06	1					
Gender	1.61	.49	-.10	-.13*	1				
Present living condition	1.16	.36	.01	.32**	.05	1			
Parental control	25.29	3.22	.17**	.08	-.08	-.03	1		
self-esteem	6.62	.94	-.42**	.06	-.01	.07	-.18*	1	
Peer influence	37.68	3.46	.25**	.05	.01	.10	-.31**	.33**	1

Note, ** = $p < .001$, * = $p < .05$. Gender was dummy coded as 1 = male and 2 = female; present living condition was dummy coded as living with parents = 1 and living with others (relatives and significant others) = 2.

The result showed that sociodemographic variables such as age, gender and present living condition did not correlate with bullying behaviour ($r = .06$, $p > .05$; $-.10$, $p > .05$; and $.01$, $p > .01$), respectively. Furthermore, parental psychological control ($r = .17$, $p < .001$) and peer influence ($r = .25$, $p < .001$) showed positive correlations with bullying behaviour. This indicates that with an increase in parental psychological control and peer influence, the likelihood of an adolescent engaging in bullying behaviour also increases. Conversely, self-esteem negatively correlated with bullying behaviour ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$). This suggests that as self-esteem decreases, bullying behaviour is more likely to increase. Thus, an inverse relationship observed between self-esteem could mean that individuals with high self-esteem may be less likely to bully than those with low self-esteem.

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression analysis of parental psychological control, self-esteem, peer influence and bullying behaviour.

Models	R ²	Adj R ²	Δ R ²	DF	F	B (UC)	β (SC)	T	Sig
Model 1	.01	.01	.01	3(246)	1.065				
Age						.05	.06	.83	.405
Gender						-.26	-.09	-1.46	.145
Present living condition						-.06	-.02	-.26	.793
Model 2	.40	.38	.38	3(243)	26.502**				
Age						.05	.05	.91	.371
Gender						-.22	-.08	-1.59	.114
Present living condition						-.08	-.02	-.41	.680
Parental control						.09	.22	4.12	.001
Self-esteem						-.76	-.54	-10.15	.001
Peer influence						.19	.49	8.95	.001

****** $p < .01$, ***** $p < .05$; Note: ****** = the test is significant at the .01 level; Adj R^2 = Adjusted r square; Δ = increase on adjust R^2 and F -ratio as a result of the interaction; DF= degree of freedom.

The result of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis using the enter method revealed that in model 1, sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and present living condition were included as control variables and did not significantly predict bullying behaviour, $F(3,246) = 1.03$, $p > .05$. Furthermore, parental control, peer influence and self-esteem were entered in Model 2 of the regression model. Specifically, the standardised beta coefficient (β) showed that parental psychological control positively and significantly predicted bullying behaviour ($\beta = .22$, $t = 4.12$, $p < .001$). Hence, hypothesis 1 was accepted. This suggests that parental psychological control, marked by a lack of love and respect for the child's individuality, may drive the child to seek validation elsewhere, potentially from perceived weaker peers. Similarly, self-esteem negatively and significantly predicted bullying behaviour ($\beta = -.54$, $t = -10.15$, $p < .001$). The second hypothesis was also accepted. Peer influence, on the other hand, positively and significantly predicted bullying behaviour ($\beta = .49$, $t = 8.95$, $p < .001$). Consequently, hypothesis 3 of the study was accepted. Finally, the interaction between parental psychological control, self-esteem and peer influence accounted for 38% variance in bullying behaviour, R^2 change = .38, and this change in R^2 was significant at $F(3,243) = 26.50$, $p < .001$. Thus, hypothesis 4 was confirmed. This means that the independent variables jointly predicted bullying behaviour, although in different directions. This underlines the important roles these factors play in determining bullying behaviour among adolescents.

Discussion

The study examined the predictive roles of parental psychological control, self-esteem and peer influence on bullying behaviour among adolescents. The hypotheses of the study were tested in line with the objectives. The results indicated that parental psychological control positively predicted bullying behaviour among adolescents. Thus, the first hypothesis, which stated that parental psychological control would predict bullying behaviour, was accepted. This indicates that young people might be more prone to indulge in behaviour characterised as bullying when their self-esteem declines. Thus, poor self-esteem may be a common factor in bullying, this is because bullies often try to gain control or social dominance in order to show strong self-esteem. Also, bullying could have a detrimental effect on an adolescent's self-esteem and frequently results in feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. This observation has been supported by several literature. For example, Ugwu et al. (2024) found that parental psychological control predicts bullying perpetration and victimisation among adolescents. In line with this observation, Nocentini et al. (2019) found that parental factors significantly predict bullying. This is because parental psychological control is characterised by manipulative strategies, including guilt-inducing, withdrawing love, and disregarding the child's uniqueness are used in this kind of control. In the case of this study, larger degrees of such controlling behaviour by parents are linked to a larger propensity for teenagers to become bullies, according to a positive correlation. As a form of protest or because they utilise similar aggressive tactics in their own relationships, adolescents exposed to this may display more externalising behaviours, such as aggressiveness. The finding also agrees with Mustapha et al. (2023) and Aurora (2024), who observed that parenting style and involvement can impact the children's personality as they grow up.

The findings of the study showed that self-esteem negatively predicted bullying behaviour. Thus, the second hypothesis of the study was also accepted. This indicates that individuals with low self-esteem may bully others to assert power or attract attention, viewing these actions as a means to attain the acknowledgement they perceive themselves lacking. This outcome has been supported by other studies, which demonstrated that poor self-esteem was related to cyberbullying (Albikawi, 2023). Likewise, Álvarez (2022) found that bullying among students and self-esteem are inversely related.

Furthermore, the findings showed that peer influence positively and significantly predicted bullying behaviour. The third hypothesis was further confirmed. This means that as the level of peer influence increases likelihood to engage in bullying behaviour also increases. This finding was in harmony with Ugwu et al. (2024), who observed that peer influence impacts bullying behaviour. The impact that peer groups have on an individual's behaviour, especially identification with violent or deviant peers, could influence a greater degree of bullying. Furthermore, Jewkes et al. (2010) and Nwafor et al. (2019) found that peer dynamics encourage and influence bullying behaviour across gender. For example, adolescents may bully others in order to fit in with the group's norms that support their behaviour, acquire approval, or improve their social standing. Conversely, Aboagye et al. (2021) recorded negative relations between peer influence and aggressive behaviour such as bullying. This is also supported by social learning theory, which proposes that aggressive behaviour is learning through observation or pressure from friends (Sideli et al., 2020).

Moreover, the findings revealed that parental psychological control, self-esteem, and peer influence jointly predicted bullying behaviour. Thus, hypothesis four was accepted. This finding has been supported by Rahmaputri et al. (2022) demonstrated that no single factor could predict bullying, noting that parental psychological control interacts with other factors that weaken self-esteem and emotional regulation, thereby making it vulnerable to negative peer influence. In the same manner, peer groups have been found to offer a social setting where bullying behaviours are modelled, encouraged, or even rewarded, increasing the likelihood that an individual will engage in such behaviours (Espelage et al., 2003). This was also supported by system theory (Cross et al., 2014), which stressed that there was a tiny line between parental factors and bullying behaviour. Similarly, social learning theory also alleges that among the determinants of bullying could be reciprocal interaction between person and environment/social factors like peers, parents and so on (Swearer et al., 2015). From these observations, it could be seen that bullying involvement is considerably more likely when strong deviant peer influence and high parental psychological control are combined.

Implications of the study

The findings of this study have theoretical, empirical and practical implications. Theoretically, the outcome of the study further confirmed the application of social learning theory in explaining bullying as well as the factors that influence it (Bandura, 1986). For example, parental psychological manipulation at home may be a pattern that models bullying behaviour at school. Thus, bullying could be influenced during social interaction, such as when people engage in social activities like playing, laughing and so on. Empirically, several studies have supported the findings of this study. The result obtained from the study indicated that the study helps to fill the gaps in the existing literature concerning factors that could impact bullying behaviour. Practically, the outcome of the study enlightens parents on the impact of their parenting styles on the ward's behaviour. For instance, numerous parents fail

to acknowledge the harm of psychological control as it conforms to cultural standards of strict upbringing. This could negatively affect their children's behaviour.

Recommendations and limitations

There is a need to train parents on non-coercive discipline, emotional validation, and supportive communication. In addition, school management can hold a termly seminar to reeducate parents on using the psychological control approach on the children. School counsellors should screen for family relational patterns when managing bullying cases. These objectives aim to educate individuals about family welfare and child protection frameworks that specifically target psychological control, in addition to physical abuse. Parents should help in building self-confidence by encouraging participation in activities the adolescent enjoys to foster a sense of competence and positive friendships. Other researchers are encouraged to explore beyond the scope of the present study by focusing on digital media use and cyberbullying in the context of family and peer dynamics.

One of the limits of the study was that the self-report scale used may facilitate social desirability bias or erroneous recall, especially concerning sensitive topics like bullying and parental control. Also, due to societal stigmas or insufficient reporting mechanisms, adolescents may underreport bullying cases in schools and other settings. Thus, there is a need for caution in generalising the findings of the study.

Conclusion

The study established existing relationships between parental psychological control, self-esteem, peer influence, and bullying behaviour among adolescents. From the hypotheses tested, these factors were found to be significantly interconnected, forming a "risk-cascade mechanism" that increases the likelihood of bullying perpetration or victimisation. Individually, parental psychological control was a significant risk factor that predicted bullying. Self-esteem was negatively and strongly related to bullying, and experiences of bullying can further reduce self-esteem. Similarly, peer influence was identified as a critical predictor of bullying perpetration. Overall, the study highlights the complex interplay of various factors in influencing bullying behaviour among adolescents and explores ways to prevent and address bullying in schools and communities.

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Conflict of interest

Nil.

Ethical consideration

Having employed the Revised Helsinki Declaration protocol, this study was authorised by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Board (HaSSREB) of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Transparency of Data

The data would be provided when purposefully demanded.

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Not applicable.

Authors contribution

Nelson Ifedili Nwankwo (NIN) wrote and designed the study with Ifeyinwa Stephina Agu, Adanma J. Solomon Nwagwu, & Nnamdi Enoch Nwakoby.

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