

# **Bullying and the Psychological Well-Being of Students in Senior Secondary School in Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated bullying and psychological well-being of students in secondary schools in Eti-Osa LGA, of Lagos State. The objectives of this study are to determine relationship between bullying and psychological well-being of students, and specifically, examine how verbal bullying impacts psychological well-being of students in senior secondary school. The findings of the study revealed that (i) there is a significant correlation between verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students there is a significant correlation between bullying and psychological well-being of students. Two hypotheses were tested. The results of the Correlation Analysis of hypothesis 1 indicates that the coefficient of determination is  $-0.778$  at a significant or probability value of  $0.04$  which is greater than  $0.01$ . This indicates that the null hypothesis that states that “there is no significant correlation between verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students” will be accepted while the alternate hypothesis will be rejected. This implies that the high occurrence verbal bullying the weaker the psychological well-being of students. The results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Hypothesis 2 indicates that the coefficient of determination is  $-0.899$  at a significant or probability value of  $0.05$  which is greater than  $0.01$ . This indicates that the alternate hypothesis that states that “there is a significant correlation between bullying and psychological well-being of students” is accepted while the null hypothesis will be rejected. This implies that bullying if not eradicated might likely affects psychological well-being of students’ by creating instability in their mental health.

**Keywords:** Verbal Bullying, Emotional Bullying, Physical Bullying and Psychological Well-Being.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bullying remains one of the most pervasive and damaging social challenges facing students in secondary school across the globe (Ozada-Nazim & Duyan, 2021). Bullying is generally defined as a repeated, intentional and aggressive behavior that is characterized by power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. Xu et al (2022) buttress that bullying can also be viewed as a continued attack by teachers or students on certain students within the school campuses and surrounding areas. Alcock (2020) study posited that bullying can manifest in several forms, including physical aggression, verbal harassment, social exclusion, cyberbullying amongst others

School bullying is not what school administrators should handle lightly as it has a significant impact on students psychological well-being. Psychological well-being in this study relates to students happiness while Pörhölä et al (2020) study opines that psychological well-being is the various dimensions and the totality of students’ mental and emotional health which includes positive relationships, personal growth, self-esteem, and a sense of control. Students with strong psychological wellbeing possess good mental health and maintain good relationship with other individuals.

Several studies have been conducted to show the impact of bullying on psychological well-being of students. Luo et al. (2022) study revealed that bullied victims find it difficult to pay attention to their studies because their

psychological well-being has been weakened through constant exposure to bullying behaviours from teachers, students and other staff in the school and as such they have the belief that going to school is a waste of time. Hamel et al. (2021) study revealed that bullying in school has a significant negative impact on students' psychological well-being while Han and Zhong (2025) study asserts that the psychological consequences of bullying are profound and long-lasting.

Despite several studies that has been conducted on bullying impact on psychological well-being of students, bullying in schools is still on the rise while psychological well-being of bullied students are damaged on a daily basis in such a way that students especially the secondary school students tends to develop mental health issues such as depression, anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation (Wilbon Sr, 2020). This makes it very important for school owners, teachers, students and other staffs in all secondary schools in Nigeria especially in Lagos State to deem it fit to minimise the occurrence of bullying in schools in order to maintain a balance across physical, mental, and social domains of the students.

Hence, to minimize the occurrence of bullying in schools, policies that impose serious sanctions on the persons who commit the bullying acts must be developed while the school administrator must ensure that it provides adequate support for the victims that were bullied in school. This will reduce the negative consequences of the bullying on the psychological well-being of students. It is on this note that the study would seek to investigate bullying and its impact on psychological well-being of students with respect to secondary schools in Eti-Osa LGA in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Bullying has become a worrying phenomenon in colleges and secondary schools in Nigeria, with cases of bullying behavior reported among secondary school students on the rise. Olaoye and Osundina (2024) opined that the act of bullying recently has been a serious issue that has affected the psychological well-being of people. Victims of bullying have reported feelings of isolation, helplessness, and fear, which often translate into academic disengagement, behavioral issues, and long-term mental health struggles (Wilbon Sr, 2020).

Bullying behaviour must be eradicated in all secondary schools in Nigeria because it will be disastrous and detrimental to school if it allows perpetrators of bullying to continue to bully their fellow students on a daily basis. Bokhari et al (2022) posited that school management must ensure that bullying behaviours which cause discomfort to students must be adequately dealt with because students who are bullied would be unhappy, frustrated, angered and also experience impaired psychological well-being.

Ringdal et al (2021) states that understanding why students are physically, emotionally and verbally bullied could help teachers and school administrators to combat it. Factors that can lead to bullying include differences in appearance, social status, race, and sexual orientation. Pörhölä et al (2020) study reported that some students who bully others have low self-esteem; though, there are others that have much higher self-confidence. Those with high self-confidence tend to lack compassion and empathy and can respond aggressively whenever they feel threatened. In some cases, students' need for attention and the desire to be perceived as brave and confident can cause them to bully.

According to Olaoye and Osundina (2024), bullying in school can make it difficult for secondary school students to focus on their schoolwork, which can result in failure and eventual dropout. However, keeping in view the pervasive influence of bullying on psychological well-being of students, this study is a response to the urgent need to find an enduring policy response informed by data to the problem of bullying vis-à-vis its impact of psychological wellbeing.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate bullying and psychological well-being of students in secondary schools in Eti-Osa LGA, Lagos State. Specifically, the objectives are as follows;

- i. To determine the relationship verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students.

- ii. To investigate the effect of bullying on the psychological well-being of students.

## Research Hypotheses

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students.

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between bullying and psychological well-being of students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Nature and Concept of Bullying in School

Bullying in school is an unwanted and aggressive behavior among students that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (Halliday et al 2021).

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019).

Family factors such as low family support and authoritarian parenting style are also considered bullying phenomenon (Georgiou et al, 2018). A bullying student has power over another student because of factors such as size, gender, age, standing among peers, and/or assistance by other students. Among boys, bullying tends to involve differences in strength; among girls bullying is more focused on differences in physical appearance, emotional life, and/or academic status (Jeffrey et al, 2001). Some bullies target peers with physical impairments, such as speech impediments (e.g., stuttering). Many stutterers experience some degree of bullying, harassment, or ridicule from peers.

Teachers and school administrators must be aware that although bullying generally happens in areas such as the bathroom, playground, crowded hallways, and school buses as well as via cell phones and computers (where supervision is limited or absent), it must be taken seriously. Kosciw et al (2016) opined that if a teacher observes bullying in a classroom, he/she needs to immediately intervene to stop it, record the incident, and inform the appropriate school administrators so that the incident can be investigated immediately.

### Types of Bullying

#### Physical Bullying

Burger (2022) states that physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Lee (2004) further affirm that physical bullying is not only the direct punishing or kicking but it also can be done indirect forms such as intentionally taking or destroying one's property. Physical bullying examples includes; hitting, pushing, shoving or intimidating or otherwise physically hurting another person, damaging or stealing their belongings.

#### Verbal Bullying

Verbal bullying is the most common type of that perpetrated by both boys and girls. Bolarinwa (2024) opine that it is one of the difficult types of bullies to identify since the attacks tend to only occur when adults are not present. Though verbal bullying creates no physical damage, the abuse can have lasting psychological impacts on victims. Verbal bullies intimidate and harm their victims with words (Bolarinwa, 2024).

#### Emotional Bullying

Emotional bullying sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships (Burger, 2022). This act of bullying often throws their victims into a lingering depressive condition. Some bullies use body language to create emotional imbalance in their targets. Emotional bullying leaves its victims tattered to the very soul.

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is any form of bullying behaviour that occurs online or via a mobile device. It can be verbal or written, and can include threats of violence as well as images, videos and/or audio. Coupled with the increasing use of computers and the internet, the use of such technology and social media has moved some bullying from the schoolyard to the internet (Burger, 2022).

## Sexual Bullying.

Sometimes schools and other places use one term or the other for legal reasons. For instance, a school document may use the term “Bullying” to describe what’s against school policy, while a law might use the term “Harassment” to define what’s against the law. Same behaviour might be against school policy and against the law. With sexual bullying, the focus is on things like a person’s appearance, body parts or sexual orientation which includes spreading gossip or rumors that are sexual in nature. Bolarinwa (2024) posited that sexual bullying maybe verbal, like making rude comments to or about someone, it may be in form of using technology to harass someone sexually (like sending inappropriate text messages, pictures or videos).

## Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is defined as a combination of positive circumstances in all aspects of life, such as contentment, both physically and spiritually, as well as optimal function. In another study, mental well-being is defined as a positive and sustainable mental state that allows individuals, groups, and nations to thrive and flourish (Agrawal & Krishna, 2021; Clarke et al., 2011). Meanwhile, individuals' happiness, subjective well-being, and eudaimonic wellbeing are frequently used to define it (Agrawal & Krishna, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Psychological well-being is more than just feeling good all of the time; it also includes negative emotions such as frustration, failure, and sadness, all of which are natural aspects of life (Shahira et al., 2018; Stamp et al., 2015). Negative emotions can have a negative impact on health and happiness over time. If not handled properly, this can have negative effects on an individual's mental health. Positive emotional and social support, on the other hand, is critical in developing psychological well-being (Siddiqui et. al., 2016). A person with a high psychological well-being will live a happy life, be satisfied with their professional and personal lives, and be capable and well-supported (Panahi et al., 2016).

The psychological well-being of an individual is considered as a crucial indicator of the level of personality that affects resistance and manifests itself in subjectively apparent fulfillment and life satisfaction, making it one of the most relevant factors influencing the formation of the future professional (Pavliuk et al, 2018). WHO (2021) emphasizes on the multifaceted character of psychological wellness, which includes positive emotions, psychological processes, and a feeling of significance and purpose in life.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theories were used in this study and these theories are transformational theory of workplace bullying, dominance theory of bullying and developmental theory.

Transformational theory of work place is propounded by Jack Mezirow in 1978. This theory involves critical thinking, which includes conducting an internal investigation into one’s views and philosophies to transform one’s life into a new significant way. According to Mezirow (1978), when a life changing event has occurred in students’ life, it alters the mind-frame of these students. The life changing event in this case is bully in school.

The essence, relevance and importance of transformational theory to this study is how bullying as a life changing event would easily make students changes from a positive psychological well-being to weak psychological well-being.

Dominance Theory of Bullying postulated by Sidanius and Pratto in 1999, held that people engage in bullying others to get social status, available resources and to be popular in the society. Dominance theory is relevant to this study because it shed more light on why some students are engaged in bullying behaviour and also why bullying behaviour is rampant among secondary school students.

## Verbal Bullying and Psychological Well-Being of Students.

Lamghari et al (2025) study examined the impact of teachers' verbal aggressiveness on high school students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and classroom engagement. Data were collected through a 20-item Likert scale questionnaire. The findings reveal that verbal aggression by teachers has significant adverse effects, with students reporting decreased motivation, academic disengagement, and negative emotional impacts such as anxiety and low self-esteem. Public humiliation emerged as particularly damaging, leading to feelings of resentment and vulnerability to bullying.

The study by Luthfiani and Abduh (2024) investigated children reported to have been bullied and the impact of bullying behaviour on fourth-grade students' and their psychological well-being. The results show various form of bullying behaviour - direct verbal, physical, and emotional bullying impacts on student's psychological well-being. The factors that cause this case are influenced by parenting style, play environment, socialization and mass media.

Viuni (2019) research examined verbal bullying and its impact on psychological well-being with students' academic achievement as a moderating factor. Descriptive qualitative method was applied to investigate the students' verbal bullying. The result of the study showed that the most verbal bullying which includes mocking, exclusion, and disrespect have an impact on psychological well-being with a significant effect on students' achievement.

Maalikiha et al (2025) study investigated the forms and effects of verbal bullying on psychological well-being according to students' perceptions. The results showed that the majority of junior high school students agreed that verbal bullying has negative emotional and psychological impacts. Most students identified words referring to physical deficiencies or body shaming (71%), academic achievement (56%), and family background (57%) as significant forms of bullying. Verbal bullying related to physique and family background was reported as the most hurtful. Approximately 40% of students reported feeling hurt, and 38% felt embarrassed by verbal bullying, which impacted their self-confidence and emotional well-being.

### Bullying and Psychological Well-Being

The study of Stephen and Soni (2023) identified the relationship between bullying and self-esteem and psychological well-being. A sample of 100 adolescents were included in the study which comprised of 50 Males and 50 females aged between 13-18. Correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses while T-test was done to determine if significant differences exist between the variables. Results demonstrate that there was a significant negative correlation between bullying and psychological well-being.

The study of Hassan et al (2024) assessed the effect of school bullying on physical health, psychological wellbeing and self-esteem among adolescents. The findings revealed a negative correlation between bullying psychological wellbeing and self-esteem.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is a survey research method and the essence of using this method is to collect information without changing or manipulating the environment with the use of a structured questionnaire. A survey study collects data from a sample of the study population which is considered to be representative of the entire group. The study area for this study is Eti-Osa LGA) is one of the 20 LGAs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

**Table 1: Sampling Frame of the Study Population**

Community High School in Alegongo	Total
Senior Secondary School One Class (SSS 1)	196
Senior Secondary School Two Class (SSS 2)	80
Senior Secondary School Three Class (SSS 3)	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>

Source: Survey, 2025.

The stratified sampling procedure was used for data collection. Table 1 presents the proportion allocation calculations according to each class.

**Table 2. Allocation of Sample to Strata**

S/N	Class	Number of Students	Sample Size
1	Senior Secondary School One Class (SSS 1)	196	$(187 \times 196) / 354 = 104$
2	Senior Secondary School Two Class (SSS 2)	80	$(187 \times 80) / 354 = 042$
3	Senior Secondary School Three Class (SSS 3)	78	$(187 \times 78) / 354 = 041$
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>187</b>

Source: Survey, 2025

### Research Instruments

Questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection in this study. This questionnaire has two sections, the bio-data of the respondents while the statements constructed to answer the research questions and hypothesis for the study. Standardised bullying questionnaires items with an accepted reliability coefficient Dogruer (2015) study was modified and adopted for the study while and Ryff's psychological well-being scales with a higher reliability coefficient cited in Harris (2010) was modified and adopted for the study. The instrument was subjected to both face and content validity to ensure that it can measure what it was meant to measure.

The pilot test results were used to evaluate the compatibility and the consistency of the instrument. For the reliability coefficient, Cronbach's Alpha was used to ascertain it. The calculated Cronbach's alpha value is between 0 and 1. An instrument is considered valid if its Cronbach value is at least 0.60 and above (Cooper & Schindler, 2019).

### Methods of Data Analysis

The research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study guided the process of data analysis. The options selected such as Agree, Disagree and Undecided stated on the research instrument were graded and the frequencies and percentages were calculated. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Correlation to test the relationship among study variables.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The researcher administers 187 questionnaires but 154 of these questionnaires were filled properly for presentations and analysis purpose. Hence, the study achieves 82.4% return rate while the non-return rate is 17.6%

### Research Results

**Table 3 Respondents' Views on Verbal Bullying**

Respondents' Views on Verbal Bullying	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%
I hate been mocked publicly	96	62.3	43	27.9	06	04.0	09	05.8	00	00	154	100
I will not feel comfortable staying with friends that call me bad names	78	50.7	37	24.0	11	07.1	16	10.4	12	07.8	154	100
I will not like the subject of any teacher that swear or curse me	82	53.3	17	11.0	08	05.2	38	24.7	09	05.8	154	100

Abusive words makes me get angry	66	40.9	43	27.9	32	20.8	10	06.5	03	01.9	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
Teasing students to be angry put them in an unstable state to learn	69	44.8	35	22.7	14	09.1	28	18.2	08	05.2	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
Words of insult and abuse in interactive class activities makes students think less of themselves	58	36.7	44	28.6	34	22.1	05	03.2	13	08.4	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Survey, 2026

As indicated in Table 4, 90.2% of the respondents affirm that they hate been mocked publicly while 9.8% disagree with this notion. 74.7% of the respondents confirm that they will not feel comfortable staying with friends that call me bad names, 17.5% disagree while 07.8% were undecided with this notion. 64.4% of the respondents’ agree that they will not like the subject of any teacher that swear or curse them, 29.9% disagree while 5.8% were undecided with this notion.

Result further reveals that 68.8% of the respondents’ asserts that abusive words makes them get angry, 27.3% disagree with this notion while those who are undecided were 1.9%. 67.5% of the respondents agree that teasing students to be angry put them in an unstable state to learn but 27.3% and 5.2% of the respondents disagree and were undecided respectively with this notion.

Finally, 65.3% of the respondents agree that words of insult and abuse in interactive class activities makes students think less of themselves while 25.3% and 8.4% of the respondents disagree and were undecided respectively on with this notion. The summary of these findings indicates that abusive words such as bad names calling; swear; curse; and insult in interactive class activities targeted at students to mock them publicly always anger students in such a way that they might hate their teachers, think less of themselves and also be in an unstable state to learn

**Table 5: Respondents’ Views on Physiological Well-Being**

Respondents’ Views on Physical Bullying	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%
Frequent condemnation from teachers might reduce my academic performance	95	61.8	15	09.7	16	10.4	09	05.8	19	12.3	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
I might lose focus in class when teachers yell at me publicly	88	57.2	36	23.4	04	02.6	19	12.3	07	04.5	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
Coping with academic stress will be difficult if students are beaten frequently in school	76	49.5	42	27.2	20	13.0	11	07.1	05	03.2	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>

Physical attack affects students creative thinking	57	37.0	50	32.5	10	06.5	23	14.9	14	09.1	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
Satisfaction towards class and school activities eradicates frustration	92	59.8	52	33.8	05	03.2	00	00.0	05	03.2	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>
Insults, swear and curse uttered to students will demotivates them from accomplishing their academic goal	123	79.9	31	20.1	00	00.0	00	00.0	00	00.0	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Survey, 2026

As indicated in Table 5, it was reveal that 71.5% of the respondents agree that frequent condemnation from teachers might reduce their academic performance, 16.2% disagree while 12.3% were undecided with this notion. 80.6% of the study respondents assert that they might lose focus in class when teachers yell at them publicly while 14.9% and 04.5% disagree and were undecided with this notion.

76.7% of the respondents in the study agree that coping with academic stress will be difficult if students are beaten frequently in school, 20.1% disagree while others who were undecided is 03.2%. 69.5% of the study respondents agree that physical attack affects students creative thinking, 21.4% were in disagreement with this notion while 09.1% were undecided with this notion. Table 4.5 confirms that 93.6% of the respondents' have the belief that satisfaction towards class and school activities eradicates frustration, 03.2% disagree outrightly with this assertion while 03.2% were undecided with this notion.

79.1% and 20.1% of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively on the statements that states that insults, swear and curse uttered to students will demotivates students from accomplishing their academic goal. The summary of this analysis of the respondents views indicates insults, swear, curse uttered to students, frequent condemnation from teachers, public yelling at students and physical attack in form of frequent beating affects students creative thinking and also make students lose focus towards coping with academic stress, accomplishing academic goal and performance while satisfaction towards class and school activities eradicates frustration

### Test of Hypotheses

#### Hypothesis One

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant correlation between verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant correlation between verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students.

**Table 6 Significant Correlation between Verbal Bullying and Psychological Well-Being of Students**

		Verbal Bullying	Psychological Well-Being of Students
<b>Verbal Bullying</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.778*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.04
	N	154	154
	Pearson Correlation	-0.778**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.04	

<b>Psychological Well-Being of Students</b>	N	154	154
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Survey, 2026

### Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant correlation between bullying and psychological well-being of students.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant correlation between bullying and psychological well-being of students.

**Table 7: Significant Correlation between Bullying and Psychological Well-Being of Students**

		<b>Bullying</b>	<b>Psychological Well-Being of Students</b>
<b>Bullying</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.899**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.05
	N	154	154
<b>Psychological Well-Being of Students</b>	Pearson Correlation	-0.899**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.05	
	N	154	154
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Survey, 2026

The results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation as shown on Table 7 indicates that the coefficient of determination is -0.899\*\* at a significant or probability value of 0.05 which is greater than 0.01. This indicates that the alternate hypothesis that states that “there is a significant correlation between bullying and psychological well-being of students” will be accepted while the null hypothesis will be rejected. This implies that bullying if not eradicated might likely affects psychological well-being of students’ by creating instability in their mental health.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of hypothesis one which revealed that there is no significant correlation between verbal bullying and psychological well-being of students is in line with Lamghari et al (2025) study which affirms that verbal aggression by teachers has significant adverse effects on students with students reporting decreased motivation, academic disengagement, and negative emotional impacts such as anxiety and low self-esteem. Luthfiani and Abduh (2024) study also buttress that all forms of bullying investigated in the study including verbal bullying has an impact on the psychological well-being of victims as the victims are traumatized, become quiet, not confident, and have feelings of fear.

Finally, the finding revealed in hypothesis four which states that there is no significant correlation between bullying and psychological well-being of students is in line with the study of Hassan et al (2024) whose study revealed a negative correlation between bullying victimization and both psychological wellbeing and self-esteem while bullying victimization has a positively correlated with various physical symptoms. Hassan et al (2024) further buttress that bullying victimization, particularly verbal and cyber bullying, is prevalent among students and is strongly associated with adverse physical symptoms, low self-esteem, and diminished psychological wellbeing.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, verbal bullying is detrimental to psychological well-being of students. It is also evident that bullying in general and in any form must be eradicated because of its proven adverse effect on the psychological well-being of students.

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made by the researcher;

- i. School proprietors, administrators and managers should be intentional about curtailing incidences of bullying in their school.
- ii. Disciplinary measures that can ensure deterrence to bullying behaviour must be institutionalized.

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