



## EFFECT OF BEHAVIOURAL COUNSELLING APPROACH ON BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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### Abstract

The study investigated the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Onitsha Education Zone, Anambra State. The main purpose of this study examined the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour of secondary school students in Onitsha education zone, Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test research design. The population of the study comprised 180 senior secondary two (SS2) student bullies in co-educational secondary school in Onitsha Education zone. A sample of 36 student bullies made up 20 males and 16 females were purposively drawn from the population of the study. The instrument for data collection was Students Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (SBBQ) were adapted as instruments for data collection. The instrument was face validated by three experts in Guidance and Counseling. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha. The computation yielded co-efficient value of 0.78. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Co-Variance (ANCOVA). The findings of the study showed that students exposed to Behavioural Counselling Approach had a significant reduction in bullying behaviour compared to those exposed to conventional counselling. The findings equally indicated that the behavioural counselling approach reduced the bullying behaviour of both male and female students compared to the conventional counselling approach. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that Behavioural Counselling Approach should be used by guidance counsellors working in secondary schools to modify behaviours of students with bullying behaviour. The management of secondary school should regularly organize in service education programme such as conference, workshop, and seminars to educate the participants on the consequences and dangers of maladaptive behaviour such as Bullying.

**Key Words:** Behavioural Counselling Approach, Bullying Behaviour,



## Introduction

Bullying behaviour is repeated intentional actions directed at an individual or group with the intent to cause physical, emotional or psychological harm. It involves an actual or perceived power imbalance between the perpetrator (bully) and the victim, where the victim finds it difficult to defend himself. This behavior can take the form of physical aggression, verbal harassment, social exclusion and cyberbullying. American psychological and association (APA, 2023) defined bullying as aggressive behavior in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying can take the form of physical contact, words or more subtle actions, and typically involves an imbalance of power. Similarly, Smith and Brain (2000) described bullying as a repeated aggressive behavior that intends to harm another person physically or emotionally and usually occur where there is imbalance of power. In his view, Olweus (1993) viewed bullying as repeated negative actions directed at a student who has difficulty to defend himself. The researchers defined bullying as intentional aggressive behavior which can be verbal, physical, social or psychological directed by one person towards another who has difficulty defending himself.

In the school context, bullying can take various forms, each involving deliberate, repeated behavior aimed at intimidating, harming, or controlling another student. These forms of bullying include physical, verbal, social/relational, psychological and cyber bullying. (Adewele & Adelakin, 2018). Lee (2017) identified issuing of threat, injuring someone, issuing embarrassing statements, humiliating another person, teasing, name calling, sending abusive text messages and physical attack as different forms of bullying. In his view, Vinney (2024) asserted that bullying in secondary schools' manifests in many forms such as physical, verbal, social or emotional cyber sexual or group based. Research within the Nigerian secondary schools revealed that bullying behaviour is caused by different factors from family, peer, individual and institutional demands. At the family level, frequent parental violence significantly increases the likelihood of bullying perpetration. (Raji 2021).

Similarly, Tambawal and Umar (2017) posited that parenting characterized as harsh, consistent, or neglectful, as well as weaker parental attachment have been linked to elevated bullying behavior among the students. In their opinion, Adeyemi et al (2024) asserted that peer group influence, school climate, lack of adult supervision and poor social competence within institutional settings amplify bullying behavior. Fareo (2015) noted that low self-efficacy, impulsivity, aggressive supportive attitudes, fragile self-esteem are causes of bullying behaviour among the students.

Bullying behavior in secondary schools inflicts multifaceted and long lasting harm on students' mental health, emotional well-being, academic performance and social adjustment. Afolabia and Aminashoun (2024) asserted that anger, fear, anxiety, humiliation, shame, sadness, loneliness, school avoidance, depressed, self-esteem, substance abuse and depression are the negative effects



of bullying. Similarly, Lohmann (2014) reported that victims of bullying are unhappy, anxious, depressed and sometimes find it hard to concentrate in their studies. Ohanaka and Okobia (2017) posited that bullying does not only harm both the victim and the perpetrator. It also affects the climate of the school, morale of teachers and indirectly the ability of all the students to learn to the best of their ability. Even students who are not bullies and victims of bullying also find the school environment hostile and not conducive for learning (ugwu & Olatunbosun, 2016). Oluwamumiburi et al (2022) reported that reduced concentration, increased absenteeism, lower grades and greater risk of alcohol misuse as the negative effects of bullying. According to Oluremi (2015), victims of bullying frequently experience anxiety, depression, low-self-esteem and poor academic performance, while perpetrators on the other hand are at increased risk of engaging in delinquent and antisocial behavior.

In secondary schools in Nigeria especially in Anambra state, the problem of bullying has gained increased attention due to its rising prevalence and its association with violence, school dropouts, and emotional disturbance among others. Studies have shown that bullying behavior is not only common but also under reported where it is often normalized as part of the school culture (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2018). Will various strategies have been employed to curb bullying in schools such as disciplinary measures, peer education, anti-bullying policies, many of these approaches have proven to be reactive rather than preventive or therapeutic. There is therefore a growing need to adapt counseling-based interventions particularly those grounded in behavior modification, to effectively address to root causes of bullying behavior among students.

Behavioural counseling approach (BCA) focuses on identifying and modifying maladaptive behaviours through the application of principles such as reinforcement, punishment, modeling and systematic desensitization (Corey,2017). This approach operates on the assumption that all behaviours both positive and negative are learned and can therefore be unlearned through appropriate interventions. In the context of school counseling, behavioural techniques can be employed to reduce bullying behaviours by reinforcing prosocial behavior and discouraging aggressive or harmful conduct. In the context of bullying, this approach involves teaching students alternative, prosocial behaviours to replace aggressive tendencies. Techniques such as token economics, behavior contracts, role playing, social skills training and assertiveness training have been shown to be effective in reducing bullying behavior when implemented consistently (Omoniyi & Olowookere2014, Babatunde & Adeolokun, 2017)

Empirical evidence within and out Nigeria have demonstrated that behavioural intervention not only help to reduce bullying incidents but also improve students' interpersonal relationships, empathy and self-control. For instance, omoniyi and olowookere (2014) found that the use of behavioural modification and assertiveness training led to a significant decline in bullying behaviours among secondary school students in Ekiti state. Similarly, Babatunde and Adeolokan (2019) reported that behavioural counseling significantly reduced physical and verbal aggression among students in Kwara state.



However, the integration of behavioural counselling approaches in Nigeria secondary schools remains limited, primarily due to lack of trained personnel, inadequate counselling resource and poor policy implementation. The gap underscores the need for empirical research to future explore the effectiveness of behavioural counselling intervention in Anambra school setting. Therefore, the study sought to investigate effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behavior among secondary school students in Anambra state.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Bullying behavior has become a pervasive problem in Nigeria secondary schools including those in Anambra state. Report on physical aggression, verbal abuse, social exclusion and psychological intimidation among students has raised a serious concern among educators, parents and mental health professionals. Despite efforts by school authorities to curb this menace through disciplinary actions and counselling, bullying remains a persistent issue that negatively impacts students' academic achievement, emotional well-being and school climate.

The prevalence of bullying behavior in Anambra state secondary schools is particularly worrisome because the victims often suffer from low self-esteem, school avoidance, anxiety and poor academic performance. At the same time, student bullies are at risk of developing long-term antisocial behaviours and often disrupt the teaching and learning process. Yet many schools in the state rely heavily on punitive measures rather than therapeutic or preventive strategies to address this behavior.

Behavior counselling has been recognized globally as an effective intervention for reducing maladaptive behavior such as bullying. However, its application in the secondary schools in Anambra state seems to be limited or poorly implemented probably due to lack of awareness, inadequate trainers' counselors and minimal policy support. Consequently, there is a gap in research regarding the effect of behavioural counselling approach in reducing bullying behaviour in secondary schools in Anambra state. Therefore, the problem of this study was to investigate the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour among secondary schools' students in Anambra state.

### **Specifically, the study sought to;**

1. Ascertain the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour among secondary school students when compared with conventional counselling.
2. Find out the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students when compared with conventional counselling.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions;



1. What is the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour among secondary school students when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?
2. What is the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school student when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of secondary school students exposed to behavioural counselling approach when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test scores.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female secondary school students exposed to behavioural counselling approach when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test scores.

### **METHOD**

The study adopted quasi-experimental research design. Specifically, the pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent control was adopted. The population of the study comprised 180 student bullies (122 males and 58 females) in all the 20 co-educational senior secondary schools two (SS 2) students in Onitsha Education Zone. The population of the students was obtained using Student Bullying Behaviour Identification Scale (SBBIS) The sample of the study consisted of 36 (20 males and 16 females) bullies drawn from the population of the study. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the sample. The instruments used for data collection was Students Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (SBBQ). The instrument was face validated by experts in Guidance and Counselling. The reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha method. The computation yielded co-efficient value of 0.78.

The researchers and two research assistants participated in this study. The research assistants were the Counsellors in the two selected co-educational secondary schools. Before the experiment commences Student Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (SBBQ) were administered to experimental and control groups as Pre-test. Afterwards, the participants in the experimental groups were trained using behavioural counselling approach package while the control group was taught conventional method. At the end of the treatment which lasted for six weeks, the instrument was reshuffled and re-administered to the experimental and control groups as a post-test. However, certain extraneous variables were controlled, if left unchecked would affect the results. These included pre-test sensitization, Hawthorne effect, non-equivalence of the group and interaction effect.



The data collected were analyzed using Mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while Analysis of Co-Variance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses of 0.05 level of significance. The researchers used SPSS version 26 to compute the data

### Results

**Research Question 1:** What is the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour among secondary school students when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

**Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Bullying Behaviour Mean Scores of Students Exposed to Behavioural Counselling and those Exposed To Conventional Counselling.**

	Pretest Bullying Behavior			Posttest Bullying Behavior			
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	Adj. M
Counseling							
Approaches							
Behavioural							
Counselling	20	56.58	4.05	20	29.89	3.81	29.86
Conventional	16	56.75	5.00	16	40.94	9.44	40.83
Counseling							
Total	36	56.66	4.44	36	34.94	8.84	

Results presented in Table 1 indicated that secondary school students exposed to behavioural counselling had mean pretest score of 56.58 with standard derivation of 4.05 and mean posttest score of 29.89 with standard derivation of 3.81. On the other hand, those exposed to conventional counselling had a mean pretest score of 56.75 with standard derivation of 5.00 and mean posttest score of 40.94 with standard derivation of 9.44. The adjusted mean bullying behaviour score for the two groups behavioural counselling and conventional counselling were 29.86 and 40.83 respectively. The mean difference value of -10.97 indicates that students exposed to behavioural counselling had a significant reduction in bullying behaviour than those exposed to conventional counselling.

**Research Question 2:** What is the effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students in when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pretest and posttest mean scores?

*Table 2 Pretest and Posttest Bullying Behaviour Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Exposed to Behavioural Counselling and those Exposed to Conventional Counselling.*



Approaches	Pretest Bullying Behavior				Posttest Bullying Behavior			
	Gender	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	Adj. M
Behavioural	Male	11	58.30	3.80	11	31.00	3.86	30.80
	Female	9	54.67	3.57	9	28.67	3.57	28.92
Conventional	Male	9	57.70	5.91	10	40.70	10.58	41.59
	Female	7	55.17	2.71	6	41.33	8.09	40.96
Counseling	Male	20	58.58	4.84	20	35.85	9.21	36.19
	Female	16	54.87	3.16	16	33.73	8.48	34.49

Results in Table 2 showed that the posttest mean bullying behaviour of male students exposed to behavioural counselling was 31.00 with standard derivation of 3.86 while that of the female students was 28.67 with standard derivation of 3.57. The posttest mean score for male student exposed to conventional counselling was 40.70 with standard derivation of 10.58 and that of the female students was 41.33 with standard derivation of 8.09. The adjusted mean score for male student exposed to behavioural counselling was 30.80 while the adjusted mean score for the female student was 28.92. On the other hand, the adjusted mean score students exposed to conventional counselling were 41.59 and 40.96 for male and female students respectively. These show that, for students exposed to behavioural counselling, there was a mean difference of 1.88 in favour of female students, and a mean difference of 0.63 in favour of female students. The mean difference for the behavioural counselling group implies that female students exposed to behavioural counselling had lightly more reduction in bullying behaviour compared to the male students exposed to the same counselling technique.

### Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of students exposed to behavioural counselling approach when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pretest and posttest scores?

**Table 3: Analysis of Covariance on the Bullying Behaviour Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Students Exposed to Behavioural Counselling and those Exposed to Conventional Counselling.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	Partial Squared
Corrected Model	1211.70	4	302.93	6.28	.001	.456
Intercept	690.14	1	690.14	14.32	.001	.323
Pretest Scores	125.25	1	125.25	2.60	.117	.080
Counseling Approaches	1042.70	1	1042.70	21.63	.000	.419
Gender	38.26	1	38.26	.79	.380	.026
Counseling Approaches	25.19	1	25.19	.52	.475	.017
Gender						
Error	1446.18	30	48.21			
Total	45393.00	35				
Corrected Total	2657.89	34				

The results in Table 3 showed that there was a significant difference in the adjusted posttest mean scores of students exposed to behaviour counselling and those exposed to conventional counselling approach,  $F(1,30) = 21.63, p = 0.000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .42$ . The null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected. This implies that the adjusted mean bullying score of students exposed to behavioural counselling ( $M = 29.86$ ) was significantly less than the mean bullying behaviour score of students exposed to conventional counselling ( $M = 40.83$ ). The partial eta squared (partial  $\eta^2 = .419$ ) suggests that the effect of behavioural counselling approach on reducing bullying behaviour among students was large.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female secondary school students exposed to behavioural counselling approach when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pretest and posttest scores?

**Table 4: Analysis of Covariance on the Bullying Behaviour Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Exposed to Behavioural Counselling and those Exposed to Conventional Counselling.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	Partial Squared
Corrected Model	1211.70	4	302.93	6.28	.001	.456
Intercept	690.14	1	690.14	14.32	.001	.323
Pretest Scores	125.25	1	125.25	2.60	.117	.080
Counseling Approaches	1042.70	1	1042.70	21.63	.000	.419
Gender	38.26	1	38.26	.79	.380	.026
Counseling Approaches	25.19	1	25.19	.52	.475	.017
Gender						
Error	1446.18	30	48.21			
Total	45393.00	35				
Corrected Total	2657.89	34				

The results displayed in Table 4, shows there was no significant difference in the adjusted mean bullying behaviour scores of male and female  $F(1,30) = 0.79, p = 0.38$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ . The null hypothesis was, therefore, not rejected. This implies that the adjusted mean bullying behaviour score of male students ( $M = 36.19$ ) was not significantly different from the adjusted mean bullying behaviour score of females ( $M = 34.49$ ). The partial eta (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ) indicates that the effect of gender on bullying behaviour was small.

### Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that the mean scores of secondary school students exposed to behavioural counselling had mean pretest score of 56.58 and mean posttest score of 29.89. On the other hand, those exposed to conventional counselling had a mean pretest score of 56.75 and mean posttest score of 40.94. The standard deviation scores were 3.81 and 9.44 respectively. This showed that there was greater variability in the distribution of bullying behaviour score of students exposed to conventional counselling approach. The adjusted mean bullying behaviour score for two groups were 29.86 and 40.83. The mean difference of -10.97 indicated that students exposed to



behavioural counselling had a significant reduction in bullying behaviour than those exposed to conventional counselling. In other words, behavioural counselling approach is effective in improving positive behaviour among secondary school student. The result of the null hypothesis indicated that there was a significant difference in the adjusted posttest mean scores of students exposed to behaviour counselling and those exposed to conventional counselling approach,  $F(1,30) = 21.61, p = 0.000, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .42$ . The null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected. This implies that the adjusted mean bullying score of students exposed to behavioural counselling ( $M = 29.86$ ) was significantly less than the mean bullying behaviour score of students exposed to conventional counselling ( $M = 40.83$ ). The partial eta squared (partial  $\eta^2 = .419$ ) suggested that the effect of behavioural counselling approach on reducing bullying behaviour among students was large. The findings of the study are in consonance with the results of Ekwelundu {2022} and Adeoye and Okonkwo (2019) who found a significant reduction in the bullying behaviour of secondary school students. The finding was expected and not surprising because behavioural counselling approach is a treatment that works to help individual learn new positive behaviours to override or minimize the unwanted behaviours.

The findings of the study revealed that the adjusted mean score for male student exposed to behavioural counselling was 30.80 while the adjusted mean score for the female student was 28.92. On the other hand, the adjusted mean score students exposed to conventional counselling were 41.59 and 40.96 for male and female students respectively. These showed that, for students exposed to behavioural counselling, there was a mean difference of 1.88 in favour of female students, and a mean difference of 0.63 in favour of female students. The mean difference for the behavioural counselling group implies that female students exposed to behavioural counselling had lightly more reduction in bullying behaviour compared to the male students exposed to the same counselling technique. The result of the null hypothesis showed there was no significant difference in the adjusted mean bullying behaviour scores of male and female  $F(1,30) = 0.79, p = 0.38, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.03$ . The null hypothesis was, therefore, not rejected. This implied that the adjusted mean bullying behaviour score of male students ( $M = 36.19$ ) was not significantly different from the adjusted mean bullying behaviour score of females ( $M = 34.49$ ). The partial eta (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ) indicated that the effect of gender on bullying behaviour was small. Also, that there was no significant interaction effect of gender and counselling approaches on students mean bullying behaviour,  $F(1,30) = 0.52, p = 0.48, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.02$ . The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected. This implies that the behaviour counselling approach reduced the bullying behaviour of both male and female students compared to the conventional counselling approach. The value of the partial eta shows that gender and counselling approaches had small interaction effect on students' bullying behaviour. The findings of this study is in agreement with the view of Isiaku {2016} and Fareo and Hanis (2018) who revealed no significant difference existed in the experimental treatment on the reduction level of bullying behaviour between male and female secondary school students. The reason for this result might be that the treatment is effective irrespective of gender.



## Conclusion

The study investigated effect of behavioural counselling approach on bullying behaviour among secondary school student in Onitsha Education Zone, Anambra State. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that students exposed to behavioural counselling had a significant reduction in bullying behaviour compared to those exposed to conventional counselling. This implied that the effect of behavioural counselling approach on reducing bullying behaviour among students was large. Gender was not a significant factor in students bullying behaviour as the adjusted mean bullying behaviour score of male students was not significantly different from the adjusted mean bullying behaviour score of females, thus indicated that the effect of gender on bullying behaviour was small.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made

1. As a result of the fact that behaviour counselling approach had significant effect in reducing bullying behaviour among secondary school students, professional guidance counsellors, psychologists and other care providers practicing in the secondary schools should utilize behavioural counselling approach in treating and reducing bullying behaviour among secondary school students.
2. Management of secondary school should regularly organize in service education programme such as conferences, workshops, and seminars to educate the participants on the consequences and dangers of bullying and other maladaptive behaviour.
3. The Guidance Counsellors should ensure that they go into collaborative and cooperative ventures with the state government, Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) Counseling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) and other stakeholders in the education sector, in ensuring that more trained Guidance Counsellors are employed in secondary school and as well sensitize, train and retrain counsellors on how to use behaviour counselling approach to help students overcome their maladaptive behaviour.

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