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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BULLYING AMONG BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media has opened new channels for human communication and formed new meeting points for youths. This is with attendant positive and negative effects on youth behaviour. Being a prerequisite task in education for youth development, boarding schools offer students a good opportunity to cooperate with and learn to respect other people's habits and values. They also develop social and communication skills through interaction with other students and staff. It's within the context of boarding schools that prompted by varying displays of violence on social media during holidays, bullying comes into play. The study identified these forms of bullying: physical, verbal emotional, sexual, cyber and tribal bullying. Anchored on Social Learning Theory, findings include that bullying does not occur between individuals of equivalent power. Exposure to violent video games during vacation can lead to aggressive displays on school resumption. Physical and cyber bullying are reportedly the most common forms of bullying. The article recommends a reorganization of academic programmes in boarding schools as students are encouraged to speak up in the event of any act of bullying towards them.

Keywords: Boarding School, Bullying, Social Media, Students, Violence

Introduction

Innovation and discoveries have been influenced by technological developments, particularly in the areas of communication and information distribution. It's crucial to remember that the internet is one of these discoveries. In today's world of digital technology, anyone may connect to any location on the globe in a matter of seconds or minutes by using any social media network. Our daily lives have been impacted by the advent of information and communication technology (ICT), particularly the internet (Nahiduzzaman & Aldosary, 2012). Through the emergence of social media, the expansion of the internet in the 21st century has opened up new channels for human communication. The internet's rapid development has had an impact that has spread more quickly than any previous means of communication, including radio, television, and even mobile phones (Balakrishnan, Dahnil, & Yi, 2014).

The emergence of social media and its gradual integration into our daily lives has definitely altered the society we live in. Kuss and Griffiths (2011) opine that social media platforms are a recent innovation that was created to promote communication. Due to how quickly they spread and how many people are using them, both their personal and professional lives are now completely dependent on them. Hence, the internet is now a meeting point of interaction for a large number of the population especially youths.

For most young people in Nigeria, the social media are the new church where users mark attendance on a daily basis (Okunna, 2018).

The way youths communicate, connect, maintain contacts, form relationships and socialize online, has been altered by social media in ways that have never been seen before. This has had a profound impact on the social world of youths and their lives. Students sometimes abuse the socializing tools by neglecting the informative and educational benefits that social media has to offer. These displays have gradually made an impact on the morals that young people exhibit in classrooms today. Social media has also brought about behavioural changes among youths as they tend to imitate what they see online including the social vices (Guo, 2022). It is constantly changing their attitude, through trends posted online daily which can be seen on pages followed on social media platforms. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and Twitter provide access to new moral and social behaviour trends and have become a place where majority go to for updates. Stein (2014) stated that social network platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have become an integral part of everyday life with 60% using social media as their primary source of information. The coming of social media has caused both positive and negative effects in the behaviour of secondary school students. Everything the youths see or hear in the media early in their lives, affect them in some way.

Every country that is dedicated to development works to create an educational system that reflects the changing demands of the country. These changes are typically not the result of compulsion, but rather of the people and the government's shared desire to create a system that satisfies their objectives and aspirations, presenting long-term requirements (Putterman, 2013). This is because, education as one of the vital and crucial tools needed for change, promotes mind formation from childhood to adulthood in a designed environment called school. Here, learning and acquisition of skills can take place for total development of each individual in the society and the nation as a whole (Idris, Hassan, Ya'acob, Gill, & Awal, 2012). With this in mind, many parents that understand the importance of education choose secondary boarding schools so that their days' 'hustling and bustling' will not affect the academic activities of their children. Positive parenting role models indicate that in the best interest of children, society should limit their exposure to violent acts. Unfortunately violence is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Nigeria especially in films and movies (Uzochukwu & Anierobi, 2020).

Boarding school, according to British Council (2020) is a residential school where students live and study during the school year. Based on this definition, students in boarding schools are accommodated in the school compound by the management of such schools. This implies that the school management takes full care of the students under their control, both academic and feeding during the academic session. Boarding school can be described as a college preparatory institution where students and teachers live and study together in a safe and secure school environment. This definition of boarding school indicates that staff of such schools should be equally accommodated alongside with the students in a more secure and conducive school environment. In boarding schools, as Efosa-Ehioghiren, Ezekiel, Orusengha, (2022) put it, students can develop skills that can serve them to live

in a broader community. More so, in learning and living together with each other as students, boarding schools offer the students a good opportunity to help each other with their studies during and after school hours. They can cooperate and respect other people's habits and values, develop social and communication skills through interaction with other students and staff. Similarly, UNESCO (2019) stated that boarding schools provide a centralized location for learning and living that can be an effective link for students' regular reading. This is because the system has a scheduled time for reading in their curriculum, and this facilitates the use of the school library and library books. On this premise, students can develop independence, self-confidence, responsibility and strong personality.

More so, there is the case of bullying in boarding schools. Bullying behaviour is prevalent in a lot of boarding schools all over the world. The definition of bullying varies and this research paper will adopt Olweus (2013) and Kaplan's definition of bullying as student's exposure, repeatedly, and overtime to negative actions that may involve verbal, violent and aggressive behaviour (Zhang, Ra,Zhang, Zhang & MacLeod, 2016). Sampson (2002) adds that bullying is targeted at students who cannot properly defend themselves due to their small body sizes, strength, or being outnumbered. It is targeted on younger or weaker students who are not able to defend themselves. The most perplexing issue is that victims of bullying do not report bullying behaviours although bullying tends to be long lasting (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). The reasons for not reporting vary. For example, some victims feel adults do not take the issue seriously while others are threatened with death if they are reported (Rigby, 2013).

Another definition believes that bullying is a repetitive and systematic act that encompasses a variety of harmful actions such as social exclusion, pushing, shoving, grabbing or even destroying personal belongings. While another definition considers it a deliberate yet conscious desire to hurt and oppress another person, either occasionally and briefly, or frequently and over a long period of time. An equally interesting definition states that school bullying is the main form in which school violence occurs and is a deliberate act aimed at causing physical or mental harm, pain and subjugation of the victim to children (Karagianni & Karabatzaki, 2022). Tactlessly, in some boarding schools in Nigeria, there seems to be neglect of the students. In some cases, certain students become non-state actors in taking the laws of the school into their hands by bullying younger students. Many of the students might take laws into their hands by disciplining and bullying other younger students who do not obey the laws of the school or obey their commands while others take the opportunity to bully the students to join cults, armed robbery, gangsterism and many other social vices.

It is important to note that the management of such boarding facilities usually employ staff other than their school and subject teachers who see to the wellbeing of the students after school. The students who travel home for vacation at the end of each term are exposed to social media whose content have both moral and social vices and upon resumption, they tend to practice and display some of the bullying content on their fellow students. The study looks at how social media has influenced the different types of bullying and the most common act of bullying that is prevalent in boarding schools in Nigeria.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter as well as other social networking sites contain one act of bullying or the other. The only type of bullying that most people are aware of is physical bullying. This is due to the fact that it is obvious and entails physically intimidating a person and assaulting them. Students frequently express the desire to physically bully someone, which entails employing force or violence to subjugate the target. Physical bullies in schools are easy to identify since they frequently outweigh their peer group in size and physical power. The act of physical bullying, which includes slapping, kicking, biting, hitting, threatening, pulling hair and similar behavior, not only harms the victim physically but also mentally. This may have an impact on the student's rate of study and overall educational trajectory (Phillips, Bowie, Wan & Yukevich, 2018). Some boarding students use this type of bullying to extort provisions and personal belongings of junior students.

However, most boarding school teachers might not be aware of verbal bullying among students, in contrast to physical bullying. However, verbal abuse has a negative impact on a victim's physical and mental health. Verbal bullying is common in settings like boarding secondary schools, where students enjoy calling themselves derogatory names and spreading rumors that they may have seen or heard on social media over time. Name-calling may be demoralizing and many bullies use it as a means of intimidation against their targets. These bullies strive to make their victims feel unloved or unworthy by picking on their weaknesses (Liu & Graves, 2011).

Another subtle and damaging form of bullying in boarding school that frequently goes unreported by parents and teachers is emotional bullying. It goes nearly unnoticed since it entails the student manipulating their fellow student's thinking to prevent them from participating in activities with their peer group. Emotional intimidation can have an impact on a student's social life, which can result in depression, unhappiness, and low self-esteem. Making someone appear less significant and causing the victims to feel less of themselves are two characteristics of emotional aggression, especially when they are dealing with family issues or financial hardship. It has been noted that majority of primary and secondary school children in Nigeria who attempted suicide did so as a result of emotional bullying (Omoteso, 2010).

Another sort of intimidation that incorporates insulting remarks or strange physical contact is sexual bullying. Although sexual harassment of boys is not just as prevalent as it is of girls, it nevertheless occurs. For instance, calling a boy a "woman-wrapper" is widely used in Nigeria. This can be the case because the male student only hangs out with female students or because they perceive him as being too weak to qualify as a man. Some bullies can make fun of a secondary school girl's developing breasts at a young age and cause the girl to feel terrible about herself. Sexual bullying is typically characterized by touching the private area without consent, offensive remarks, making the male feel less like a man and indecent gestures that embarrass the victim (Hlavka, 2014). Bullying in secondary schools frequently involves sexual intimidation, particularly during the puberty stage when teenagers are shifting from childhood to adulthood. Students are prone to feeling insecure and open to bullying at this point. It is important to emphasize that if parents and teachers fail to act quickly to stop the situation, sexual intimidation may turn into sexual abuse.

These comprise an aftermath of exposure from social media which when not properly censored and students after visiting such sites tend to practice same immoral acts using their fellow students (Citron, 2014).

The benefits of technology are undeniable. It can be utilized to further one's education or used in locating useful study materials. It has also developed into a venue for online bullying of others. Cyber bullying is a highly widespread epidemic which has distilled into internet bullying in Nigeria on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. For instance, some tribes in Nigeria belittle and make other tribes feel inferior through the type of content posted on social media. Students in primary and secondary boarding schools may now use the internet and are aware of what is happening there. These children often target minority groups and tell them how unimportant they are, replicating the online bullying that occurs in schools (Kumashiro, 2020).

Tribal Bullying, mentioned in cyber bullying, refers to the persecution of a child or adult because you believe that person's tribe is of no significance. This keeps endangering the student's peace of mind. According to a survey, tribal hostility is on the rise in Nigeria and is further exacerbating the tribal lines in the nation (Chagnon, 2013). Additionally, bullying frequently takes on various forms throughout time. Recent years have seen an increase in awareness of cyber bullying or bullying that occurs online. Because such bullying may expand to unstructured settings, it might be challenging for schools to take action. (Dinakar, Jones, Havasi, Lieberman, & Picard, 2012**).** Given that the school should be a place where students go to learn, not to be terrified, it should be a secure environment for all students. Bullying at school worsens children's feelings of insecurity and jeopardizes their health, wellbeing, and commitment to their studies.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The notion of social learning theory was first introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977. Bandura (1977) suggests that a lot of learning takes place through observation first, prior to doing it personally. This theory posits that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modelling. It requires attention to the person observed, remembering what was observed, the ability to replicate the behavior and the motivation to act the same way. According to Bandura, people observe behaviour either directly through social interactions with others or indirectly by observing behaviours through media.

The theory is that of learning process and social behavior which brings about new behaviors which is acquired from observing and imitating others. Joseph (2021) explains this as surfing the net and our social networks account, interacting with our social capital and getting exposed to many incidents a day, including theatres, movies, series and social media practices. This results in observing the behaviour of others which can influence other people. Through the exposure to social media, students tend to imitate behaviours they see being displayed on different social media sites.

Applying the theory to this study, one can say that the students learn new social behaviour from social media as well as from celebrities on social media platforms by observing, imitating and modelling. If students see their favorite celebrity using verbal abusive words on social media, they tend to acquire knowledge of such words and there is a possibility that they would adjust their attitude towards such verbal abusive words

thereby displaying such on their fellow students.

Social learning theory states that if humans were motivated to learn a particular behaviour, that particular behaviour would be learned through clear observation. By imitating these observed actions, the individual observer would solidify that learned action and be rewarded with positive reinforcement (Miller & Dollard, 1941).

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This research is categorized as a content analysis. Content analysis is also a part of library research that is, analyzing the content of similar works done by various researchers relating to the study. The design used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative is the method that used to describe the condition and situation of something specifically. In other words, this method is describing the condition of existence and classifying the information. In this study, the researcher used descriptive qualitative method. This study is aimed to analyze the influence of social media on bullying among boarding school students in Nigeria and also what is seen as the most dominant type of bullying found in boarding secondary schools in Nigeria. The study uses descriptive qualitative method in in depth understanding of the data. The reason for conducting a qualitative research is because the researchers want to understand the context or setting in which participants in a study address a problem or issue. Qualitative researchers seek to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. The goal is to present a holistic picture and depth of understanding rather than a numeric analysis of data.

- It was discovered that bullying does not take place when there is disagreement between individuals of equivalent or similar power. The difference is crucial because being repeatedly attacked or threatened by an entity with greater power may have different repercussions than being repeatedly threatened or assaulted by an entity with comparable power. In the first scenario, one is more likely to feel helpless. (Ybarra, Boyd, Korchmaros & Oppenheim, 2012). The junior students are mostly bullied by their seniors not their peers.
- The study's findings claim that because students frequently utilize the internet, mobile devices and video games to communicate with one another and obtain information, exposure to social media content encourages aggressive behaviour among students. The distinctive quality of social media that gives students effective tools to design and navigate their social settings, is its interactivity and entertainment functions. It was discovered that violent video games played by students during holidays and during summer vacation can lead to subsequent display of aggressive behavioural issues once school resumes. The function of social media in the adolescent has undergone a revolutionary change.
- Comparing oneself to others is an unavoidable means to experience anxiety and social media has made it even simpler to do so. Although social media makes it easier to make friends and meet new people, it also gives the abusive ones a quick and easy way to pick on others. Backing up the above findings, Adedayo, & Aborisade, (2018) affirmed that social media gives unrestricted access

to images of actual violence. For instance, recent videos of killings, performance of rituals and gang fights posted on social media may have increased general exposure and the likelihood of imitated aggressiveness. It is now well acknowledged that young people commit violent acts against their peers on social media, including bullying, harassment and relationship violence. The unregulated and unedited environment offered by social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram make it easy for young people to be exposed to unlawful activity and abusive behaviour. Studies say that young people who watch violent content online have a higher risk of committing severe crimes and are more inclined to copy violence (Anderson, Berkowitz, Wartella, 2003; Tosyali, 2018; Guo, 2022).

- In Nigeria, even though cases of bullying have been reported in many schools, this deviant act is not always given any desirable attention. Furthermore, there are no available statistical facts to show the actual number of students that are bullied or victims of bullying in Nigerian schools. This lack of statistical facts and absence of well documented evidence has made it difficult to appreciate the prevalence of bullying behaviour in Nigeria. The findings also revealed that watching violent films and video games/videos encourage aggressive behaviour among young people. The research also showed that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others encourage aggressive behavior among teenagers, such as hitting children. Frequent usage of social media sites can result in addiction, negative habits, criminal vulnerabilities and security risks including fraud, imitation, fraudulent writing and blogging, among other things.
- Furthermore it was seen that physical bullying and cyberbullying is the most common type of bullying propagated by students and young people.

Conclusion

It is clear from situational analysis of boarding school violence in Nigeria that physical violence occurs frequently in our country's educational system. Despite the turn in events, the Federal Ministry of Education (2007) notes that its elimination or reduction remains a major problem. This is partly due to the fact that violent incidents in Nigerian schools are typically not widely reported. The reason for this is because majority of students believe school officials won't take any action if they ever report instances of physical abuse and most times the students are threatened by their bullies not to report. According to this study's findings, social media is a necessary component of young adulthood though its negative health effects from over use are unavoidable. Teenagers today interact often with media goods and are exposed to violent scenes in practically all types of media content. Spending too much time in front of a screen can be detrimental, leading to a sedentary lifestyle and hazardous actions. Long-term use of violent social media platforms and exposure to their content raise the propensity for aggression and violent actions.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- Students should be encouraged to speak up in the event of any act of bullying perpetuated towards them. There should be immediate action taken by the school authorities when reports are received.
- Academic programs and lessons in our boarding secondary schools need to be reorganized. More than merely theory, it ought to involve implementation, fact-finding, and problem-solving. This will encourage students, who at this age are full of life and energy, to spend majority of their holidays/ vacation at home working on academic assignments rather than spending hours evaluating various social media sites and watching violent movies.
- The fact that social media is popular among adolescents and adolescence is a period of turbulence, it is worth considering that parents play an important role during the adolescence period. Parents' role in educating adolescents on how to behave and interact with each other is really important as the family is one of the primary social environments for adolescents. Having an informed discussion with their children may prevent them from aggressive behaviours.
- Teachers and parents have to control the access a child has to the internet. Too much flexibility in child tending should be avoided by parents. They should look over and monitor the shows that their children watch as well as the different websites they visit/evaluate every day.
- The Nigerian Communication Commission should control and screen the content and quality of programs communicated via various social media platforms and sites to limit or eradicate transmission of violent materials to the barest minimum.

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