



Research Paper: Effectiveness of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy in Reducing Bullying Behaviours of Adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria



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Abstract

Objective: This study examined the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Methods: This study adopted a quasi-experimental design. The population of this study was 3,222 SS1 students of the 2022/2023 Academic Session and a sample of 24 adolescents were drawn as subjects of the study using purposive sampling. The researchers used a questionnaire titled Adolescents' Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (ABPQ) for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using paired samples and independent samples t-test to analyze the hypotheses.

Results: The findings revealed that CBT was effective in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents. The findings also revealed that there was gender difference in the effectiveness of CBT in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents.

Conclusion: The researchers concluded that CBT is effective in ameliorating bullying behaviours among adolescent students.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period that is characterized by major transformations in the lives of young people. At this stage, the changes occur physically, mentally and socially. These changes are manifest through their abilities to form interpersonal relationships. [Musa and Sababa \(2013\)](#) assert that adolescence is a period filled with new experiences, new responsibilities and new relationship between adults and the young people themselves. This period comes with its dangers, stress, frustration, anxiety and several deviant or behavioral problems. In some cases, these challenges may lead to maladaptive behaviours, poor academic performance, and even mental health problems. While some individuals deal with the challenges of adolescence successfully, many however, develop difficulties that can have enduring consequences for their later functioning and well-being ([Huesmann et al., 2009](#)). These difficulties may appear in different forms through strained interpersonal relationships, social anxiety, aggressive and violent behaviours such as bullying.

Olweus and Limber as cited in [Mbadugha et al. \(2019\)](#) described bullying behaviour as being subjected to unfavorable acts by one or more other students on a regular basis over an extended period of time. Attempting or purposefully causing harm or suffering to others is one example of such harmful behaviour. The harm or discomfort can be inflicted physically (such as by hitting, kicking, pushing, or choking) or verbally (such as by calling names, threatening,

taunting, malicious teasing, or spreading nasty rumors). It can also show up in other ways, like making faces or obscene gestures, or by purposefully being left out of a group. While behaviours that indicate very blatant attacks (typically verbal or physical) on the victim are included in the category of “direct bullying,” the latter, usually subtler forms, are referred to as “indirect bullying.” The researchers of this paper see bullying as a conscious, deliberate and aggressive behaviour that is repeatedly targeted at individuals who are seen as weak and cannot stand for themselves through verbal insults and physical violence.

Even though scholars have found that bullying occurs in different social settings other than schools, its prevalence in the school environment exerts greater magnitude. However, there is contradiction as to the level of prevalence of this behavioural problem in Nigeria. Some researchers report high prevalence while others report low prevalence. Scholars like [Fenny and Falola \(2020\)](#) while investigating bullying behaviours among secondary school students, assert that the prevalence of bullying is 59.9%. Another survey conducted by [Ighaede-Edwards et al. \(2023\)](#) reports that 27.9% of students were bullies while 51.9% of students have experienced at least one type of bullying. [Egbochuku \(2007\)](#) found out that 78% of students in Nigerian schools have been victims of bullying while 71% were perpetrators of bullying behaviours. Based on these findings by previous scholars, it seems fair to draw a conclusion that bullying behaviours at schools are recognized as dangerous and harmful acts that victimize the

targeted students and bystanders. This behaviour has therefore, become a thing of concern to teachers, school management and the major educational stakeholders. There is need for an adequate intervention or strategy which calls for combatting and reducing such behaviours.

Studies have been conducted on various issues and topics; however, conclusion has not been reached on whether or not gender has any influence. Global studies on bullying behaviors among male and female students reported interesting findings. Scholars report that the level of being bullied and exhibiting bullying behaviour is higher among males than the females (Asiyai, 2015; Azid, 2022; Fenny & Falola, 2020; Umoke et al., 2020). In the same vein, Asiyai (2015) pointed out that bullying often occurred in boarding schools than day schools. Other scholars assert that female students exhibited higher bullying behaviours than their male counterparts. These studies also believe that the female students are more likely to be victims of bullying than the male students (Carbone-López et al., 2010; Olubunmi, 2015).

Literature reviews on bullying and psychosocial problems have reported the effectiveness of counselling/psychological interventions in ameliorating these behavioural problems. Some of these studies which were conducted by Asro et al. (2021) and Santy & Machmuda (2019) revealed that group counselling was effective in helping adolescents reduce bullying behaviours. Similarly, a study conducted by Efastri et al. (2015) reported the significant effectiveness of a behavioural approach in mitigating

bullying behaviours of students. Another study conducted by Selvia et al. (2017) found out that cognitive restructuring which is a technique of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) was effective in helping adolescents to think rationally and avoid these maladaptive behaviours. In the same line, Rini and Iswara (2020) found out that role-play exerted significant effect on the bullying behaviours of secondary school adolescents. Since previous studies utilized group counselling, thought stopping, cognitive restructuring, behavioural approach and role-playing in reducing bullying and these strategies were effective, the researchers of this study would like to use CBT in order to address the menace of bullying which has been bedeviling the school community in Taraba State.

According to Beck as cited in Ahmad (2019), CBT approach is a therapy that aims to change a client's cognitive or perception of a problem; thereby resulting in the client's change of emotions and behaviour. The main focus of CBT is to assist clients in examining and structuring maladaptive and dysfunctional core beliefs (Walters & Corey, 2013). The basic assumption of CBT approach is that the behaviour displayed is influenced by cognitive processes. With this in mind, CBT intervention not only focuses on changing behaviour of an individual but also intervenes in cognitive processes that affect emotions and behaviour. With regards to bullies, CBT can help restructure the illogical and irrational beliefs and thoughts of superiority over weaker students who they feel can easily be bullied. This can result in a

change of emotions and behaviours of the adolescent bully.

Bullying behaviours are a persistent problem in Nigerian schools specifically, schools located in Taraba State. Even though adequate researches have been conducted on bullying all over the globe, there is a dearth in research as regards to this behavioural problem (bullying) in Taraba State. While researchers like (Adamu et al. 2020; Amuche & Mbakwe, 2022) have conducted studies on deviant and social behaviours such as bullying, truancy etc., among students in Taraba State, these studies were surveys which rather than proffer appropriate intervention to handle the problem, only investigated the factors and consequences of the problem, and other variables such as relationship and counselling implication. Apparently, it has become necessary to delve into a study that can help students to adjust during the trying period of adolescence.

In the past years, teachers and the school management resort to corporal and other forms of punishments such as time-out, detention etc., in order to remedy the bullying behaviours exhibited by adolescent students. This strategy however, is far from effective as cases of bullying continue to be reported among secondary school students in Taraba State. This therefore calls for the utilization of more effective strategies and interventions. It is with this in mind that the researchers conducted this study in order to find out if CBT could be the most effective intervention that can be used in reducing the bullying behaviours exhibited by adolescent students in this region. The research hypotheses are:

1. There is no significant effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy in reducing bullying among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant gender difference in the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy in reducing bullying among adolescents in Taraba State.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design, Statistical Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

This study is a quasi-experimental research which utilizes the pre-test, post-test design. Intact class was used as treatment group since the subjects were drawn from educational settings. This study was carried out in Jalingo Education Zone. The Education Zone is a region in the Northern part of Taraba State; one of the States in Northern Nigeria. This Education Zone is comprised of three Local Government Areas i.e., Jalingo, Ardo-kola and Lau. The population for this study was 3,222 SS1 students of the 2022/2023 Academic Session. Simple random sampling was used in selecting one Jalingo LGA from the three LGAs in the region. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to draw a sample of 24 adolescents for the study. The sample subjects comprised of equal number of male and female adolescent students (i.e. 12 males and 12 females). In order to arrive at the sample size, the researchers conducted an administration of questionnaires to serve as baseline for the selection of participants for the study. 50 questionnaires were administered to the students of Government Day Secondary School Kofai, Ardo Kola.

After the administration, 24 adolescent students were identified as having moderate bullying behaviours. They were therefore selected to participate in the study.

2.2. Instruments

The instrument for data collection was a 30 items questionnaire titled “Adolescent Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (ABPQ)” the instrument has two sections; section A which contained the demographic information of the participants such as; gender, age and class while section B contained items designed to measure the subjects’ Behavioural problems. In order to determine the content and construct validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was validated by two experts in counselling and psychology and one expert in measurement and evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, copies of the instrument were trial tested on a sample of 32 adolescent students with bullying behaviours who were drawn from two secondary schools in Zing LGA; an area not part of the study. The reliability index of

the instrument was established using Pearson product moment correlation which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

The study was conducted in three phases. At the first phase, data for the study was collected during the baseline study or the first administration of questionnaires. At the second phase, the researchers designed 8-week treatment plan using techniques of CBT in order to expose the clients to the therapy. After the therapy, the questionnaire was administered to the participants as posttest.

The data collected was analyzed using inferential statistics of paired and independent samples t-test to test the hypothesis. The reason why the researchers chose this type of statistics is because, t-test is used in comparing the means of two matched groups of people or it is used in comparing the mean of a single group of cases examined at two different points in time (Ross & Willson, 2017).

3. Results

Paired samples t-test was used to test the first hypothesis of the research (Table 1).

Table 1.

Paired Samples t-test on the Effectiveness of CBT

Variable	Test	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig (p)
Bullying	Pretest	24	18.04	3.55	23	2.248	0.009
Behaviours	Posttest	24	14.45	4.84			

P < 0.05, t computed > 1.96 at df 23

Results of the Paired sample t-test statistics in table 1 showed that CBT has significant effectiveness in reducing bullying behaviours (t = 2.848, p = .009). The mean

score of the participants’ bullying behaviour before exposure to the treatment was 18.04 and it was reduced to 14.45 after exposure to treatment, implying a mean reduction

difference of 3.59 in favour of the post test scores. This shows that CBT has positive effect in reducing bullying behaviours.

Table 2.

Independent samples t-test on Gender Difference in the Effectiveness of CBT.

Variable	Test	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	Sig (p)
Bullying	Pretest	12	12.41	2.71	22	-2.237	0.036
Behaviours	Posttest	12	16.50	5.71			

$P > 0.05$, t computed > 1.96 at df 18

The result of the above independent samples t-test statistics in [table 2](#) shows that there is significant gender difference in the effectiveness of CBT in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents in Jalingo Education Zone. The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that scores were significantly lower for the male participants ($M = 12.41$, $SD = 2.71$) than the females ($M = 16.50$, SD). Since a reduction in the mean implies positive effect of the treatment, the scores showed a gain of 4.09 in favour of the males. Thus, it can be concluded that in treating bullying behaviours among adolescents in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, CBT proved to be more effective for the males than the females.

4. Discussion

The results indicate that there is significant effectiveness of CBT in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents. The reason for such effectiveness could be attributed to the utilization of cognitive behavioural techniques which were embedded in the treatment package as designed by the researchers and used during the treatment sessions. This finding agrees with [Santy and](#)

Independent samples t-test was used to test the second hypothesis of the research ([Table 2](#)).

[Machmuda \(2019\)](#) who conducted a study on minimizing bullying behaviours. The researchers concluded that CBT is effective in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents. The outcome of this study suggests that the utilization of CBT techniques in group sessions is effective in reducing bullying behaviours of individuals most especially adolescent students in senior secondary schools. The finding of the study also agrees with the finding of [Efastrri et al. \(2015\)](#) who conducted a study on the reduction of bullying behaviours using behavioural approach. The researchers found out that bullying behaviours of students drastically reduced when they were exposed to behavioural approaches in the treatment sessions conducted. The finding is also in line with [Selvia et al. \(2017\)](#) in a study conducted to test the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring and thought -stopping techniques to reduce bullying behaviours. The researchers found out that those techniques when effectively utilized in group sessions helped reduce bullying behaviours among students. Similarly, the finding is in agreement with that of [Asro et al. \(2021\)](#) who found out that group counselling was effective in decreasing bullying behaviours

after the students were exposed to role-playing techniques. The finding is also in line with the finding of [Rini and Iswara \(2020\)](#) who carried out a study to find out the effectiveness of role-playing technique in reducing bullying behaviours. The researchers concluded that the techniques were effective in reducing bullying behaviours. CBT when used in a group counselling session helps adolescents developing empathy, and learning alternative strategies for conflict resolution. These findings suggest that CBT can be an effective intervention for addressing bullying behaviours among adolescents.

The results shows that there is a significant gender difference in the effectiveness of CBT in reducing bullying behaviours among adolescents. The reduction in bullying behaviours among male and female adolescents could be because of the utilization of cognitive restructuring techniques which sought to correct cognitive distortions related to bullying. The finding is in agreement with the finding of [Yahaya and Ma'aruf \(2014\)](#) who found out that the techniques of CBT proved to be more effective on male students than the females. However, [Ekwelundu et al. \(2022\)](#) found out in a study utilizing cognitive restructuring to reduce bullying behaviours that female participants benefitted more than male participants. However, this finding disagrees with the study conducted by [Moses \(2024\)](#) who utilized rational emotive behavior therapy; a form of CBT in order to reduce intolerant behaviours among secondary school adolescents. The researcher found out that the intervention was positively effective

on both the male and female adolescents. In another study conducted by [Aliero et al. \(2023\)](#), the researchers found that CBT intervention exerted the same treatment on both the male and female participants of the study. Another study conducted by [Chinweuba and Frank \(2023\)](#) also found a dissimilarity. The researchers found out in their study utilizing CBT to reduce bullying that the therapy was equally beneficial to male and female participants. CBT as a counselling intervention has proven its effectiveness in remediating bullying behaviours that secondary school adolescents exhibit. Therefore, CBT is both beneficial to male and female adolescents.

The implication of these findings is that the government and non-governmental organizations could liaise with professional counselling bodies in order to organize workshops and seminars to sensitize and train psychologists/counsellors on how to effectively use techniques of CBT in helping adolescent students to reduce bullying behaviours. Another implication is that since gender did not exert any significant effect in reducing bullying behaviours, counsellors and psychologists could combine CBT with other techniques in order effectively reduce bullying among adolescent students.

5. Conclusion

The researchers conclude based on the findings of this study that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) was effective in reducing bullying behaviour among adolescents. The study found out that techniques of CBT significantly reduced

bullying behaviours among adolescents. The findings therefore, indicate CBT when utilized in a group counselling session, is a valuable tool for reducing bullying behaviours which adolescents exhibit in the society.

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Conflict of interest

The researchers declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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