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The Impact of Bullying on Public Junior Secondary School Students in Rivers State: Counselling Strategies for Intervention

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ABSTRACT
This study examined impact of bullying on public junior secondary school students in Rivers State: Counselling strategies for intervention. Four objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 12,669 SS2 students in public senior secondary school in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The researcher made use of simple random sampling technique with sample size of 388 students. Self structured questionnaire titled: Impact of Bullying on Public Junior Secondary School Students Questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was given to three experts including one in Guidance and Counselling and two in Measurement and Evaluation for validation. Cronbach's Alpha formula was adopted to establish the reliability of 0.84. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions and z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the data analysis, the finding of the study revealed that bullying has negative impact on public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Based on the findings, the study recommend amongst others that school administrators should establish and enforce clear anti-bullying policies, with particular emphasis on preventing physical bullying, teachers and school counselors should provide regular guidance and counseling services, conflict resolution programs, and emotional support to help students cope with the psychological effects of verbal bullying and schools should promote positive peer relationships through anti-bullying campaigns, peer mentoring programs.
Keywords: bullying, junior secondary school, students

INTRODUCTION

Education is expected to provide a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where learners can develop intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally. A conducive school climate promotes effective teaching and learning, while exposing students to opportunities for positive interpersonal relationships and healthy development (Fortune, 2025). However, the increasing incidence of bullying in secondary schools has become a major concern for educators, parents, counsellors, and policymakers because it undermines students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and overall school adjustment. Bullying creates an atmosphere of fear and insecurity that interferes with the attainment of educational goals.

Bullying refers to repeated aggressive behaviour intentionally directed at an individual who is perceived to be less powerful or unable to defend himself or herself. It involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim and may occur physically, verbally, socially, psychologically, or through electronic means (cyberbullying). Common examples include hitting, kicking, teasing, threatening, spreading rumours, social exclusion, intimidation, and online harassment. Unlike ordinary conflicts among peers, bullying is deliberate, repetitive, and intended to cause physical or emotional harm (Gabriel-Job &Azubogu, U2022). Research has consistently shown that bullying is a global educational and public health issue affecting learners across different cultural and socio-economic settings.

Bullying is particularly detrimental during the junior secondary school years because students at this developmental stage are undergoing significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. Adolescents are more likely to be influenced by peer relationships, making them vulnerable to intimidation, rejection, and victimization. Victims of bullying often experience psychological distress, reduced classroom participation, school avoidance, loneliness, and diminished confidence, while students who engage in bullying behaviour may develop aggression, antisocial tendencies, and poor interpersonal relationships. Consequently, bullying negatively affects not only individual learners but also the overall school climate and educational outcomes (Fenny &Falola, 2020).

In Rivers State, bullying remains a significant concern within public secondary schools despite efforts by school authorities to maintain discipline. Empirical evidence from the state has shown that bullying behaviours are associated with poorer psychological well-being and reduced academic performance among secondary school students. Similarly, research conducted among junior secondary school students in Rivers State found that bullying behaviours negatively influence students' academic performance and highlighted the need for counselling-based interventions within schools(Fenny &Falola, 2020).

Beyond its academic consequences, bullying has serious implications for students' mental health and social adjustment. Victims frequently experience fear, emotional trauma, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulty establishing healthy peer relationships. In severe cases, prolonged exposure to bullying may lead to school dropout, self-harm ideation, substance abuse, or violent retaliatory behaviour.

Guidance and counselling services play a critical role in preventing and managing bullying in schools. Professional school counsellors are equipped to provide preventive education, individual and group counselling, peer mediation, conflict resolution, behaviour modification, empathy training, and social skills development for both victims and perpetrators (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston2022).

Despite growing awareness of bullying and its adverse effects, reports suggest that bullying continues to occur in many public junior secondary schools in Rivers State. Existing disciplinary measures often emphasize punishment without adequately addressing the emotional, psychological, and social factors that sustain bullying behavior (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston2022).

Physical Bullying and the Academic Impact on Public Junior Secondary School Students

Physical bullying is one of the most visible forms of bullying experienced by students in schools. It involves intentional acts of physical aggression such as hitting, kicking, pushing, pinching, punching, slapping, tripping, damaging personal belongings, and other forms of physical intimidation directed repeatedly at a less powerful student (Fareo, 2015). Physical bullying creates an unsafe learning environment that interferes with students' ability to participate effectively in academic activities. Victims often attend school with fear and anxiety, making it difficult for them to concentrate on classroom instruction or engage confidently in learning tasks.

Physical bullying also affects students' psychological well-being in ways that hinder academic success. Victims commonly experience fear, stress, anxiety, emotional distress, and low self-esteem after repeated physical victimization (Nwala, 2025). These emotional difficulties impair memory, problem-solving ability, classroom participation, and examination performance. Students who feel unsafe at school are less likely to ask questions, interact with teachers, or participate in group learning activities, thereby limiting their academic development.

Furthermore, injuries resulting from physical bullying may directly interfere with learning. Students who sustain bruises, cuts, sprains, or other physical injuries may require medical attention or periods of absence from school. Even when injuries are not severe, the pain and discomfort associated with physical

assaults can reduce students' ability to concentrate during lessons and complete academic tasks effectively. Consequently, repeated physical victimization contributes to declining academic performance over time(Olweus, 2023).

Verbal Bullying and the Psychological Impact on Public Junior Secondary School Students

Verbal bullying is one of the most common forms of bullying experienced by students in secondary schools. It involves the repeated use of spoken or written words intended to humiliate, intimidate, threaten, or emotionally harm another person. Examples of verbal bullying include name-calling, teasing, insults, mocking, ridicule, abusive language, derogatory comments, and threats (Olweus, 2023). Although verbal bullying does not usually result in visible physical injuries, its psychological effects can be profound and long-lasting. Victims often experience emotional pain that adversely affects their mental health, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

The psychological impact of verbal bullying is particularly severe among public junior secondary school students because they are at a developmental stage characterized by rapid emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During early adolescence, students are highly sensitive to peer acceptance and social approval. Repeated verbal abuse can damage their self-concept, making them feel rejected, worthless, or inferior (Swearer, Espelage, and Vaillancourt & Hymel2020).

Social Bullying and the Social Impact on Public Junior Secondary School Students

Social bullying, also referred to as relational or indirect bullying, is a form of bullying that aims to damage a person's social relationships, reputation, or sense of belonging within a peer group. Unlike physical bullying, social bullying often occurs through subtle behaviours such as deliberate exclusion from group activities, spreading false rumours, gossiping, public humiliation, manipulation of friendships, and encouraging others to reject or isolate a fellow student (Olweus, 2023). Although these behaviours may not leave physical injuries, they can have profound social and emotional consequences for victims, particularly during adolescence when peer acceptance is central to healthy development.

Furthermore, social bullying weakens students' sense of school belonging. A positive sense of belonging develops when students feel accepted, respected, and valued by their peers and teachers. However, repeated experiences of exclusion, rumour spreading, or deliberate humiliation can make victims feel unwanted and disconnected from the school community. Students who lack a sense of belonging are less likely to participate actively in school programmes, contribute during classroom discussions, or engage in cooperative learning activities (Espelage& Swearer, 2021).

Cyberbullying has also been associated with risky behaviours among adolescents. Research suggests that prolonged exposure to online harassment may increase the likelihood of substance misuse, truancy, running away from home, and other maladaptive coping behaviours among some young people. Although not all victims exhibit these behaviours, persistent cyberbullying can contribute to poor behavioural adjustment, especially when adequate family support and school counselling services are lacking. In severe cases, emotional distress associated with cyberbullying has been linked to self-harm and suicidal behaviour, highlighting the importance of early identification and intervention (Nwala, 2025).

Within the Nigerian context, cyberbullying has become more prevalent as adolescents gain greater access to smartphones, social media, and internet services. Although research on cyberbullying among junior secondary school students is still developing, existing studies indicate that online harassment negatively affects students' behaviour, emotional well-being, peer relationships, and academic engagement. Victims often experience fear, social withdrawal, reduced self-confidence, and behavioural problems that hinder their adjustment to school (Fareo, 2015).

In Rivers State, increasing access to digital communication technologies has created greater opportunities for cyberbullying among adolescents. Students who experience online harassment may become reluctant to interact with peers, participate in school activities, or seek help because of fear of embarrassment or retaliation. These behavioural changes can undermine the objectives of public junior secondary education by reducing students' participation, discipline, and overall adjustment to the school environment (Nwala, 2025).

Counselling Strategies for Intervention

Bullying among students has become a major concern because of its adverse effects on academic performance, emotional well-being, social adjustment, and the overall school climate. Consequently, effective intervention requires more than disciplinary measures; it demands comprehensive counseling programmes that address the needs of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and the wider school community. School counsellors play a central role in designing and implementing preventive and remedial interventions aimed at reducing bullying behaviours and promoting positive interpersonal relationships among students (Olweus, 2023).

Group Counselling: Group counselling provides students with opportunities to share experiences, express emotions, and learn from one another in a supportive environment. Victims of bullying can receive emotional support from peers facing similar challenges, while students who bully others can develop empathy by understanding the effects of their actions on others (Olweus, 2023).

Cognitive Behavioural Counselling (CBC): Cognitive Behavioural Counselling focuses on identifying and changing negative thoughts and behaviours that contribute to bullying. Counsellors help perpetrators recognize irrational beliefs that justify aggression while teaching victims strategies for managing fear, anxiety, and negative self-perceptions. Through cognitive restructuring, problem-solving exercises, and behavioural practice, students learn more appropriate ways of responding to interpersonal conflicts. This approach has been shown to reduce aggressive behaviour and improve emotional regulation. Peer Counselling and Peer Support Programmes Peer counselling involves training selected students to provide support, encouragement, and guidance to their classmates under the supervision of professional counsellors. Peer counsellors serve as role models, promote positive behaviour, identify students experiencing bullying, and encourage them to seek professional help when necessary. Peer support programmes foster inclusiveness, reduce social isolation, and strengthen students' sense of belonging within the school community (Olweus, 2023).

Implications for Public Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

In public junior secondary schools in Rivers State, counselling strategies should be integrated into the school's overall student support system. Government agencies, school administrators, teachers, parents, counsellors, and community stakeholders should collaborate to strengthen guidance and counselling services through the provision of trained professional counsellors, counselling resource centres, regular awareness campaigns, and continuous monitoring of students' behaviour. School authorities should also establish confidential reporting mechanisms and ensure prompt intervention whenever bullying incidents occur. By adopting comprehensive counselling strategies, schools can reduce bullying, improve students' psychological well-being, enhance academic performance, and promote peaceful and inclusive learning environments consistent with the objectives of quality education and student well-being (Olweus, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Schools are expected to provide a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment that promotes students' academic achievement, personal growth, and psychosocial well-being. However, bullying has become a persistent challenge in many public junior secondary schools, where students experience physical, verbal, social, and psychological victimization. Such experiences undermine learners' confidence, emotional stability, classroom participation, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. Although schools have established disciplinary measures to address misconduct, bullying continues to occur, suggesting that existing approaches may not adequately address the underlying behavioural and psychosocial factors that sustain the problem.

In Rivers State, reports from empirical studies indicate that bullying remains prevalent among secondary school students and is associated with adverse outcomes such as fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor concentration, absenteeism, declining academic performance, and difficulties in social adjustment (Jamabo & Ndimele, 2021; Fortune, 2025).

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the impact of bullying on public junior secondary school students in Rivers State: Counselling strategies for intervention. Specifically, the study sought to attain the following objectives:

1 To determine the extent to which physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State
2 To ascertain the extent to which verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State
3 To find out the extent to which social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State
4 To examine the extent to which cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent dophysical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?
2. To what extent do verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?
3. To what extent do social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?
4. To what extent do cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The researcher formulated the following nullhypotheses that guided the study:

1 There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State
2 There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State
3 There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State
4 There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised all the students of public senior secondary school in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, specially (SS2) numbering 12,669 students. There are 5,720 male students and 6,949female students. The sample size of the study was derived by applying the Taro Yamen's Procedure for determining appropriate samplesize of388 students. The researcher made use of simple random sampling technique. The instruments used for data collection was self structured questionnaires titled: Impact of Bullying on Public Junior Secondary School Students Questionnaire (IBPJSSSQ). The responses were rated based on the four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) – 4, High Extent (HE) – 3, Low Extent (LE) – 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) – 1 respectively. The instrument was submitted to 3 experts, 1 in Educational Pyschology, Guidance and Counselling and 2 in Measurement and Evaluation for possible corrections and input.

Cronbach'sAlphaformulawasadoptedtoestablishthereliabilityoftheinstruments.Twenty copies were administered to some students of senior secondary school in Emohua Local Government Area who were not part of the study population. Their responses were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha statics and a reliability index of 0.84, 0.78, 0.82 and 0.90 was obtained with the approximation of 0.84. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions and z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *To what extent does physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation analysis on the extent physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

S/No	Questionnaire Items	Male Students = 158			Female Students = 230		
		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	
1.	Physical bullying significantly affects the academic outcomes of students	2.89	0.85	High Extent	2.95	0.86	High Extent
2.	Students who experience physical bullying are more likely to encounter challenges that interfere with their learning and overall academic	2.86	0.83	High Extent	2.86	0.84	High Extent
3.	Victims of physical bullying often experience fear and anxiety about attending school	2.78	0.83	High Extent	2.91	0.85	High Extent
4.	Missing lessons reduces students' opportunities to understand classroom instruction, complete assignments	2.83	0.84	High Extent	2.82	0.84	High Extent
5.	Students who are repeatedly subjected to physical bullying may find it difficult to concentrate during lessons	2.86	0.84	High Extent	2.86	0.84	High Extent
	Grand Total	**2.84**	**0.84**		**2.88**	**0.85**	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 presents that items 1 to 5 have means of 2.89, 2.86, 2.78, 2.83, 2.86 for male students with standard deviations ranging from 0.85 to 0.84 and means of 2.95, 2.86, 2.91, 2.82, 2.86 for female students with standard deviations ranging from 0.86 to 0.84 which indicate "High Extent" on the extent physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Also, the grand means for male students and female students are 2.84 and 2.88 respectively, further confirming a "High Extent" on the extent physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Thus, it is found that physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a High Extent.

Research Question 2: *To what extent does verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation analysis on the extent verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

S/ No	Questionnaire Items	Male Students = 158			Female Students = 230		
		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	
6.	Verbal bullying significantly affects the psychological well-being of public junior secondary school students	2.86	0.84	High Extent	2.91	0.85	High Extent
7.	Verbal bullying have lasting effects on students' psychological development of students	2.83	0.84	High Extent	2.95	0.86	High Extent
8.	Students who are exposed to verbal bullying are likely to experience adverse psychological outcomes	2.97	0.86	High Extent	2.98	0.86	High Extent
9.	Students who are frequently subjected to verbal bullying may develop feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, humiliation and frustration	2.94	0.86	High Extent	2.99	0.86	High Extent
10.	Repeated exposure to hurtful words and negative comments can diminish their sense of self-worth and create persistent emotional discomfort	2.97	0.86	High Extent	2.98	0.86	High Extent
	Grand Total	**2.90**	**0.85**		**2.97**	**0.86**	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The information in table 2 shows that items 6 to 10 have means of 2.86, 2.83, 2.97, 2.94, 2.97 for male students with standard deviations ranging from 0.84 to 0.86 and means of 2.91, 2.95, 2.98, 2.99, 2.98 for female students with standard deviations ranging from 0.85 to 0.86 indicating a "High Extent" on the extent verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. The grand means for male and female students are respectively, 2.90 and 2.97, which is a confirmation of "High Extent" on the extent verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. The above results imply that verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a High Extent.

Research Question 3: *To what extent do social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State*?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation analysis on the extent social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

S/ No	Questionnaire Items	Male Students = 158			Female Students = 230		
		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	
11.	Social bullying significantly affects the social well-being of students	2.83	0.84	High Extent	2.91	0.85	High Extent
12.	students who experience social bullying are likely to encounter difficulties in their interpersonal relationships, social interactions	2.72	0.82	High Extent	2.86	0.84	High Extent
13.	Social bullying seriously disrupt healthy social development during adolescence	2.75	0.83	High Extent	2.93	0.85	High Extent
14.	Victims of social bullying face problem of building and maintaining positive relationships with their peers	2.69	0.82	High Extent	2.95	0.86	High Extent
15.	Victims of social bullying lose trust in their peers and become reluctant to establish new friendships	2.67	0.82	High Extent	2.87	0.85	High Extent
	Grand Total	**2.73**	**0.83**		**2.90**	**0.85**	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 presents that items 11 to 15 have means of 2.83, 2.73, 2.75, 2.69, 2.67 for male students with standard deviations ranging from 0.84 to 0.82 and means of 2.91, 2.86, 2.93, 2.95, 2.87 for female students with standard deviations ranging from 0.85 to 0.85 which indicate "High Extent" on the extent social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Also, the grand means for male students and female students are 2.73 and 2.90 respectively, further confirming a "High Extent" on the extent social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. However, it was found that social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a High Extent.

Research Question 4: *To what extent do cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation analysis on the extent cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

S/ No	Questionnaire Items	Male Students = 158			Female Students = 230		
		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD		Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	
16.	Cyberbullying significantly affects the behavioural outcomes of students	2.89	0.85	High Extent	2.95	0.86	High Extent
17	Students who experience cyberbullying are more likely to exhibit negative behavioural changes	2.86	0.83	High Extent	2.86	0.84	High Extent
18	Victims of cyberbullying may become withdrawn, irritable, aggressive, or unusually quiet	2.78	0.83	High Extent	2.91	0.85	High Extent
19	Students who experience cyberbullying develop avoidance behaviours	2.83	0.84	High Extent	2.82	0.84	High Extent
20	Persistent cyberbullying lead to poor self-regulation and risky behavioural patterns	2.86	0.84	High Extent	2.86	0.84	High Extent
	Grand Total	**2.84**	**0.84**		**2.88**	**0.85**	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 presents that items 15 to 20 have means of 2.89, 2.86, 2.78, 2.83, 2.86 for male students with standard deviations ranging from 0.85 to 0.84 and means of 2.95, 2.86, 2.91, 2.82, 2.86 for female students with standard deviations ranging from 0.86 to 0.84 which indicate "High Extent" on the extent cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Also, the grand means for male students and female students are 2.84 and 2.88 respectively, further confirming a "High Extent" on the extent cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. So, it is found that cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a High Extent.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Table 5: Z-test Analysis of significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Status	N	Mean $\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Students	158	2.84	0.84	386	1.29	1.96	Accepted
Female Students	230	2.88	0.85				

The analysis in Table 5 revealed that the z-cal of 1.29 is less than the z-crit of 1.96. Therefore, the calculated z-ratio is not statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance since it is smaller than the given critical value of z-ratio. So, the hypothesis 1 is thus accepted and the conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 6: Z-test Analysis of significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Status	N	Mean $\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Students	158	2.90	0.85	386	1.24	1.96	Accepted
Female Students	230	2.97	0.86				

The analysis on Table 6 indicated that the z-cal of 1.24 is less than the z-crit of 1.96. Therefore, the calculated z-ratio is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance, since it is less than the given critical value of z-ratio. Therefore, the hypothesis 2 is thus accepted, and the conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Table 7: Z-test Analysis of significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Status	N	Mean $\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Students	158	2.73	0.83				
				386	1.21	1.96	Accepted
Female Students	230	2.90	0.85				

The analysis in Table 7 revealed that the z-cal of 1.21 is less than the z-crit of 1.96. Therefore, the calculated z-ratio is not statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance since it is smaller than the given critical value of z-ratio. So, the hypothesis 3 is thus accepted and the conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Table 8: Z-test Analysis of significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State

Status	N	Mean $\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male Students	158	2.84	0.84				
				386	1.24	1.96	Accepted
Female Students	230	2.88	0.85				

The analysis on Table 8 indicated that the z-cal of 1.24 is less than the z-crit of 1.96. Therefore, the calculated z-ratio is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance, since it is less than the given critical value of z-ratio. Therefore, the hypothesis 4 is thus accepted, and the conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of the study in research question one: To what extent do physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State revealed that physical bullying affect the academic impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a high extent. The findings of this study revealed that physical bullying significantly affects the academic outcomes of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. This suggests that students who experience physical bullying are more likely to encounter challenges that interfere with their learning and overall academic performance. Physical bullying, which includes acts such as hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, and other forms of physical aggression, creates an unsafe school environment that hinders students' ability to concentrate and actively participate in classroom activities.This finding is in collaboration with Olweus (2023) who admitted that victims of physical bullying often experience fear and anxiety about attending school, resulting in increased absenteeism and irregular class attendance. Missing lessons reduces students' opportunities to understand classroom instruction, complete assignments, and prepare adequately for examinations. Consequently, their academic achievement may decline over time. Students who are repeatedly subjected to physical bullying may find it difficult to concentrate during lessons due to persistent fear, emotional distress, and concern for their personal safety. Such distractions reduce classroom engagement, participation, and motivation to learn, ultimately

affecting academic productivity. Some students may also avoid certain school activities or locations where bullying frequently occurs, limiting their educational experiences. The finding also indicates that physical bullying can lower students' self-confidence and academic self-efficacy. Victims may begin to doubt their abilities, lose interest in schoolwork, and develop negative attitudes toward learning. This reduced motivation may lead to poor assignment completion, lower examination scores, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school if the bullying remains unresolved.

The study in Research Questions 2: To what extent do verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State indicated that verbal bullying significantly affect the psychological impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a high extent. The findings of this study revealed that verbal bullying significantly affects the psychological well-being of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. This indicates that students who are exposed to verbal bullying are likely to experience adverse psychological outcomes that can interfere with their emotional stability, mental health, and overall well-being. Verbal bullying, which includes name-calling, insults, teasing, ridicule, threats, and the use of offensive language, can have lasting effects on students' psychological development. This study is in the same view with Arseneault (2018) who asserts that students who are frequently subjected to verbal bullying may develop feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, humiliation, and frustration. Repeated exposure to hurtful words and negative comments can diminish their sense of self-worth and create persistent emotional discomfort, making it difficult for them to enjoy the school environment. Verbal bullying often undermines students' self-esteem and self-confidence. Victims may begin to internalize the negative labels or criticisms directed at them, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. This negative self-perception may discourage them from expressing themselves freely, participating in classroom discussions, or engaging in social interactions with their peers. The study also suggests that prolonged exposure to verbal bullying may increase the risk of psychological problems such as chronic stress, depression, anxiety disorders, loneliness, and emotional withdrawal. Some students may become socially isolated or reluctant to attend school because they fear continued verbal abuse. These psychological difficulties can negatively influence their relationships with classmates, teachers, and family members, further affecting their overall development.

The significant effect observed in this study emphasizes the need for schools to implement comprehensive measures to prevent and address verbal bullying. Guidance and counseling services should be strengthened to provide emotional support for affected students, while teachers, parents, and school administrators should work collaboratively to foster a respectful, inclusive, and emotionally safe school environment. Regular awareness programmes on the harmful consequences of verbal bullying can also help promote empathy, respect, and positive communication among students.

The findings of the study in Research Question 3: To what extent do social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State showed that social bullying affect the social impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State to a high extent. The findings of this study revealed that social bullying significantly affects the social well-being of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. This indicates that students who experience social bullying are more likely to encounter difficulties in their interpersonal relationships, social interactions, and sense of belonging within the school environment. Social bullying, which involves behaviours such as social exclusion, spreading rumours, deliberate isolation, public embarrassment, and encouraging others to reject or avoid a student, can seriously disrupt healthy social development during adolescence. The finding is in the same vein with Fareo (2015) who reviewed that the extent of the social impact is reflected in the challenges victims face in building and maintaining positive relationships with their peers. Students who are repeatedly excluded from group activities or subjected to rumours and rejection often experience loneliness, social isolation, and a diminished sense of acceptance. Such experiences may prevent them from participating fully in classroom discussions, extracurricular activities, and other school events that promote social interaction and personal development. Victims of social bullying may lose trust in their peers and become reluctant to establish new friendships for fear of further rejection or humiliation. This can result in poor communication skills, limited peer support, and reduced opportunities

to develop the interpersonal competencies that are essential during adolescence. Over time, these students may withdraw from social activities and avoid situations where they are likely to interact with classmates. The findings also suggest that persistent cyberbullying may lead to poor self-regulation and risky behavioural patterns. Students may spend excessive time online monitoring negative comments, become socially isolated, or experience difficulty concentrating on school responsibilities. Such behaviours can interfere with academic engagement, reduce classroom participation, and contribute to conflicts with teachers, peers, and family members.

The significant effect identified in this study underscores the importance of implementing effective strategies to prevent and address cyberbullying in public junior secondary schools. Schools should provide digital citizenship education, promote responsible use of technology, and establish clear procedures for reporting and responding to cyberbullying incidents. Parents should also monitor their children's online activities and maintain open communication about their digital experiences. In addition, school counselors should provide behavioural support and intervention programmes to help affected students develop healthy coping strategies and positive behavioural responses. These collective efforts will contribute to creating a safer online and school environment that supports students' positive behavioural development.

CONCLUSION

The impact of bullying on public junior secondary school students in Rivers State: Counselling strategies for intervention cannot be over emphasized. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that physical bullying affect the academic impact of students, verbal bullying affect the psychological impact of students, social bullying affect the social impact of students and cyberbullying affect the behavioural impact of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. The study also deduced that the prevalence of bullying in Nigerian secondary schools has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past decade and that there are many students experience one or more forms of bullying during their school years, with physical, verbal, emotional, and social bullying being the most common. Factors such as poor supervision, ineffective school discipline, peer pressure, family background, violent media exposure, and inadequate counselling services have been identified as contributors to bullying behaviour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to ensure that the study meet its objectives.

1. School administrators should establish and enforce clear anti-bullying policies, with particular emphasis on preventing physical bullying, to reduce its negative impact on students' academic performance.
2. Teachers and school counselors should provide regular guidance and counseling services, conflict resolution programs, and emotional support to help students cope with the psychological effects of verbal bullying.
3. Schools should promote positive peer relationships through anti-bullying campaigns, peer mentoring programs, and social skills training to minimize the social effects of social bullying and foster an inclusive school environment.
4. Government and school authorities should implement digital citizenship and internet safety education programs to educate students on the dangers of cyberbullying, responsible online behavior, and appropriate reporting mechanisms.

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