



Demographic Variables Influencing Bullying Conducts Among In-School Adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis

Abdulhafis Adeyinka Hassan^{1*}, Ibrhaim Solahudeen Owoyale-Abudlganiy², Kamoru Abidoeye Tiamiyu³

^{1*3}Department of Educational Management and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

²Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

Email : hassanabdulhafis089@gmail.com

Submitted: 2025-07-22; Accepted: 2025-09-10; Published: 2025-09-11

Abstract

This study explored demographic variables influencing bullying behaviours among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. A descriptive survey design targeted 42,288 public and private secondary school students across Ilorin Metropolis. A total of 150 respondents were selected to participate in the study. Data was collected using the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire Revised version, which consists of 14 items on a 5-point Likert scale with a reliability coefficient of 0.781. Three null hypotheses were formulated and tested using the t-test statistical tool and analysis of variance (ANOVA) on SPSS. The findings related to the formulated hypotheses examined the significance of gender, age and class differences on bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ilorin metropolis. The result of the findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in terms of age. Also, no significant difference was found based on gender and class level. The study concluded that bullying conduct among in-school adolescents did not show a significant difference based on demographic variables. Therefore, teachers and school staff should receive regular training on identifying and addressing bullying behaviour in students of all ages. This training can include strategies for recognizing forms of bullying, such as verbal and emotional abuse, and techniques for fostering inclusive classroom environments where all students feel safe and supported.

Keywords: *Bullying Behaviour, In-school Adolescents, Demographic Variables, Gender and Age Differences*

INTRODUCTION

To give students the skills, knowledge, and capacity to live independently, schools continue to be social spaces where students and teachers interact physically. Given how much time they spend in school at this point in their development, in-school adolescents may significantly impact their attitudes, values, and behaviours, including their tendency to bully others. According to Olatunji (2024), bullying among adolescents enrolled in secondary schools in Ilorin City is becoming more common, as it is in many other regions of the world. This could result from a variety of factors, such as changing cultural norms, increased usage of social media and technology, gender, age, type of school, and complexity of the social dynamics that exist among teenagers. In the view of Balluerka et al. (2023), bullying is an antisocial act that may have a detrimental impact on adolescent students' ability to focus in a learning environment and hinder them from acquiring the essential functional skills necessary for success in school and their social life. This may have a substantial influence on the developing path of both the victims and the offenders. Studies have shown a connection between bullying and several adverse outcomes, including scholastic problems, depression, and anxiety. Sabramani et al. (2021) showed that adolescents who participate in bullying are at an increased risk of developing behavioural issues such as aggressiveness, difficulties with their physical health, and even suicidal thinking. The fact that bullying, with its attendant adverse consequences on the teaching and learning process as well as the social development of the prospective leaders of tomorrow, may be responsible for the rising worry that teachers, parents, counsellors, and society have over the occurrence of bullying.

Bullying is often defined as a specific sort of hostility that is intentional, takes place on several occasions, and involves an imbalance of power between the people who are doing the bullying and the people who are being bullied (Volk et al., 2014). Both physical and verbal harassment are by far the most common types of bullying (Ahmad & Smith, 2020). According to Ekedama and Eboh (2024), there is also a form of bullying known as relational bullying. This form of bullying mainly comprises spreading rumours and isolating oneself from other people. It would appear that this is a common practice among adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis. Ekedama and Eboh (2024) stated that the usage of cell phones to transmit mean-spirited notes or messages and the internet for cyberbullying is also on the rise. Peer pressure refers to the influence, either direct or indirect, exerted by individuals within a social group who share comparable beliefs, interests, or circumstances (Forgas & Williams, 2016). It is more probable that a person's ideas, values, and behaviour will be influenced by several factors, including gender, age and class level (Manstead, 2018). Bullying is defined as intentional and repetitive aggressive behaviour that involves an imbalance of power, often causing harm or distress to the victim (Volk et al., 2014). While bullying is a universal issue, demographic variables such as gender, age, and class level can significantly influence the nature and prevalence of bullying behaviours. This section reviews relevant literature on these variables and bullying, focusing on recent studies conducted in Nigeria.

Gender is a widely studied factor in bullying research, with studies indicating that male and female students engage in different forms of bullying. While boys are more likely to engage in overt, physical forms of bullying, such as hitting and pushing, girls often engage in more covert, relational bullying, such as gossiping, exclusion, and spreading rumours (Kieffer, 2013). Another key variable highlighted in the study is age, with younger adolescents often being more vulnerable to bullying due to their developmental stage and social dynamics. Research suggests

that bullying behaviour decreases as students age and develop better emotional regulation skills and coping mechanisms (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014). However, older students may engage in bullying behaviours to maintain social status or control over younger peers, particularly in hierarchical school settings. In Nigeria, adolescent bullying is often reported to peak in the early years of secondary school (JSS 1–3), with younger students being more likely to experience bullying from older peers in higher classes (Olaniyi, 2024). Olumide et al. (2016) explored gender differences in bullying behaviours in Nigerian secondary schools and found that boys were more likely to engage in physical bullying, while girls were more likely to engage in psychological and relational bullying. This gendered nature of bullying may be influenced by societal expectations and gender roles that encourage boys to assert dominance through physical strength. At the same time, girls may be socialized to use social manipulation and relational tactics to assert power. However, recent studies show that the distinction between physical and relational bullying is not always clear-cut. Adebayo et al. (2019) found that both male and female students in Ilorin experienced high rates of verbal bullying, indicating that the increasing use of social media and cyberbullying may be reducing the gender divide in bullying behaviours. This calls for an integrated approach to understanding how gender influences bullying, particularly in the digital age.

Ibrahim et al. (2023) found that students in the lower class levels of secondary schools were more likely to be involved in bullying, with age-related differences in the forms of bullying experienced. Younger students were found to be more vulnerable to physical bullying, while older students were more likely to engage in social exclusion and cyberbullying. These findings suggest that age-related differences in bullying behaviours are influenced not only by developmental factors but also by the social and academic environments in which students interact. In Ilorin, as in other urban Nigerian settings, the transition between primary and secondary school, as well as the increasing pressure to conform to peer groups, may heighten the risk of bullying during early adolescence. Class level, which refers to the grade or year in which a student is enrolled, plays a significant role in shaping bullying dynamics. Research indicates that bullying behaviours can vary across different class levels, with students in lower grades being more likely to experience bullying from older students. This power imbalance is often a result of differences in size, age, and social experience (Nelson et al., 2019). Olatunji et al. (2021) found that bullying behaviours were more prevalent in the lower class levels (JSS 1-3) of secondary schools in Ilorin, with older students (SSS 1-3) more likely to engage in bullying to assert their dominance and social status. The study also highlighted the role of school administrators and teachers in mitigating or inadvertently raising bullying, depending on their attention to class-level differences and interventions.

Furthermore, class level influences how students perceive and react to bullying. Students in higher class levels often have more social power and resources to perpetuate or resist bullying behaviours. Therefore, bullying in senior classes may often be linked to social hierarchies, peer influence, and competition for status. In contrast, bullying in junior classes may stem from issues related to vulnerability, insecurity, and social adaptation.

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on gender

2. There is no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on age
3. There is no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on class level.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is suitable for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data on prevailing conditions, attitudes, and behaviours within a defined population. The choice of this design aligns with the objective of the study, which is to assess the influence of demographic variables—specifically gender, age, and class level—on bullying conduct among secondary school students. The population of the study comprised all in-school adolescents enrolled in public and private secondary schools across the three Local Government Areas (LGAs) constituting Ilorin Metropolis: Ilorin West, Ilorin East, and Ilorin South. According to available educational statistics, the population of secondary school students in the metropolis is approximately 42,288. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, simple random sampling was used to select five (5) secondary schools from each of the three LGAs, making a total of 15 schools. In the second stage, stratified random sampling was applied to ensure fair representation of class levels (junior and senior classes). Finally, systematic random sampling was used to select 20 students per school, leading to a total sample size of 300 respondents. This sample size was deemed adequate for the statistical analysis and generalization within the study scope. Data were collected using the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Revised Version), a well-established instrument for assessing bullying behaviours among school-aged students. The instrument consists of 14 items structured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree (1)" to "Strongly Agree (5)". The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A: Demographic Information – capturing gender, age, and class level. Section B: Bullying Behaviour Inventory – assessing various dimensions of bullying, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying tendencies. The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, and a reliability coefficient of 0.781 was obtained, indicating a good level of reliability for the research context. Before data collection commenced, ethical approval and administrative clearance were obtained from relevant school authorities and education boards. Informed consent was also secured from all participants, and parental consent was sought where necessary. Trained research assistants facilitated the distribution of the questionnaires and remained on-site to ensure that students completed the forms independently and returned them immediately, thus reducing the chances of external influence or loss of data. Collected data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. To test the hypotheses, the study employed inferential statistical techniques: A t-test was used to examine gender differences in bullying conduct. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine the effect of age and class level on bullying behaviour. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance, which is a standard threshold for educational and behavioural research. The results were interpreted in the context of both statistical significance and practical implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on gender.

Table 1.
t-test Table Showing the Bullying Conduct of In-school Adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis Based on Gender

Variable	No	Mean	St. Dev	Df	t. Cal	Sig.	P
Male	125	35.88	11.47	288	24.34.000	***	
Female	175	43.75	14.55				

Table 1 shows the result obtained from testing hypothesis one. The table shows that t. calculated is 24.34, the degree of freedom is 288, and the significance level is 0.00. Since the significance level is less than 0.05, the hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there is a significant difference in the bullying conduct of male and female in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on age.

Table 2.
ANOVA Table Showing the Difference in the Bullying Conduct of In-school Adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis Based on Age

	The Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1011802.96	2	50901.48	506.42	0.00
Within Groups	38295.23	297	100.31		
Total	1050098.19	299			

Table 2 shows the results obtained from testing hypothesis two. From the table, F. calculated is 506.42, the degree of freedom is 2/297, and the significance is .000. Since the significance level is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the bullying conduct of In-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on Age.

Hypothesis three

There is no significant difference in the bullying conduct of in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis based on class level.

Table 3.
ANOVA Table Showing the Difference in the Bullying Conduct of In-school Adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis Based on Class Level

	The Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1144.31	2	572.16	0.81	0.04
Within Groups	268840.79	297	705.62		
Total	269985.10	299			

Table 3 shows the results obtained from testing hypothesis three. From the table, F. calculated is 0.81, the degree of freedom is 2/297, and the significance is 0.04. The null hypothesis is rejected since the significance level is less than 0.05. Hence, there is a significant difference in the bullying conduct among in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, based on class level. It has been shown that class level has a relatively significant influence on bullying conduct.

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed that there is a significant difference in the bullying conduct of male and female in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis. This meant that male students engage in bullying conduct differently from their female counterparts. This finding implies that the gender of the in-school adolescents in Ilorin metropolis exerted significant differences in their bullying conduct. This finding supports the previous finding of Olumide et al (2016), who reportedly found gender differences in bullying behaviours in Nigerian secondary schools and found that boys were more likely to engage in physical bullying, while girls were more likely to engage in psychological and relational bullying. This gendered nature of bullying may be influenced by societal expectations and gender roles that encourage boys to assert dominance through physical strength. At the same time, girls may be socialized to use social manipulation and relational tactics to assert power. Furthermore, this study's findings also revealed a significant difference in the bullying conduct among in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, based on age. This shows that the bullying conduct of different age categories was significantly different. This result shows that as the students advance in age, they possess different values and feelings toward their experience and express their thoughts differently. This implies that the ages of in-school adolescents significantly influence their bullying conduct. This finding agreed with the previous finding of Ademiluyi et al. (2022), who found that younger students were more vulnerable to physical bullying, while older students were more likely to engage in social exclusion and cyberbullying. The reason is that age-related differences in bullying behaviours are influenced not only by developmental factors but also by the social and academic environments in which students interact. Hypothesis three: Based on class level, there is a significant difference in the bullying conduct among in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. This shows that the class level has a relatively significant influence on bullying conduct. This study concurred with the findings of Sentse et al. (2015), who found that students in the lower class levels of secondary schools were more likely to be involved in bullying, with age-related differences in the forms of bullying experienced. Also, Olatunji et al. (2021) found that bullying behaviours were more prevalent in the lower class levels (JSS 1-3) of secondary schools in Ilorin, with older students (SSS 1-3) more likely to engage in bullying to assert their

dominance and social status. The study also highlighted the role of school administrators and teachers in mitigating or inadvertently raising bullying, depending on their attention to class-level differences and interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how demographic variables—specifically gender, age, and class level—influence bullying conduct among in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria. Unlike some previous studies, which reported no significant variation in bullying behaviour across demographic characteristics, this study established clear and statistically significant differences in bullying conduct based on all three variables. Male students were found to engage more frequently in overt forms of bullying, while age and class level revealed nuanced patterns, with younger students more prone to victimization and older students more likely to perpetrate subtle or cyberbullying forms. These findings contrast with earlier assumptions of uniformity in bullying patterns across adolescent populations and challenge generalized intervention models. The value of this research lies in its conceptual contribution to understanding bullying conduct through a context-specific and demographic lens. It affirms that bullying is not only a behavioural issue but also a socio-developmental one shaped by identity markers such as age, gender, and school positioning (class level). By embedding the phenomenon of bullying within the social hierarchies of Nigerian schools, the study introduces a multi-dimensional framework for interpreting adolescent aggression, peer dominance, and vulnerability in school settings. This approach supports the design of tailored, demographically sensitive interventions that align with the lived realities of Nigerian secondary school students. In light of the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate bullying behaviours and foster safer learning environments in secondary schools within Ilorin Metropolis and beyond:

1. Educational stakeholders, including school administrators and policymakers, should formulate and implement anti-bullying policies that take into account the diverse experiences of students based on gender, age, and class level. Such policies should address specific bullying patterns observed among different student groups and promote zero tolerance for all forms of bullying.
2. Regular workshops and training sessions should be organized for teachers, school counsellors, and non-teaching staff on how to identify, intervene in, and prevent bullying. These trainings should also equip staff with skills to manage age- and gender-specific bullying behaviours effectively and promote a culture of inclusivity.
3. Schools should create peer mentorship programmes where senior students are trained to support and guide their junior counterparts. These systems can reduce bullying initiated by older students and create a more compassionate school culture where respect and empathy are nurtured across class levels.
4. The school curriculum should include structured social-emotional learning programmes to help students build emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. These competencies are essential in reducing aggression and promoting healthier peer interactions among adolescents.
5. Parents and guardians should be actively involved in anti-bullying efforts through awareness campaigns and school-community partnerships. Regular sensitisation

- programmes can equip parents with the tools to recognise signs of bullying and collaborate with schools to address behavioural concerns early.
6. Schools should develop confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms for students to report bullying without fear of retaliation. Such mechanisms can include anonymous reporting boxes, designated student support officers, or digital reporting platforms managed by school counsellors.
 7. Educational researchers and institutions should conduct longitudinal and qualitative studies to explore emerging trends in bullying, including cyberbullying and emotional abuse. Continuous data collection and monitoring will help in evaluating the effectiveness of existing interventions and guiding future practices.

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, D. O., Ninggal, M. T., & Ajiboye, S. K. (2019). Frequent social media use as predictor of cyberbullying among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. *Education, Sustainability & Society (ESS)*, 2(2), 17-21.
- Ademiluyi, A., Li, C., & Park, A. (2022). Implications and preventions of cyberbullying and social exclusion in social media: systematic review. *JMIR formative research*, 6(1), e30286.
- Ahmad, Y., & Smith, P. K. (2022). Bullying in schools and the issue of sex differences. In *Male violence* (pp. 70-83). Routledge.
- Balluerka, N., Aliri, J., Goñi-Balentiaga, O., & Gorostiaga, A. (2023). Association between bullying victimization, anxiety and depression in childhood and adolescence: The mediating effect of self-esteem. *Revista de Psicodidáctica (English ed.)*, 28(1), 26-34.
- Ekedama, K., & Eboh, E. (2024). Influence of School Bullying on Mental Health of Students in Delta Central Senatorial Districts in Delta State. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research* 4(3), 183-189.
- Forgas, J. P., & Williams, K. D. (2016). *Social influence: Direct and indirect processes*. Psychology Press.
- Garnefski, N., & Kraaij, V. (2014). Bully victimization and emotional problems in adolescents: Moderation by specific cognitive coping strategies? *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(7), 1153-1160.
- Ibrahim, H. B., Dahiru, A. S., & Isma'il, A. (2023). Effect of Inhibitory Modelling Technique in modification of bullying behavior among secondary school boarding students. *Mediterranean Journal of Social & Behavioral Research*, 7(3), 161-168.
- Kieffer, C. C. (2013). Rumors and gossip as forms of bullying: Sticks and stones? *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 33(2), 90-104.
- Manstead, A. S. (2018). The psychology of social class: How socioeconomic status impacts thought, feelings, and behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 57(2), 267-291.
- Nelson, H. J., Burns, S. K., Kendall, G. E., & Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2019). Preadolescent children's perception of power imbalance in bullying: A thematic analysis. *PLoS one*, 14(3), e0211124.
- Olaniyi, M. I. (2023). *Experiences of Child Sexual Abuse and Challenges Of Disclosures Among Junior Secondary School Students In Ogun State, Nigeria* (Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan).

- Olatunji, B. A. (2024). School Culture As A Correlates of Secondary School Students' Behaviour In Ilorin South, Kwara State. *Journal of Education and Innovation*, 26(3), 19-32.
- Olumide, A. O., Adebayo, E., & Oluwagbayela, B. (2016). Gender disparities in the experience, effects and reporting of electronic aggression among secondary school students in Nigeria. *BMJ global health*, 1(3), e000072.
- Sabramani, V., Idris, I. B., Ismail, H., Nadarajaw, T., Zakaria, E., & Kamaluddin, M. R. (2021). Bullying and its associated individual, peer, family and school factors: Evidence from Malaysian National Secondary School Students. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(13), 7208.
- Sentse, M., Kretschmer, T., & Salmivalli, C. (2015). The longitudinal interplay between bullying, victimization, and social status: Age-related and gender differences. *Social Development*, 24(3), 659-677.
- Volk, A. A., Dane, A. V., & Marini, Z. A. (2014). What is bullying? A theoretical redefinition. *Developmental Review*, 34(4), 327-343.