



Age, Gender, Bullying Victimization, and Juvenile Delinquency Among Senior Secondary School Students in Delta State: A Test of General Strain Theory

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Abstract

This study investigated Age, Gender, Bullying Victimization, and Juvenile Delinquency among senior secondary school students in Delta State: A Test of General Strain Theory. The study objectives tends to examined if General Strain Theory effectively explains variations in physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion, affecting delinquent behaviours among students by age and gender. This study Ex-post-facto research design using descriptive method. The population of the study comprised of 106,719 senior secondary school students from 477 owned public secondary schools in Delta State. A sample size of 672 senior secondary school students selected from the study's population. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques (SRST) were used. The instrument entitled: "Age, Gender, Bullying Victimization, and Juvenile Delinquency among Senior Secondary School Students: Test of General Strain Theory Questionnaire" (AGBVJDSSSSTGSTQ) was used. The instrument was established by three (3) experts. The Cronbach Alpha determined reliability coefficient index of 0.87. Out of 672 copies of the instruments was sent students, 500 copies were retrieved. Linear and multiple regression was used to answer research questions and hypotheses raised for the study at 0.05 levels of significance. The study indicated strong evidence that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency among students and General Strain Theory effectively explains the variations in juvenile delinquency linked to physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion among senior secondary school students in Delta State. The recommended that school management should be proactive in implementing targeted anti-bullying policies that address the specific needs of students based on age and gender.

Keywords: *Age, Gender, Bullying Victimization, Juvenile Delinquency, General Strain Theory.*

Introduction

Age, gender, bullying victimization, and juvenile delinquency are interconnected factors that significantly impact youth development, especially during formative school years. Olweus (2018) and Farrington (2019) indicated that bullying, whether physical, emotional, or cyber-based, creates negative psychological effects that vary by age and gender, with consequences often extending into delinquent behaviors. Juvenile delinquency is not only a personal issue but a societal concern, as it affects educational environments and communities. Agnew (1992) noted that General Strain Theory, exposure to

stressors, such as bullying, may result in maladaptive behaviours when individuals lack healthy coping mechanisms. Understanding the dynamics of age, gender, and victimization within the context of juvenile delinquency is essential for developing effective preventive measures.

The application of General Strain Theory in examining bullying and juvenile delinquency among senior secondary students in Delta State addresses how age and gender may influence reactions to bullying. Adolescents facing victimization in schools often experience significant strain, leading to potential delinquent responses if they lack adequate social or



emotional support (Agnew, 1992; Siegel, 2019). In Delta State, reports have highlighted the prevalence of bullying in secondary schools, with younger students frequently targeted and older students sometimes engaging in retaliatory delinquent acts. Gender differences also play a critical role; male students might react with externalized behaviors like aggression, while female students could display internalized responses such as depression or anxiety, which can later manifest as delinquency (Espelage & Holt, 2020).

The issue of bullying and juvenile delinquency has a longstanding history, impacting not only the educational sector but also broader societal stability. Traditional approaches in schools often overlook the complex psychological effects of bullying, which vary across age and gender, leading to repeated cycles of victimization and aggression (Smith *et al.*, 2019). The challenges are multifaceted: lack of sufficient anti-bullying programs, inadequate mental health resources, and limited teacher training on effective interventions contribute to an environment where bullying persists. Addressing these issues is critical, as untreated bullying and delinquency can disrupt educational achievements, lead to negative social behaviors, and increase the risk of criminal activities outside school environments (Farrington, 2019). The importance of tackling bullying and delinquency lies in creating safer schools and, by extension, a more peaceful society. To address these challenges, educational institutions in Delta State should implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies, introduce counseling services, and provide teacher training on managing victimization and strain. Establishing a supportive environment will help students develop healthier coping mechanisms, ultimately reducing the likelihood of delinquency (Espelage & Holt, 2020).

Bullying victimization plays a critical role in shaping adolescents' behavior and can lead to juvenile delinquency. Smith *et al.*, (2022) noted that both age and gender significantly influence how adolescents respond to bullying. Younger adolescents may exhibit more outwardly aggressive behaviors due to their limited

emotional coping mechanisms, while older adolescents may engage in more covert forms of delinquency such as theft or vandalism. Gender differences also exist, as boys are often more likely to react with physical aggression in response to bullying, whereas girls might internalize the experience, leading to behaviors such as truancy or running away. Understanding these nuanced differences highlights the importance of age and gender-sensitive approaches in preventing juvenile delinquency stemming from bullying victimization (Gupta, 2021).

The finding of Nwankwo and Okeke (2016) in line with the present study finding revealing that victims of bullying are significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors, especially among males. The researchers found that the impact of bullying victimization varied by age, with younger adolescents showing higher levels of aggression and risky behaviors as coping mechanisms. Ajayi *et al.* (2022) finding revealed that bullying victimization significantly contributed to feelings of helplessness and anger, leading to increased delinquency in senior secondary school students. The finding also suggested that gender differences also play a role, as male students often retaliated physically, while female students tended to engage in indirect forms of delinquency, such as social exclusion and gossip.

General Strain Theory (GST) provides a valuable framework for understanding how different forms of bullying physical, verbal, and social exclusion contribute to juvenile delinquency. Adolescents experience strain from different type of bullying, and their responses may vary based on age and gender. For example, physical bullying may provoke more immediate, aggressive reactions among younger boys, whereas verbal bullying or social exclusion can lead to internalized strain that manifests in delinquent behaviors over time, especially in girls and older adolescents. This theory highlights that gender and age factors not only influence the type of bullying but also the coping mechanisms used (Ferreira, 2022). Research by Bassey and Nwafor (2017) in accordance with the present study indicated that both physical and verbal bullying



significantly contributed to the likelihood of delinquent behaviors, with social exclusion being particularly impactful among female students. Additionally, Afolabi et al. (2022) finding stated that adolescents who experience multiple forms of bullying faced heightened strain, which correlated with increased instances of delinquency. This suggests that General Strain Theory is effective in explaining how the cumulative effects of bullying, categorized by age and gender, can lead to delinquent actions among students.

Statement of the Problem

The study on age, gender, bullying victimization, and juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students in Delta State was prompted by multiple factors and challenges. Observations and reports indicated a troubling rise in bullying and juvenile delinquency within secondary schools, with age and gender playing possible roles in these patterns. Younger students, particularly those who differ from their peers in certain ways, often face victimization, which may result in stress and anxiety. Male students, in some cases, may respond to bullying with aggressive behaviors as a coping mechanism, while female students might exhibit internalized responses. These behavioral variations prompted an interest in exploring how factors like age, gender, and victimization contribute to delinquency, applying General Strain Theory to understand the link between strain and juvenile behaviour. The study also arose from the challenge of limited intervention programmes in schools, where existing disciplinary measures often fail to address the root causes of bullying and delinquency. Schools sometimes lack counseling and support systems, which can leave victimized students without healthy ways to cope, further fueling negative behaviors. To address these challenges, the study recommends schools implement anti-bullying policies, alongside support programs such as counseling and mental health services. Educators and parents should work together to create a supportive environment where students feel safe and have access to guidance, reducing the strains that lead to delinquent behaviours.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aim at investigating Age, Gender, Bullying Victimization, and Juvenile Delinquency among senior secondary school students in Delta State: A Test of General Strain Theory. The following specific objectives guided this study are to.

- I. Ascertain how bullying victimization contribute to juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State.
- ii. Determine the extent General Strain Theory adequately explains variations of physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion affect juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State.

Research Questions

- i. How does bullying victimization contribute to juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State?
- ii. To what extent do General Strain Theory adequately explains variations of physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion affect juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State?

Hypotheses

- I. Bullying victimization does not significantly contribute to juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State?
- ii. General Strain Theory does not significantly and adequately explains variations of physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion affect juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State.



Methodology

This study adopted Ex-post-facto research design using descriptive method. In the ex-post facto, the researcher had no control over the variables of interest and therefore cannot be manipulated. Thus, the researcher considered this design suitable for the study because it enables the researcher to statistically determine the effects between the variables. The population of the study comprised of 106,719 senior secondary school students from 477 owned public secondary schools in Delta State during the 2023/2024 academic year. The sample size for the study consisted of 672 Senior Secondary school students selected from the study's population. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample. The stratification is based areas of the state (Northern Area, Central Area and Southern Area of Delta State). In other word, 34 public schools from Delta North, 38 public schools from Delta Central and 24 schools from Delta South, making a total of 96 public senior schools across the 25 local government areas of Delta State. Secondly, 7 students were drawn from each sampled school through simple random sampling techniques (SRST) by a balloting method. In the balloting method every students have equal chance of being selected into the sample.

The main instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire which titled "Age, Gender, Bullying Victimization, and Juvenile Delinquency: Test of General Strain Theory Questionnaire" (AGBVJDTGSTQ) was designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; section A and B. Section A consisted of demographic data of the respondents, section B consisted of 22 item statement on bullying (**physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion**). The respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on four points scale with close ended items as Strongly Agreed (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D)=3, Strongly Disagree(SD)=1. The validity of the instrument was established by three (3) experts; two experts from the Department of Criminology and Security Studies, one from Guidance and Counselling Department (Measurement and Evaluation Unit).

These specialists assessed the instruments for appropriateness and suitability to the study, and their ideas were implemented. Using the internal consistency method, the questionnaire was administered to 30 senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The result of the test was used to compute the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha was applied for the computation of the reliability coefficient index of 0.87 obtained for **physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion**.

With the aid of two research assistants, the researcher employed senior secondary school students as the subjects in order to collect data directly from them. The participants were requested to exhibit confidence in their answers. A questionnaire was sent to 672 students, who were given copies to fill out and 500 copies were retrieved. Linear and multiple regression was used to answer research questions and hypotheses raised for the study at 0.05 levels of significance using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software version 23.

Results and Discussion

Presentations of Results

Research Question One: How does bullying victimization contribute to juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State?

Ho₁: Bullying victimization does not significantly contribute to juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State?

Table 1: Linear regression analysis on how bullying victimization contribute to juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State



Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.342 ^a	.117	.115	.49027		
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.889	1	15.889	66.101	.000 ^b
	Residual	119.703	498	.240		
	Total	135.592	499			

The results from Table 1 indicate a moderate positive correlation between bullying victimization and juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students in Delta State, as evidenced by an R value of 0.342. The R Square value of 0.117 reveals that approximately 11.7% of the variance in juvenile delinquency can be attributed to bullying victimization. Importantly, the regression model yields a statistically significant F-statistic of 66.101 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.000, which is far below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This indicates strong evidence that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency, suggesting that efforts to mitigate bullying could be crucial in reducing delinquent behaviour among senior secondary school students in Delta State. In conclusion, the analysis underscores the need for targeted interventions to address bullying in schools as a means of curbing juvenile delinquency in this demographic which could involve offering specialized sessions that focus on the emotional impact of bullying, peer mediation programs, and promoting inclusive practices that reduce social exclusion. By addressing the root causes of strain as outlined in General Strain Theory, educational institutions can help mitigate the factors that lead to delinquent behavior, creating a more supportive environment for all students.

Research Question Two: To what extent do **General Strain Theory adequately explains variations of physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion affect juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State?**

Ho₂: **General Strain Theory does not significantly and adequately explains variations of physical bullying, verbal**

bullying and social exclusion affect juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis on the extent do General Strain Theory adequately explains variations of physical bullying, verbal bullying and social exclusion affect juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students with respect to age and gender in Delta State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.527 ^a	.277	.274	.43398		
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.908	2	17.954	95.330	.000 ^b
	Residual	93.604	497	.188		
	Total	129.512	499			

The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate a robust relationship between the variables associated with General Strain Theory and juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students in Delta State. The R value of 0.527 indicates a strong positive correlation, suggesting that as the levels of physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion increase, so does juvenile delinquency. The R Square value of 0.277 signifies that approximately 27.7% of the variance in juvenile delinquency can be explained by these forms of bullying. The model yields a highly significant F-statistic of 95.330 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.000, which is substantially lower than the 0.05 significance level, confirming that the overall regression model is statistically significant. This finding implies that General Strain Theory effectively explains the variations in juvenile delinquency linked to physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion among senior secondary school students in Delta State. In conclusion, the analysis highlights the importance of addressing physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion in interventions aimed at reducing delinquent behavior among adolescents, indicating that these factors are crucial for understanding and mitigating juvenile delinquency in this population. This could involve offering



specialized sessions that focus on the emotional impact of bullying, peer mediation programs, and promoting inclusive practices that reduce social exclusion. By addressing the root causes of strain as outlined in General Strain Theory, educational institutions can help mitigate the factors that lead to delinquent behavior, creating a more supportive environment for all students.

Discussion of Findings

Finding established from research question 1 via hypothesis 1 indicated strong evidence that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency, suggesting that efforts to mitigate bullying could be crucial in reducing delinquent behaviour among senior secondary school students in Delta State. The finding also underscores the need for targeted interventions to address bullying in schools as a means of curbing juvenile delinquency in this demographic which could involve offering specialized sessions that focus on the emotional impact of bullying, peer mediation programs, and promoting inclusive practices that reduce social exclusion. By addressing the root causes of strain as outlined in General Strain Theory, educational institutions can help mitigate the factors that lead to delinquent behavior, creating a more supportive environment for all students. The finding of Nwankwo and Okeke (2016) in line with the present study finding revealing that victims of bullying are significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors, especially among males. The researchers found that the impact of bullying victimization varied by age, with younger adolescents showing higher levels of aggression and risky behaviors as coping mechanisms. Ajayi et al. (2022) finding revealed that bullying victimization significantly contributed to feelings of helplessness and anger, leading to increased delinquency in senior secondary school students. The finding also suggested that gender differences also play a role, as male students often retaliated physically, while female students tended to engage in indirect forms of delinquency, such as social exclusion and gossip.

Finding obtained from research question 2 via hypothesis 2 revealed that General Strain Theory effectively explains the variations in juvenile

delinquency linked to physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion among senior secondary school students in Delta State. In conclusion, the analysis highlights the importance of addressing physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion in interventions aimed at reducing delinquent behavior among adolescents, indicating that these factors are crucial for understanding and mitigating juvenile delinquency in this population. This could involve offering specialized sessions that focus on the emotional impact of bullying, peer mediation programs, and promoting inclusive practices that reduce social exclusion. By addressing the root causes of strain as outlined in General Strain Theory, educational institutions can help mitigate the factors that lead to delinquent behavior, creating a more supportive environment for all students. Research by Bassey and Nwafor (2017) in accordance with the present study indicated that both physical and verbal bullying significantly contributed to the likelihood of delinquent behaviors, with social exclusion being particularly impactful among female students. Additionally, Afolabi et al. (2022) finding stated that adolescents who experience multiple forms of bullying faced heightened strain, which correlated with increased instances of delinquency. This suggests that General Strain Theory is effective in explaining how the cumulative effects of bullying, categorized by age and gender, can lead to delinquent actions among students.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study indicated strong evidence that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency, suggesting that efforts to mitigate bullying could be crucial in reducing delinquent behavior among students and General Strain Theory effectively explains the variations in juvenile delinquency linked to physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social exclusion among senior secondary school students in Delta State



Recommendations

1. School management should be proactive in implementing targeted anti-bullying policies that address the specific needs of students based on age and gender by developing educational programs that raise awareness about the consequences of bullying and promoting a culture of empathy and support among students.
2. School management should be committed to incorporating General Strain Theory into their intervention strategies by establishing programs that help students manage stressors associated with bullying by providing resources and training for counselors to facilitate coping skills workshops tailored to different age and gender groups.
3. School administrators should organise seminars and workshops to mitigate the issue of age, gender, bullying victimization, and juvenile delinquency among senior secondary school students.

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