



Effect of Assertiveness Technique in Reducing Verbal Victimization among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra State

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author LIA, designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author VNN and Author AVE managed the analyses of the study. Author VNN managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra state.

Study Design: The design adopted for this study is pure experimental design.

Place and Duration of Study: The target population is 1182 junior secondary students identified to be verbally victimized. The duration is between January 2021 and June 2021.

Methodology: The design adopted for this study is the pure experimental. Two secondary schools were adopted for the study, from the two secondary schools, one group served as treatment/experimental group and the other school served as control group with participants randomly assigned. These participants were identified by administering a structured questionnaire structured by the researchers. The population for the study comprised 1182 junior secondary students identified to be verbally victimized. The sample was drawn using the purposive sampling technique, this was to identify schools with students that are verbally victimized. A total of 104 students (54 male and 50 female) were drawn and randomly assigned to the experimental and

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control groups as sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was the bullying victimization scale (BVS), the scale was developed and validated based on Elvis (1996) questionnaire and normalized for Nigerian cultural situation. Data collected for this study were organized in table and were analyzed. Data relating to the answering of research questions were analyzed using the mean. While the data relating to the testing of hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance was analyzed using Analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA).

Results: At 0.05 level of significance, the analysis of the data collected revealed that the experimental group had a mean gain difference of 3.29 over the control group, the result further revealed that male students had a mean gain difference of 21.54 over the female students. This indicates that assertiveness technique was more effective on male junior secondary school students than their female counterparts. The findings revealed there was no difference in the mean post test scores of students who received treatment using assertiveness technique and those in the control group ($p = 0.416, 0.05$). also there was a significant difference in the mean post test scores of male and female secondary school students ($p=0.026, 0.05$).

Conclusion: Through the findings that emerged from the study, it is concluded that the assertiveness technique is effective in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra state. Hence, counsellors in secondary schools should adopt assertiveness counselling techniques during counselling sessions to reduce the increased rate of verbal victimization in schools.

Keywords: Assertiveness; verbal; victimization; technique; students.

1. INTRODUCTION

The school setting is a developmental context for junior secondary students where they are opportune to interact and socialize with peers. The school is a place of learning and growth for most adolescents and youths. In recent decades, the school population has been on the increase and this has led to culturally diverse gathering due to globalization and the increase in migratory flows [1]. In the last decades, the phenomenon of interpersonal violence such as verbal victimization has been the major concern in schools. This phenomenon is characterized by a perverse dynamic in which the roles of bully and victim emerge [2]. The victim is subdued by the bully or bullies in terms of intentional physical and/or psychological towards them. Through observations, it is revealed that they may also be a place for victimization from school violence and bullying of secondary schools students [3].

Secondary school students among others are individuals who are repetitiously victimized by others, and they are known through characteristics, such as introversion, weakness, emotionality, shame, caution, unsafely, and higher level of anxiety [4]. Majority of victims are physically weaker when bullied, and have less power in order to defend and take care of themselves physically and verbally. Hence, they are often aimed at bullies' aggression with no reason. Victims have typically a negative and defective insight about themselves, weak social

skills, less power than their peers and failure in emotional expression. They have negative attitude toward themselves and their status. They are lonely, are not a member of social networks, and have restricted relations with others. In addition, they have supporting parents. These parenting styles have roles in victimization, because parents haven't trained students on how to encounter difficulties and tolerances [4].

These defects probably argued that victims when exposed to bully, exacerbate their difficulties. Victims may become isolated and distressed. This in turn leads to low self-esteem and self-confidence, more negative self-efficacy and attitude, and lose their braveness and power defense. If students aren't treated, they could have physical health problems, such as neurological and digestive diseases, sleep disorders, headaches and muscle tension, educational and academic difficulties, such as escaping and refusing to go to school [5], psychological difficulties, like severe depression, mental health disorder, and spread of suicide thoughts and even the possibility of suicide attempts [6].

School bullying and peer victimization are major social problems affecting children and adolescents in all parts of the world. The serious consequences of bullying and peer victimization have generated considerable amount of attention from the public, as well as educators, school officials, and researchers in recent years [7].

Furthermore, they defined bullying in general sense as an aggression action that occurs many a time and includes an unequal physical power between bully and victim [5]. Also, peer victimization has been defined as single or repeated episodes of peer-perpetrated aggression that results in real or perceived harm to others. According these definition of bullying, bullying behaviour has five important characteristics which ranges from an aggressive action, it isn't generally pre-motivated, takes many a time place; includes an unequal power between bully and victim, happens in small social groups that their members are familiar with each other [7]. Bullying behaviour includes a wide expanse of destructive behaviours that systematically cause victimized individuals in a wide time to exhibit different attitude and moods.

Due to such undesirable outcomes of victimization, it is necessary to adopt interceptive programs in order to help victims strengthen their courage facing the victimization behaviours, and diminishing victimization. Verbal victimization (VV) is a form of bullying with unpleasant consequences that calls for creation and application of suitable intervention programs to help victims increase their strengths and build a sense of dealing with such behaviours and thereby reduce their victimization. Nevertheless, one of these effective programs could be assertiveness training technique, victims that are victimized mostly suffer from low self-efficacy and self-esteem, the feelings of helplessness and inability [8]. The concept of assertiveness is a quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive. In the field of psychology, assertiveness is a learnable skill and a means of communication. It is characterized by a confident declaration of a statement without need of proof, which affirms the person's rights or point of view without other aggressively threatening the rights of another [9].

Assertiveness is a means to promote an individual's power in stressful social situations, such as verbal victimization among others. Assertiveness training program have an appropriate experimental support in promoting mental health and improving interpersonal skills. Several studies have reported the effect of assertiveness technique, including the increase of social adjustment and skills [7]; social support, adolescents' competence in conflict situations with peers [10], desirable social relations and expansion of satisfactory in social communication [7], happiness and achievement.

In a study carried out by [8] on the effect of assertiveness skills training on the reduction of emotional victimization of female high school students, the results in both experimental and follow-up stages showed that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group. The findings suggested that an assertiveness skills training program decreased students' Emotional victimization as an effective intervention. In another study conducted by [11], on group therapy, psychodrama, assertiveness training and counselling for bullying among middle school students in India. The result indicates marked difference targeted in self-report aggression scores and teacher ratings for aggression after therapy. Also, there was a marked increase in assertiveness among the Experimental Group. This leads to a conclusion that a multipronged effort to tackle bullying is required in the schools today.

A similar study carried out by [12] on preventing sexual victimization: an assertiveness training program for female adolescents. It was found that no significant changes in risk in group level analyses; however slight mean changes in the expected direction were made on the majority of the scales. Individually, one participant met criteria for change using the Reliable Change Index (RCI) for improvement in signaling sexual boundaries. Slight increase was noted in observed eye contact, assertive volume and tone, and assertive non-verbal. Non-overlap of All Pairs (NAPs) supports these findings. Self-report increased of assertive volumes and tones of voice were found. The studies reviewed reveals that a reasonable amount of studies have been conducted on assertiveness techniques and proven effective in certain aspects with psychosocial supports and lacks verifiable findings in relation with verbal victimization. The observed situation in junior secondary schools in Anambra state is one in which students feel so pressured by others, easily pushed around by way of manipulation out of fear of other people opinions about them that is fear of being adjudged negatively. This makes them unable to stand up for their rights in matters that concern them. The core of unassertiveness comes from low self-esteem. People who have low view about themselves believe automatically that other people's point of view is stronger than theirs. However, the issue of verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra state have not been empirically resolved, this concern bothers the researcher

and this study determined the effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra state. Specifically, the study will determine;

1. The effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra State using their pre-test and post test scores.
2. The effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among male and female junior secondary school students in Anambra State using their pre-test and post test scores.
3. The difference in the pre-test and post-test verbal victimization scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State treated with assertiveness technique and those treated with conventional technique.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra State using their pre-test and post test scores?
2. What is the effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among male and female junior secondary school students in Anambra State using their pre-test and post test scores?
3. What is the difference in the pre-test and post-test verbal victimization scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State treated with assertiveness technique and those treated with conventional technique?

1.3 Hypotheses

1. The effect of assertiveness technique on the mean verbal victimization pre-test, post test scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State is not statistically significant.
2. The effect of assertiveness technique on the mean verbal victimization pre-test, post-test scores of male and female junior secondary school students in Anambra State is not statistically significant.
3. The difference in effect of assertiveness technique, gender on verbal victimization scores of junior secondary school students

in Anambra State treated with and those treated with conventional technique is not statistically significant.

2. METHODOLOGY

The design adopted for this study is the pure experimental design. According to [13], the pure experimental design is one which randomization of subjects is possible. Two secondary schools were adopted for the study, from the two secondary schools, one group served as treatment/experimental group and the other school served as control group with participants randomly assigned. The participants were students who agreed to being verbally victimized. These participants were identified by administering a structured questionnaire structured by the researchers. The population for the study comprised 1182 junior secondary students identified to be verbally victimized. The sample was drawn using the purposive sampling technique, this was to identify schools with students that are verbally victimized. A total of 104 students (54 male and 50 female) were drawn and randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups as sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was the bullying victimization scale (BVS), the scale was developed and validated based on Elvis (1996) questionnaire and normalized for Nigerian cultural situation. The scale consists of 26 items that evaluates physical, verbal and emotional victimization at a 6-degree Likert scale. Scoring is directly conducted and people, who obtain more than 49.5, are identified as victim. The coefficients obtained for all test is $r = 0.98$ and for VV area is $r = 0.99$ that indicates high reliability of this scale. Its validity was assessed using construct validity on the range of 0.75 to 0.90 showing that all items of subscales assessed VV.

The researcher controlled the extraneous variables such as gender, subject interaction, experimental bias and Hawthorns effect. The experimental treatment procedure included the participants who participated in (80) eighty minutes sessions which was held twice a week, for eight consecutive weeks. After eight weeks treatment and conventional counselling interaction, the Bullying Victimization Scale (BVS) was re-administered on all the participants in both the experimental groups and control group which were regarded as post-test. The post-test scores were collected and given to the researcher for analysis and to determine the statistical difference between the experimental

groups and control group scores. The completed instruments were scored following the scoring instructions provided in the BVS. Data collected for this study were organized in table and were analyzed. Data relating to the answering of research questions were analyzed using the mean. While the data relating to the testing of hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance was analyzed using Analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Question 1

What is the effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra State using their pre-test and post test scores?

3.2 Hypothesis 1

The effect of assertiveness technique on the mean verbal victimization pre-test, post test scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State is not statistically significant.

Mean and standard deviation were presented in Table 1. This indicated that students treated with assertiveness technique had pre-test mean score of 34.45 and post-test mean score of 68.12 with gained with a mean of 32.67 for verbal victimization. The students in control group who received conventional group counselling had pre-test mean score of 21.51 and post-test mean score of 50.89 with gained mean of 39.38 for verbal victimization. This indicates that the treatment (assertiveness technique) is more effective. Using the analysis of variance ANCOVA, Table 2 shows that the p-value ($p \leq 0.000$) is less than 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected at 0.05 alpha level of significance and, 1 and 50 degree of freedom. This implies that the effect of assertiveness technique on the mean verbal victimization pre-test, post-test scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State is statistically significant.

These findings align with the finding of [8] which revealed that results in both experimental and follow-up stages showed that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group. The findings suggested that an assertiveness skills training program decreased students' Emotional victimization as an effective intervention.

Furthermore, the study conforms with the study conducted by [11], on group therapy, psychodrama, assertiveness training and counselling for bullying among middle school students in India. The results indicate marked difference targeted in self-report aggression scores and teacher ratings for aggression after therapy. Also, there was a marked increase in assertiveness among the experimental group. This leads to a conclusion that a multipronged effort to tackle bullying is required in the schools today.

3.3 Research Question 2

What is the effect of assertiveness technique in reducing verbal victimization among male and female junior secondary school students in Anambra State using their pre-test and post test scores?

3.4 Hypothesis 2

The effect of assertiveness technique on the mean verbal victimization pre-test, post-test scores of male and female junior secondary school students in Anambra State is not statistically significant.

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation results for male and female junior secondary school students treated with assertiveness technique. Male students had mean scores of 39.37 and 63.57 for their pre-test and post-test scores, with a gain in mean score of 24.20. Also, female students exposed to assertiveness technique had a pre-test mean score of 39.51 and a post-test score of 42.17 respectively. Hence the gain in mean result was 2.66. This analysis implies that the treatment was more effective on male junior secondary school students than their female counterparts. The ANCOVA analysis presented in Table 4 shows that the p-value ($p < 0.006$) is less than 0.05 alpha level. This implies that the effect of assertiveness technique on the verbal victimization pre-test and post-test mean scores is statistically significant. Hence, the use of assertiveness technique has a significant effect on the academic achievement mean scores of verbally victimized junior secondary school students.

These findings are in agreement to the findings of [7] which revealed that assertiveness training program have an appropriate experimental support in promoting mental health and

improving interpersonal skills. They further reported that the effect of assertiveness technique, including the increase of social adjustment and skills, align with the study of [10] which found significant effect on social support, adolescents' competence in conflict situations with peers and desirable social relations and expansion of satisfactory in social communication, happiness and achievement.

3.5 Research Question 3

What is the difference in the pre-test and post-test verbal victimization scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State treated with assertiveness technique and those treated with conventional technique?

3.6 Hypothesis 3

The difference in effect of assertiveness technique, gender on verbal victimization scores of junior secondary school students in Anambra State treated with and those treated with conventional technique is not statistically significant.

The mean and standard deviation presented in Table 5 shows that students treated with assertiveness technique had pre-test mean score of 39.37 and a post-test mean score of 63.57

with gained mean 24.20. similarly, students in the control group treated with conventional group counselling had a pretest mean score of 38.86 and posttest mean score of 60.17 with gained mean 21.31 in their verbal victimization scores. This implies that assertiveness technique is more effective. The ANCOVA result presented in Table 6 revealed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 103df denominator, the calculated F3.15 is less than the critical F3.99. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the post test verbal victimization means scores of students treated with assertiveness techniques and those treated with conventional counselling technique based on gender.

This finding conforms to the finding of [12] which found that no significant changes in risk in group level analyses; however slight mean changes in the expected direction were made on the majority of the scales. Individually, one participant met criteria for change using the Reliable Change Index (RCI) for improvement in signalling sexual boundaries. Slight increase was noted in observed eye contact, assertive volume and tone, and assertive nonverbals. Nonoverlap of All Pairs (NAPs) supports these findings. Self-report increased of assertive volumes and tone of voice were found.

Table 1. Verbal victimization pre-test and post-test mean scores of junior secondary school students treated with assertiveness techniques and those treated with conventional techniques

Source of Variation	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	MeanGain	Remark
Assertiveness Technique	52	35.45	7.8	68.12	6.11	32.67	Effective
Control	52	21.51	8.4	50.89	7.44	29.38	

Table 2. ANCOVA on the verbal victimization pre-test and post-test mean scores of male junior secondary school students treated with assertiveness techniques and those treated with conventional techniques

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1268.389 ^a	2	634.194	40.306	.000
Intercept	1528.879	1	1528.879	97.167	.000
Verbal victimization	618.797	1	618.797	39.327	.000
Treatment	107.460	1	107.460	6.830	.011
Error	1038.481	50	15.735		
Total	45582.000	65			
Corrected Total	2306.870	65			

Table 3. Verbal victimization pre-test and post-test mean scores of male and female junior secondary school students treated with assertiveness techniques and those treated with conventional techniques

Gender	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gained Mean	Remark
Male	54	39.37	63.57	24.20	Effective
Female	50	39.51	42.17	2.66	

Table 4. ANCOVA on the verbal victimization pre-test and post-test mean scores of male and female junior secondary school students treated with assertiveness techniques and those treated with conventional techniques

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.486 ^a	1	.486	.014	.006
Intercept	41291.558	1	41291.558	1199.512	.000
Gender	.486	1	.486	.014	.906
Error	2306.384	100		34.424	
Total	45582.000	103			
Corrected Total	2306.870	103			

Table 5. Pre-test and post-test verbal victimization scores of junior secondary school students treated with assertiveness technique and those treated with conventional technique

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gained Mean	Remar
Assertiveness technique	35	39.37	63.57	24.20	More Effective
Control group	35	38.86	60.17	21.31	

Table 6. ANCOVA on the pre-test, post test verbal victimization scores of junior secondary students treated with assertiveness technique and those treated with conventional counseling technique

Source of variation	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Crit. F	Remark
Corrected Model	446.622	2	223.311			
Intercept	796.992	1	796.992			
Pretest	244.322	1	244.322			
Treatment Group	168.337	1	168.337	3.146	3.99	NS
Error	3585.221	100	53.511			
Total	271997.000	103				
Corrected Total	4031.843	103				

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the observation that school bullying and peer victimization are major social problems affecting children and adolescents in all parts of the world. The serious consequences of bullying and peer victimization have generated considerable amount of attention from the public, as well as educators, school officials, and researchers in recent years. Through the findings that emerged from the study, it is concluded that the assertiveness technique is effective in reducing verbal victimization among junior secondary school students in Anambra state. Hence, counsellors in secondary schools should

adopt assertiveness counselling techniques during counselling sessions to reduce the increased rate of verbal victimization in schools.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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