

## **Influence of Gender, Age, Religion and Ethnicity on Peer-Victimization Among Primary Four Pupils in Ibadan, Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT** Peer-victimization has been found to be a universal phenomenon among children, which can lead to very grave consequences in the emerging adult. This study examined the influence of gender, age, religion and ethnicity on peer-victimization of 240 (131 boys and 109 girls) purposively selected primary 4 pupils in Ibadan metropolis. There was no gender difference in overall peer-victimization of primary school pupils. The same pattern was observed in age, religion and ethnicity dimensions. It is then concluded that experience of peer-victimization cuts across race and culture, its occurrence and dynamics are culturally universal. However, there exist some differences that can be attributed to cultural differences. Research efforts thus, should focus more on this area with emphasis on intervention and rehabilitation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Various studies have examined the incidence and prevalence of peer-victimization in children (Wentzel and Asher, 1995) and there seems to be agreement that the phenomenon is a global concern (Garcia and Perez, 1989; Slee, 1995; Smith, 1991). Occurrence of peer-victimization is multifaceted and encompasses a number of behaviours, it could be a function of culture, gender, age etc. and as such it is not easy to ascribe a single cause to its occurrence in children.

Peer-victimization has been defined as exposure to repeated, over time negative actions by a child from another child (Olweus, 1994), this definitely will involve asymmetrical power relationship involving intentional harm. The statistics on the prevalence of peer-victimization is rather alarming indicating that about two out of seven children experience peer-victimization within a week. Karstadt (1999) reports that four children in every class are subjected to peer-victimization on a regular basis, this is in consonance with earlier reports by Olweus, (1978), Slee and Rigby (1993) that one out of ten children is persistently victimized by peers while many more children are victimized less severely.

The health and psychological impacts of victimization on children can not be over emphasized, studies have shown that there exist relationships between peer-victimization, psychological adjustment and school functioning (Juvonen, Nishina, and Graham, 2000). Whitney

and Smith (1993), as well posit that peer-victimization is clearly a significant and pervasive problem that could lead to deleterious consequences for children. In another study, Mynard, Joseph and Alexander (2000) found that peer-victimization is associated with lower self-worth and higher posttraumatic stress and those adolescents with external locus of control may be at a greater risk of psychological problems.

Studies have reported gender differences in the experience of peer victimization in children, though criteria for categorization at times differ from one author to the other. Crick and Grotpeter (1995), Bjorkqvist et al (1992) report that boys are more likely to experience direct victimization whereas girls more than boys are likely to experience indirect victimization. Examining peer-victimization along four dimensions Mynard and Joseph (2000) report that boys experience higher physical victimization and attack on property than girls, girls on the other hand experience more victimization on social manipulation while no significant difference was found between boys and girls on verbal victimization.

In spite of all research findings on peer-victimization very little is known on peer-victimization in Nigeria, and this is because there is dearth of research into this area. This problem is not peculiar to Nigeria however; even in places where research has been extensive some populations have been neglected. For instance, Amah (2000) reports that very little is known about whether there is a significant difference in the

achievement of African American and Latin American students dealing with peer-victimization. He also reports that there are only a few studies examining peer-victimization among ethnic minority children living in economically distressed communities. Thus, the interest of this is to examine if there are gender, age, religion and ethnic differences in the experience of peer victimization among primary school pupils in Ibadan, Nigeria.

**METHODS**

**Research Design:** This is a survey study that made use of the Ex-post facto research design. The independent variables are age, gender, religion and ethnicity, while the dependent variable is peer-victimization.

**Participants:** Participants in the study were 240 (131 boys and 109 girls) purposively selected primary 4 pupils from 5 nursery and primary schools in Ibadan metropolis. Age range of participants was between 7 and 12 year old with a mean age of 8.9 and standard deviation of 0.94. The pupils with the aid of their teachers responded to the Mynard and Joseph (2000) peer-victimization scale.

**Measures:** Data collection was through the aid of a structured questionnaire containing two sections. Section A tapped demographic variables while section B was Mynard and Joseph (2000) multidimensional peer-victimization scale. This is a Likert format 16 item scale with reliability coefficient of 0.85, 0.75, 0.77, and 0.73 on physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation and attack on property respectively. Balogun and Olapegba (2005) report an overall reliability coefficient of 0.78 and a split-half reliability of 0.76 in Nigerian population.

**Procedure:** Consent was officially sought from authorities of the schools and guardians of

the participants through the schools for their ward to participate in the study. Questionnaires were administered in the classrooms during regular school hours with respective class teachers helping out. Of about 250 questionnaires given out 240 were valid for use.

**Statistics:** t-test of independent means and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data.

**RESULTS**

The results show there is no gender differences in peer-victimization-  $t=.60$ ;  $df=238$ ,  $p<.05$  (see Table 1). Boys were found to experience more peer-victimization on attack on property than girls-  $t=2.38$ ;  $df=238$ ,  $p<.05$  (see table 2). While no significant difference was found on the physical, verbal and social manipulation subscales.

**Table 1: Summary table of t-test of independent means showing gender and age differences in peer-victimization.**

	N	X	SD	df	t	P
<i>Sex</i>						
Boys	131	16.21	6.85	238	0.6	>.05
Girls	109	15.7	6.36			
<i>Age</i>						
>8.50years	162	16.49	6.72	238	1.74	>.05
<8.50years	78	14.91	6.31			

Age difference was also not found in the experience of peer-victimization- $t=1.74$ ;  $df=238$ ,  $p>.05$  (see Table 2). Meanwhile, children who are 9 years old and above experience more peer-victimization on social manipulation- $t=1.98$ ;  $df=238$ ,  $p<.05$  (see Table 3), no age difference was found on physical, verbal and attack on property sub-scales. Religion and ethnicity were found not to have any significant effect on the experience of peer-victimization among primary school children- $f(2, 237)=0.93$   $P>.05$ ,  $f(3, 239)=0.47$   $P>.05$  (see Table 4).

**Table 2: Summary table of t-test of independent means showing gender differences in peer-victimization on each of the sub-scales.**

	Sex	N	X	SD	df	t	P
Social manipulation	Boys	131	6.35	3.13	238	0.74	>.05
	Girls	109	6.06	3.09			
Verbal victimization	Boys	131	4.09	2.47	238	0.39	>.05
	Girls	109	3.95	2.14			
Physical victimization	Boys	131	2.35	1.86	238	1.84	>.05
	Girls	109	2.79	1.87			
Attack on property	Boys	131	3.44	1.88	238	2.38	<.05
	Girls	109	2.89	1.72			

**Table 3: Summary table of t-test of independent means showing age differences in peer-victimization on each of the four factors.**

	Age	N	X	SD	df	t	P
Social Manipulation	>9years	156	6.51	3.09	238	1.98	<.05
	<9years	84	5.68	3.08			
Verbal victimization	>9years	156	4.12	2.36	238	0.97	>.05
	<9years	84	3.82	2.26			
Physical victimization	>9years	156	2.63	1.84	238	0.82	>.05
	<9years	84	2.42	1.95			
Attack on property	>9years	156	3.19	1.83	238	-0.07	>.05
	<9years	84	3.2	1.84			

**Table 4: Summary table of one way ANOVA showing effect of religion on peer-victimization, and effect of ethnicity on peer-victimization.**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
<i>Religion</i>					
Between Groups	81.39	2	40.69	0.93	>.05
Within Groups	10395.5	237	43.86		
Total	10476.9	239			
<i>Ethnicity</i>					
Between Groups	61.847	3	20.616	0.47	>.05
Within Groups	10415	236	44.132		
Total	10476	239			

## DISCUSSION

To fill the research gap in peer-victimization in the Nigeria culture, this study examined the direction of occurrence of peer-victimization in school children. On overall peer-victimization no difference was found between boys and girls, but a significant difference was found between boys and girls on attack on property. This is suggestive of a significant difference of boys and girls on peer-victimization. This finding is in line with that of Crick and Grotpeter (1995), Whitney and Smith (1993) who report that boys are more likely than girls to experience direct victimization. This result may be a function of cultural gender orientation that teaches boys to be masculine, playing pranks, with a sense of responsibility in protecting the female folks, while girls are socialized to be gentle and shy. They are also culturally expected to be reserved even towards one another.

No significant gender differences were found in the experience of peer-victimization on physical, verbal and social manipulation subscales, this is in agreement with the findings of Mynard and Joseph (2000), it then shows that cultural differences in the experience of peer-victimization may be non-existent or negligible where found.

Age was also discovered not to have any significant effect on the experience of peer-

victimization. This is not in agreement with Mynard and Joseph (2000) report when they examined experience of peer-victimization across year groups. An examination of the various factors however, support partially the conclusion of Mynard and Joseph (2000), older children were found to experience peer-victimization more than younger children on social manipulation subscale while no such difference was observed on the other 3 sub-scales.

Religion does not have a significant effect on peer-victimization of primary school children, this may be due in part to the age of the children studied; they are likely too young to be influenced by religious tenets and biases. A one-way ANOVA did not also reveal any significant effect of ethnicity on peer-victimization of the children under study. However, it will be difficult to make a valid conclusion on this because the setting of the study was populated predominantly by people of Yoruba ethnic group. This made the sampling to be tilted in favour of the Yorubas to the disadvantage of the Igbos and Hausas.

## CONCLUSION

It may then be safe to conclude that experience of peer-victimization is an issue that cuts across race and culture, its occurrence and dynamics are culturally universal with similar

dimensions across gender, age and ethnicity. Peer-victimization is a pervasive problem with a tendency to snowball negatively and adversely affect adjustment in adulthood while encouraging anti social behaviour. It is suggested that research efforts should focus more on this area with emphasis on intervention and rehabilitation.

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