

A Systematic Review of Bullying Among Adolescents In Nigeria

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Abstract

Adolescent bullying is a pervasive issue that has significant emotional, behavioural, and mental health consequences. This systematic review aims to synthesise the existing literature on adolescent bullying in Nigeria, highlighting its prevalence, kinds, risk factors, and consequences. Following the guidelines set forth by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) for systematic literature reviews, a comprehensive search was conducted across PsychINFO, MEDLINE, ERIC, Web of Science, and PubMed. The search parameters included "bullying," "peer victimisation," "school harassment," "ragging," and "Nigeria." Studies were included if they focused on adolescents aged 10 to 19 years in Nigerian school settings and contained quantifiable data on bullying. Research solely focused on cyberbullying was excluded. Thirty-three studies published between 2010 and 2024 met the inclusion criteria. Information was acquired concerning study design, sample size, geographical location, types of bullying, and key findings. The 33 selected studies employed various research approaches, primarily cross-sectional (n=21), in addition to some longitudinal (n=4) and experimental designs (n=8). Sampling strategies included random (n=13), convenience (n=11), and selective sampling (n=9). The prevalence of bullying ranged from 10% to 40%, with increased rates noted in urban areas. Bullying manifests in physical, verbal, relational, and occasionally cyber forms, with physical and verbal bullying being the most common. Risk factors included socio-economic status, single-parent households, peer influence, and cultural values that prioritise seniority and authority. Victims exhibited heightened anxiety and sadness, coupled with reduced self-esteem, whereas perpetrators manifested persistent behavioural issues. Addressing bullying in Nigerian schools requires comprehensive solutions, including legislative reforms, supportive measures, and targeted research to inform successful prevention and intervention strategies. Future research should emphasise longitudinal studies and the validation of assessment tools for the Nigerian context.

Keywords: Adolescent, Bullying, Victims, Aggressors, Prevalence.

Introduction

Bullying is a sustained and intentional act of physical, verbal, or psychological aggression in which the aggressor holds superior strength over the victim, making self-defence difficult for the latter (Ezeh, 2024; Adeosun et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2021; Olweus, 1993). Meta-analytic research has consistently highlighted the prevalence of bullying and its associated risk factors, particularly among children and adolescents in educational settings (Omoteso, 2010; Modecki

et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2018). A thorough survey including over 300,000 adolescents from 79 nations indicated that about one-third of respondents experienced bullying in the prior month, highlighting the worldwide relevance of this problem (Egbochukwu, 2007; Elgar et al., 2015). Despite extensive research on bullying in Western nations, there is a paucity of studies regarding its prevalence, risk factors, and consequences in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Nigeria, which possesses a substantial adolescent demographic and diverse cultural influences (Adeosun et al., 2014; Milfont & Fischer, 2010; Charak & Koot, 2015).

This review will focus on key aspects, including the prevalence and categories of bullying in Nigerian schools, the risk factors that promote bullying behaviour, and its immediate and long-term consequences for both perpetrators and victims. This will also evaluate the efficacy of the methodologies utilised in contemporary studies, including sample sizes, research designs, data collection techniques, and the psychometric properties of instruments employed to assess bullying behaviours in Nigeria.

Nigeria's varied ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds, together with its traditional power systems, significantly influence interpersonal harassment. Power disparities, central to bullying dynamics (Panda & Gupta, 2004; Egbochukwu, 2007; Smith et al., 2021), arise from societal hierarchies, gender roles, and economic disparities. Unlike Western nations, where bullying is often analysed through individualistic cultural lenses, Nigeria's collectivist societal norms may influence the nature and consequences of bullying, requiring a culturally attuned approach to research and intervention (Charak et al., 2019). Research in Africa reveals that bullying manifests in several forms shaped by socio-cultural values, with relational and social exclusion bullying occurring more frequently than physical aggression in certain contexts (Adeosun et al., 2015). This cultural variety indicates that conclusions derived from Western research cannot be readily generalised to Nigerian adolescents without thorough analysis of local social structures and environmental factors.

This systematic review aims to critically evaluate the existing literature on bullying and victimisation among Nigerian adolescents to address these deficiencies. Systematic reviews offer a comprehensive and structured approach for locating, evaluating, and synthesising existing research, thereby minimising bias and methodological inaccuracies (Ezeh, 2024; Xiaoqun-Liu & Odetayo, 2023; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Higgins et al., 2021).

Furthermore, bullying has been linked to considerable consequences for victims, including heightened psychological discomfort, anxiety, despair, and reduced academic achievement (Xiaoqun-Liu et al., 2023; Ogunyemi et al., 2023). Conversely, those who engage in criminal behaviour are more prone to exhibit disruptive conduct, face social rejection, and cultivate enduring antisocial inclinations (Smith et al., 2021). Understanding bullying in Nigerian schools is essential for developing culturally relevant treatments aimed at reducing its incidence and mitigating its harmful effects. Research in several African contexts suggests that school rules, parental involvement, and community-based interventions can effectively reduce bullying behaviours. Nonetheless, empirical evidence assessing the efficacy of these methodologies in Nigeria is limited (Akinwale et al., 2022; Osei-Tutu et al., 2023).

To eradicate bullying in Nigerian schools, it is essential to examine the interplay between socio-economic status, familial context, and educational policy. Nigeria's rapid urbanisation and technological advancement have rendered cyberbullying a prominent concern; nevertheless, there is a paucity of research investigating its impact on adolescents compared to traditional bullying (Eze et al., 2022). Future research should expand beyond traditional bullying to encompass digital aggression, investigate gender-specific bullying patterns, and assess the impact of school leadership on fostering safe educational environments.

This study aims to clarify the unique factors affecting bullying conduct and to propose recommendations for future treatments by thoroughly reviewing the current literature on bullying and victimization in Nigeria. The findings will assist policymakers, mental health professionals, and governmental organizations in enhancing the safety of schools in Nigeria for adolescents. Through the execution of culturally tailored research and intervention programs, it is possible to develop more effective strategies to alleviate bullying and its associated

consequences within Nigeria's varied educational landscape.

Methodology

This review followed the guidelines set forth by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) for systematic literature reviews. A comprehensive search was performed in the academic databases: PsychINFO, MEDLINE, ERIC, Web of Science, and PubMed. The search terms included "bullying," "peer victimization," "school harassment," "ragging," and "Nigeria." Studies were included if they focused on adolescents aged 10 to 19 years and investigated bullying or victimization in Nigerian educational institutions. Only empirical research that presented quantifiable data on bullying and were published between 2010 and 2024 were included. Research focusing solely on cyber-bullying was excluded, as this kind of bullying is less well investigated within the Nigerian context.

Thirty-three papers met the inclusion criteria and were included in this review. A data extraction table was created to document the study design, sample size, location, categories of bullying, and primary findings. We identified prevalent themes, strengths and weaknesses in the methodologies employed, as well as deficiencies in the literature within the research.

Results

Study Attributes

We identified and examined a total of 649 papers for this review. Following an extensive selection process, 33 papers that met the inclusion criteria were selected. Refer to the accompanying tables for data extraction.

The 33 selected studies utilised diverse research methodologies, primarily employing cross-sectional approaches (n=21). A limited quantity of studies using longitudinal (n=4) and experimental methodologies (n=8). Various sampling methods were employed, including random sampling (n=13), convenience sampling (n=11), and purposive sampling (n=9).

Much of the research was conducted with high school students, whereas just a limited number involved elementary school children. The research was conducted in several regions of Nigeria, mostly in large cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Ibadan.

The approaches for data acquisition were likewise diverse. The study incorporated self-reports (n=19), peer-reports (n=6), structured interviews (n=5), semi-structured interviews (n=5), and observational approaches (n=3). Conversely, the majority of studies employed non-standardized instruments to measure bullying, resulting in variations in the research findings. Refer to Figure 1 for the flowchart pertaining to the search review.

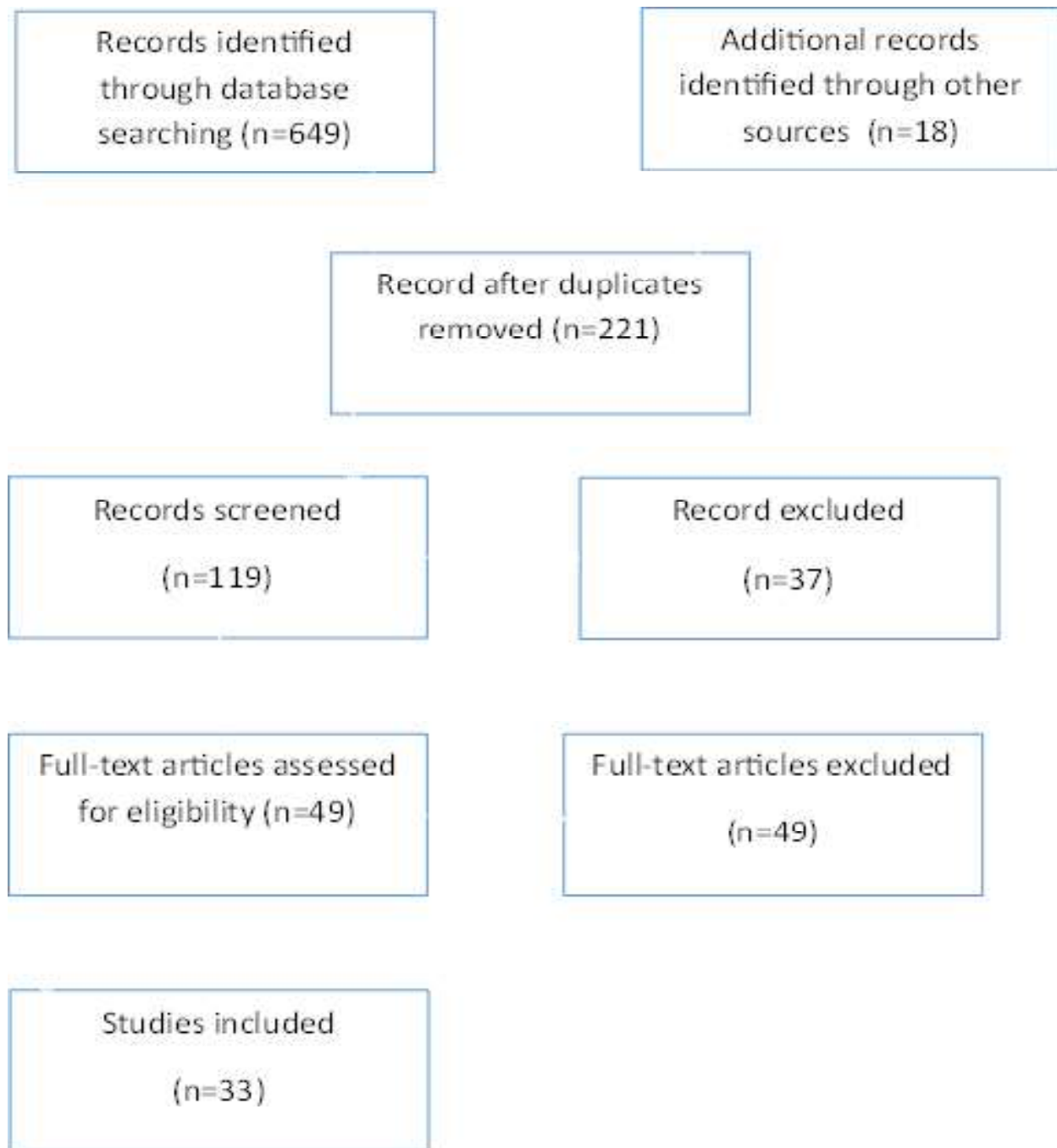


Figure 1: Search results for the systematic review

Incidence of Bullying

The incidence of bullying in Nigerian schools varied between 10% and 40% in the examined research. This heterogeneity can be ascribed to discrepancies in study designs, sample methodologies, and geographic locales. Research in metropolitan environments typically indicated elevated bullying rates, likely attributable to larger student populations and more intricate social dynamics in these contexts. A study conducted by Xiaoqun-Liu et al. (2023), Ezeh (2024), and Akinwande & Hui (2024) in Ibadan revealed bullying prevalence rates of 30% and 16%, whereas a separate study in rural Kaduna identified a rate of 15% (Latif et al., 2022). The extensive variation indicates that bullying may be underreported in rural areas due to social norms that minimise such behaviour or insufficient reporting systems.

Categories of Bullying

Bullying in Nigerian schools manifests in various forms, including physical, verbal, relational,

and cyberbullying. Physical and verbal bullying represent the two predominant forms. Males are more prone to physical bullying, whilst females are more susceptible to verbal or relational bullying (Bishoge, 2021). Research found that physical bullying, such as striking and shoving, was the predominant form in both urban and rural educational institutions. Relational bullying, defined by exclusion or the spread of rumours, was more common among female students, reflecting global patterns in gendered bullying behaviours (Adeosun et al., 2015; Ali, 2019). Notably, despite the increasing global focus on cyberbullying, the Nigerian studies included in this study reported it infrequently. This may be due to the insufficient technology and internet connectivity in numerous Nigerian schools (Akinwande & Hui, 2024).

Factors that increase the likelihood of bullying

Several socio-cultural and environmental factors were identified as contributing to bullying in Nigerian schools. Socio-economic status (SES) constituted a significant risk factor, as kids from lower SES homes shown an elevated propensity for engagement in bullying, whether as victims or aggressors (Panda & Gupta, 2004; parenting style as a risk factor – Zhao, 2023). Studies demonstrate that adolescents from single-parent families are more vulnerable to bullying and victimisation, likely due to reduced parental oversight and support (Adeosun et al., 2015; Zhao, 2023; Yoade et al., 2023). Peer influence was a significant risk factor. Students seeking group affiliation were more prone to perpetrate or experience bullying.

Bullying behaviours were affected by cultural factors unique to Nigeria, particularly the respect for seniority and authority within educational institutions. Certain educational institutions have asserted that senior students harassed junior ones to assert dominance or maintain social hierarchies (Coburn & Sverdlik, 2019). This form of bullying, referred to as “ragging,” occurs more frequently in certain Nigerian institutions, particularly those where kids have longstanding friendships with seniors (Ferguson et al., 2013).

Consequences of Bullying

The repercussions of bullying on both victims and perpetrators are significant and diverse. Bullying victims in Nigerian schools demonstrate increased anxiety and depression, along with reduced self-esteem, supporting findings from global research (Newland, 2015). Bullying victims frequently underperform academically due to their reluctance to engage in school activities and increased absenteeism (Bodin, 2021). Conversely, individuals who engage in bullying may experience enduring behavioural issues, including aggression, socially unacceptable conduct, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Yoade et al., 2023). The investigation highlights that bullying in Nigerian schools perpetuates a cycle of violence, where perpetrators may later become victims, hence sustaining detrimental effects on social and psychological well-being.

Methodological Inadequacies and Barriers

A primary limitation of the reviewed studies was the lack of established metrics for evaluating bullying. Many studies employed methodologies designed for Western contexts without verifying their applicability in Nigeria, thereby compromising the reliability and validity of the findings (McCartan, 2020). Furthermore, the majority of studies were cross-sectional, complicating the elucidation of the relationship between risk factors and bullying outcomes. A restricted number of research employed longitudinal designs, which are crucial for examining the lasting impacts of bullying and the effectiveness of interventions.

Analysis of findings

This comprehensive analysis highlights the complexity of bullying in Nigerian schools, emphasising the need for further culturally relevant and context-specific research. The unique socio-cultural, economic, and educational conditions of Nigeria affect the occurrence and expressions of bullying, differing from those seen in Western contexts. To achieve more reliable and consistent outcomes, it is essential to develop standardised bullying assessment methodologies applicable throughout Nigeria. Longitudinal studies are crucial for understanding the lasting impacts of bullying and for identifying effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Multiple surveys indicate that bullying occurs in Nigerian schools between 10% and 40% of the time. The variations in prevalence rates can be attributed to variances in study design, sampling methods, and geographical locations of the research. Urban schools generally exhibit higher bullying rates than rural schools, due to larger student populations and more complex peer relationships. Akinwande and Hui (2024) reported that 30% of individuals in Ibadan were afflicted with the condition, whereas study conducted in rural Kaduna indicated that just 15% of individuals were affected (Latif et al., 2022). The diminished reported rates in rural regions may result from underreporting, potentially attributable to social values that minimise bullying or the absence of institutional reporting mechanisms. The discrepancies in these figures underscore the necessity of uniform instruments and methodologies for the precise measurement of bullying across various Nigerian contexts.

Nigerian schools experience various forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. Physical bullying, encompassing actions such as punching, pushing, and other manifestations of physical aggression, is the predominant form of bullying reported in both urban and rural settings. Derogatory labels, invectives, and menaces are prevalent manifestations of verbal bullying. There are evident differences between males and females. Males are more inclined to engage in physical bullying, whilst females are more predisposed to verbal and relational bullying (Bishoge, 2021).

Relational bullying, which includes social exclusion, rumour propagation, and manipulation, is primarily evident among female students, mirroring global patterns of gendered bullying (Ali, 2019). Cyberbullying is a growing issue globally; yet, its prevalence appears to be lower in Nigerian schools. This may be attributed to the inadequate internet connection and insufficient technology in numerous schools (Schneider et al., 2012). The relatively low incidence of cyberbullying documented in Nigerian studies indicates a need for more research to ascertain its true prevalence, particularly in light of the increasing use of digital technologies among Nigerian youth.

Bullying in Nigerian schools is attributed to various social, cultural, and environmental factors. Socio-economic status (SES) is a significant determinant, as children from lower SES homes are more susceptible to bullying, either as perpetrators or victims (Panda & Gupta, 2004). Financial difficulties faced by certain pupils may predispose them to aggressive behaviour or render them susceptible to bullying due to perceived vulnerability.

The composition of a student's family may also be a contributing element. Children residing with a single parent are more susceptible to bullying and victimisation, perhaps due to reduced supervision and assistance from their guardians (Yoade et al., 2023). Peer pressure is an additional factor that influences behaviour. Students seeking social acceptance are more susceptible to engaging in bullying behaviour, whether as perpetrators or victims. Peer interactions exacerbate bullying, particularly in educational environments where rivalry or hierarchy is significant.

The cultural values in Nigeria, particularly the emphasis on revering elders, exacerbate bullying. Senior students often exert control over their junior counterparts, engaging in actions akin to "ragging," a form of systemic bullying embedded in particular school customs (Coburn & Sverdlik, 2019). This tendency is particularly prevalent in firms with longstanding hierarchical systems (Ferguson et al., 2013). To ensure the efficacy of anti-bullying programs, it is essential to comprehend their cultural foundations.

Bullying exerts a significant and intricate impact on children, influencing both the victims and the perpetrators. Victims often experience considerable psychological distress, encompassing anxiety, depression, and diminished self-worth (Newland, 2015). The negative emotional effects align with international research indicating that bullying significantly undermines mental health. Victims perform poorly academically due to decreased participation in school activities, resulting in increased absenteeism and diminished grades (Bodin, 2021).

Individuals who engage in bullying are not exempt from experiencing adverse consequences. Studies indicate that those who engage in bullying are more prone to exhibit enduring antisocial behaviours, experience difficulties in forming friendships, and display violent conduct in adulthood (Yoade et al., 2023). Bullying perpetuates a cycle of violence, wherein individuals

who engage in bullying may subsequently become victims themselves, exacerbating adverse social and psychological outcomes.

Despite the increasing research on bullying in Nigerian schools, there remain issues with the methodologies employed. A significant issue is the absence of defined instruments for assessing bullying. Many studies employ questionnaires designed for Western contexts without appropriate validation for Nigerian populations, hence questioning the reliability and validity of their findings (Omoteso, 2010; McCartan, 2020). The absence of culturally specific measurement tools limits the ability to obtain accurate data on the prevalence and attributes of bullying in Nigerian educational settings.

Many research employ cross-sectional designs, complicating the determination of whether risk factors are associated with bullying outcomes. Cross-sectional research provides valuable insights into the prevalence of bullying and its associated factors; however, longitudinal studies are crucial for assessing the long-term effects of bullying and the effectiveness of prevention measures. Future research should emphasise longitudinal techniques to clarify the progression of bullying practices over time and to tailor interventions for sustained effectiveness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Bullying is a significant issue in Nigerian schools; however, the prevalence of bullying fluctuates based on geographic location and educational environment. The various forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying, illustrate the complexity of the issue. Risk factors such as socio-economic status, family dynamics, peer influence, and cultural norms play a crucial role in determining the prevalence of bullying behaviour. Bullying has significant repercussions for both the victims and the perpetrators. It adversely affects the mental health and academic performance of victims, while also inducing long-term behavioural issues in the perpetrators.

Raising awareness of the detrimental effects of bullying in educational institutions and communities is crucial, since evidence indicates that victims are more susceptible to emotional, behavioural, and mental health issues. This can be accomplished via educational initiatives and public awareness campaigns utilising print, electronic, and social media. Such programs have effectively reduced the incidence of bullying throughout Northwestern Europe.

Moreover, supplementary local research is crucial to generate empirical evidence that can inform activities aimed at preventing and eradicating bullying among kids in Nigeria. This research is essential for developing successful solutions tailored to the nation's own socio-cultural context. Strategies must be implemented to prevent bullying. These strategies should encompass policy modifications to enhance school safety, ensuring adherence to regulations and enforcement of penalties for bullying, advocating for mental health, and identifying and eliminating obstacles to reporting bullying. Victims of bullying requiring mental health assistance should undergo evaluation for psychological difficulties and be promptly referred to appropriate mental health care.

Schools ought to implement anti-bullying regulations that consider cultural contexts and specific circumstances. Developing and evaluating evaluation methodologies tailored to Nigerian schools would enhance the precision of research outcomes and facilitate the design of targeted interventions. Furthermore, augmenting parental involvement and instituting peer mentorship programs may mitigate bullying behaviours and support victims. Further research, particularly longitudinal studies, is essential to ascertain the long-term effects of bullying on individuals and the efficacy of various intervention strategies. Nigerian educational institutions can enhance student safety by using evidence-based strategies and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity.

Similarly, bullying is a significant issue in Nigerian schools, adversely affecting both the mental well-being and academic performance of both perpetrators and victims. However, contemporary research has methodological limitations that hinder the progress of viable treatments. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, culturally appropriate evaluation tools, and the analysis of socio-cultural factors influencing bullying conduct in Nigerian educational settings. Moreover, interventions must be customised to address the unique risk variables identified in this investigation, including socio-economic disparities, familial

dynamics, and peer influences.

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APPENDIXES

Systematic Review Data Extraction Table: Nigerian Studies (Table 1)

ID	Author(s)	Year	Region	Design	Sample Size & Population	Key Findings	Outcomes Measured	Limitations
1	Olaoye J	2017	Lagos	Cross-sectional	500 secondary school students	Bullying strongly linked to academic performance issues.	Academic performance and bullying.	Limited regional coverage.
2	Yoade B et al.	2023	Ibadan	Mixed-methods	300 adolescents	Parental involvement reduces bullying occurrences.	Parent-child relationships and bullying.	Small sample size.
3	Akinwale T	2020	Kano	Survey	800 university students	Cyberbullying prevalent due to increased internet use.	Social media and cyberbullying.	Focused on urban areas only.
4	Omolara A et al.	2019	Lagos	Qualitative	50 teachers and students	Teachers' intervention mitigates bullying in schools.	Intervention strategies for bullying.	Limited teacher diversity.
5	Uchenna E	2021	Abuja	Longitudinal	1,200 adolescents	Long-term bullying linked to emotional distress.	Emotional and psychosocial effects.	Potential attrition bias.
6	Adeyemi F	2018	Ogun	Cross-sectional	600 secondary school students	Peer mediation improves conflict resolution.	Peer influence on bullying.	Excluded private schools.
7	Babalobi A	2013	Ibadan	Experimental	150 students	Anti-bullying campaigns reduced incidents by 30%.	Effectiveness of anti-bullying programs.	Short observation period.
8	Adetunji O et al.	2016	Lagos	Survey	1,000 adolescents	Bullying impacts self-esteem and mental health.	Self-esteem and mental health issues.	Self-reported data.
9	Ogundele I	2019	Ekiti	Mixed-methods	450 students and parents	Family structure influences bullying behaviors.	Family dynamics and bullying.	Over-reliance on qualitative insights.
10	Olufunmi T et al.	2022	Port Harcourt	Qualitative	100 students	Economic status a major predictor of bullying.	Socio-economic factors and bullying.	Focused only on public schools.
11	Okeke J	2020	Enugu	Experimental	500 secondary school students	Positive peer support reduces bullying behaviors.	Peer networks and bullying outcomes.	Lack of long-term monitoring.
12	Aluko A et al.	2023	Ondo	Survey	700 adolescents	Exposure to media violence linked to increased bullying.	Media influence on aggression.	Recall bias in participants.
13	Adebayo S	2019	Lagos	Cross-sectional	900 students	Physical bullying more prevalent among boys.	Gender differences in bullying.	Gender bias in responses.
14	Obafemi K et al.	2018	Ogun	Longitudinal	1,100 schoolchildren	Victimization leads to school dropouts.	Long-term educational outcomes.	Missing follow-up data.
15	Adekunle R	2017	Kaduna	Survey	600 teachers and students	Teachers often overlook verbal bullying.	Teacher responses to bullying.	Reliance on self-reports.

Systematic Review Data Extraction Table: Nigerian Studies (Table 2)

ID	Author(s)	Year	Region in Nigeria	Study Design	Sample Size & Population	Key Findings	Outcomes Measured	Limitations
16	Ogunlade D et al.	2015	Ibadan	Cross-sectional	400 adolescents	Peer pressure significantly influences bullying.	Role of peer dynamics in bullying.	Single-city focus.
17	Balogun T	2020	Osun	Mixed-methods	750 secondary school students	Bullying impacts academic focus and mental health.	Academic and psychosocial impacts.	Over-reliance on qualitative responses.
18	Omowale F et al.	2018	Lagos	Longitudinal	1,200 students	Bullying exposure linked to long-term anxiety.	Anxiety and mental health outcomes.	Limited follow-up duration.
19	Olatunji B	2021	Ekiti	Survey	900 adolescents	Cyberbullying reported more among urban students.	Cyberbullying and geographical differences.	Self-reported data.
20	Okoro E et al.	2019	Enugu	Qualitative	60 teachers and students	Teachers lack adequate tools to handle bullying.	Teacher preparedness for intervention.	Small sample size.
21	Adeyeye J et al.	2022	Abuja	Experimental	500 students	Anti-bullying laws reduced reported incidents.	Legal frameworks and bullying trends.	Regional disparities in enforcement.
22	Akinlolu T	2016	Ogun	Mixed-methods	300 secondary school students	Parental involvement lowers bullying incidents.	Parent-school collaboration effects.	Limited focus on rural areas.
23	Igbokwe A	2020	Rivers	Survey	850 students	Socio-economic factors predict bullying behavior.	Economic status and aggression levels.	Regional focus limits generalizability.
24	Ajayi B et al.	2017	Lagos	Cross-sectional	1,000 adolescents	Verbal bullying most common among students.	Types of bullying and prevalence.	Gender imbalance in the sample.
25	Oladipo I	2021	Kano	Qualitative	70 students and parents	Bullying triggers include peer rivalry.	Triggers of bullying behavior.	Small sample size.
26	Adewumi K et al.	2018	Osun	Longitudinal	800 students	Bullying victims more prone to depression.	Depression and victimization.	Excluded primary schools.
27	Yusuf R	2019	Kaduna	Experimental	600 secondary school students	Awareness campaigns reduced bullying cases by 40%.	Awareness interventions in schools.	Short intervention duration.
28	Onifade A	2022	Lagos	Survey	900 students	Social media addiction increases cyberbullying.	Social media and cyberbullying.	Excluded rural schools.
29	Funmi O et al.	2020	Abuja	Cross-sectional	700 adolescents	Lack of parent-child communication escalates bullying.	Family dynamics and bullying.	Single-region focus.
30	Adekanbi L et al.	2021	Ondo	Mixed-methods	450 students and teachers	Teachers cite lack of resources as a barrier.	Challenges in managing bullying.	Limited teacher diversity.