

## Parenting Styles and Callous-Unemotional Traits as Predictors of Bullying among Adolescents.

**Nweke Kingsley Onyibor**  
**Kingsleyuweke73@yahoo.com**

**Dike Adannia Amarachukwu**  
**dannia\_dyke@yahoo.com**

**&**

**Enike Tobias Chineze**  
**Interpol4christ@yahoo.com**

### **Abstract**

*The study examined parenting styles and callous-unemotional trait as predictors of bullying. Participants in the study were 100 secondary school students from St. John Secondary school and Igwebuике grammar school, Awka. Participants comprised of 51 male, and 49 female, with the Age range of 12-19 years, mean age 14.34years and standard deviation 1.99. Instruments used were parental authority questionnaire developed by Busi (1991), Inventory of callous unemotional trait scale validated by Nwafor (2013) and peer experience questionnaire developed by Hersherger (1999). Multiple regression analysis of variance enter method was used for data management. Result of ANOVA summary showed significant association at  $F(3,100) = 16^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ . Furthermore, beta coefficient for Permissive style was  $B = -.20^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ , Authoritarian style was  $B = .40$ ,  $P > .05$ , Authoritative style was  $Beta = B .25^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ , and Callous-Unemotional trait  $B = .23^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ . Therefore, hypotheses one and two were confirmed. It was concluded that Authoritative parenting style, permissive parenting style and Callous-unemotional trait predict Bullying among adolescents in the present sample. It was recommended that parents should adopt authoritarian parental style as this will reduce tendency towards bullying behavior. Also, parents should ensure that model behaviors displayed before their adolescent children are packed with empathy in order to tune down bullying among adolescents.*

**Keywords: parental styles, callous-unemotional trait, bullying behavior adolescents**

## **Introduction**

### **Background to the Study**

Most often, parents wish to send their children to best schools for quality education. In this process, parents struggle with bills and enormous sacrifices in order to meet up with financial challenges of the present time. However little did they know that another factor in their way of success with these children lies in the tolerance or acceptance of older children within the school environment. Some newly admitted children had reports of ill treatment coming from the older students which may take different forms. Some students reported of unlawful collection of provisions, uniforms, foot wears, money and other valuables. Some older students especially in the boarding schools have turned the younger ones into gay partners. Others in the all female school reported of lesbianism. In the end, the issues come to the public as social problems that ought to have been averted. Among the boys, some have received terrible beatings in the process of coercing them to join cult groups. As a result the goals of parents in sending their children to best schools have been defeated because most of the children end up not graduating. Others have been introduced to drugs use and peddling, sex pervades, and diverse levels of trauma. Against this background rests the tenets of this study on: Parenting styles and callous unemotional traits as predictors of bullying among secondary students.

According to Olweus (2001), Bullying is not simply a dyadic problem between a bully and a victim, but is recognized as a group phenomenon, occurring in a social context in which various factors serve to promote, maintain or suppress such behavior. The above definition holds that bullying goes beyond two different individuals, but may also take place among group members. Authors posit that bullying behavior may arise without apparent provocation, yet negative actions may be carried out by physical contact, words, mean gesture, and intentionally exclusion from a group. (Farrington, 1993; Smith & sharp 1994). Thus, it becomes obvious that the recipient of a bullying behavior may be less strong, of lower power, and lacks power to defend self.

Consequences of bullying among victims have been reported as depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, sleep disorder, loss of appetite, poor health, and drop in grade point average (<http://www.stopbullying.go>). According to McEwen, Gray and Nasca (2015) consequences of bullying are evident in neuroendocrinology of

stress. Indeed bullying has long term effect in the form of poor physical and mental health and reduced adaptation to adult roles including forming of lasting relationships, integration with work and belief in economical independent. It has been reported that there are six types of bullying: Physical, verbal; relational aggression, cyber bullying, sexual bullying, and prejudicial bullying (<https://www.verywellfamily.com>). Furthermore, studies reveal that there is positive association between parenting style and bullying behavior (<https://researchgate.net> ).

Parenting styles refers to different ways by which parent raise their children. Baumrind (1991) argues that there are four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting style. Authoritative parenting style is one in which the parents direct their children's activities in a rational issue oriented manner parents exercising control when necessary, but give the children freedom to act responsibly. Authoritative parenting style was referred to as one in which parents set high expectations and standards, and monitor their children behavior (Greenwood, 2013). Children in authoritative parenting style are usually expected to make decision and learn from their mistakes. Authoritative parenting style is a style in which parents do not consider the feelings of their children in attempting to shape control and evaluate their behavior therefore children are required to follow rules without objection or explanation from parents.

Permissive parenting style is parenting style that does not involve any form of punitive treatment. Permissive parenting style makes few or no demands for household responsibilities and allows the children to behave the way they want. Permissive parenting style is the most passive style of parenting. According to Greenwood (2013) permissive parenting style may be affective and loving but damming the children's safety in the long run. Scholars, report that inconsistent punishment often lead to child aggression. Therefore, it was thought that bullying starts at home. Accordingly, the pattern of parenting style may brews bullying among adolescents. Scholars report that Callous-Unemotional traits have significant positive association with bullying (Zuch, Ttofi, & Farrington, 2019). Individuals with CU trait may not feel guilty when they do anything wrong. Such individual may not express emotions of any kind therefore their

state of mind may not easily be interpreted. As a result, persons with callous-unemotional traits are eager to please self at the detriment of others.

### **Parenting styles and Bullying**

Gomez-Ortiz, Romera and Ortega-Ruiz (2016) reported a study on parenting styles and bullying: the mediating role of parental psychological aggression and physical punishment. Participants for the study were 2060, Spanish high school students (47.6% girls, mean age = 14.34). Result showed that non-democratic parenting styles favor the use of primitive discipline which increases the risks of adolescent bullying involvement.

Georgiou, (2008) reported a study on parenting styles and bullying at school: The mediating role of locus of control. Participants for the study were 447 students between 10 and 11 years old from different elementary, urban, and rural schools in Cyprus. Results show that authoritarian parenting is positively associated to bully-victim experiences in school, while authoritative parenting is negatively associated to bullying-victim experience in school. Locus of control partially mediated between authoritarian parenting style and bullying victim experiences at school. Also locus of control fully mediated callous-unemotional traits and bullying

### **Callous-unemotional trait and bullying**

Zych et al (2019) reported a study on empathy and callous-unemotional traits in different bullying roles: A systematic Review and meta-Analysis. Report was based on 53 empirical reports. Results, show that bullying perpetration is negatively associated with cognitive (odds ratio [OR]) = 0.60 and affective (OR = 0.51) empathy perpetration is negatively associated with callous –unemotional traits (OR= 2.55). Bullying –victims scored low in empathy (OR = 0.57). Also, no significant association was found between victimization and empathy (OR = 0.96), while the relationship between callous-unemotional traits and victimization is small but significant (OR= 1.66)

Ciucci and Baroncelli (2014) reported a study on the emotional core of bullying: further evidence of the role of callous-unemotional traits and empathy. The study participants

were 529 middle school children between the ages of 11 years and 8 months to 13 years and 8 months. Result, showed that among 11 years and 8 months, the uncaring dimension of CU traits were positively related to bullying, but the associations was completely mediated by a lack of effective empathy in older students. Callous dimension of CU traits was directly related to bullying and empathy was not associated when taking into account CU traits.

Wang, Hsiao, Chen, Sung, Hu, and Yen (2019) reported a study on Association between Callous-unemotional traits and various type of involvement in school bullying among adolescents in Taiwan. Results showed that higher levels of CU trait were positively associated with greater risk of being a victim of physical bullying and belongings snatch, or a perpetrator of verbal, relational and physical bullying and belongings snatch. Higher levels of unemotional trait were positively associated with greater risk of being a victim of verbal and relational bullying.

### **Theory of Bullying**

Social learning theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1973. According to the theory, individuals learn enormous amount of social behaviors simply by watching models display such behavior within their environment. Scholars have applied the social learning theory on providing evidence of intervention and prevention for both bullies and victims of bullying (Shafer & Siverman, 2013). More recently, social learning theory has been used to explain the basis of bullying among grade six and seven learners in Benoni (Young, 2014). Therefore, the researchers adopted the social learning theory as the theoretical framework of this study. Adoption of social learning theory is that as adolescents watch significant models perform scripts of bullying at home, they may learn it first hand and quickly deploy it at school among weaker adolescents.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Soon after a child leaves home for formal education, the child begins to perceive that the conditions outside the home differ from the one at home. At this moment onwards, the child learns that use of force may arise not only from the teacher or school caregiver, but

also from fellow older students. Bullying has become rampant, and the present level in our secondary schools has reached alarming level. As a result some students have come up with depression, anxiety and other psychopathological conditions. Consequent upon these psychopathological issues, the researchers examined; parenting styles and callous-unemotional traits as predictors of bullying among secondary school students.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Dimensions of parenting style will significantly predict bullying behavior among adolescents.
2. Callous-unemotional trait will significantly predict bullying behavior among adolescents.

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

100 secondary school students (JSS 2 and SS2 students situated at Awka south L.G.A of Anambra state served as participants for the study. They were selected from two secondary schools, the SS 2 students were selected from St. John girls' secondary school, St. John street Nnaemeka, and the SS 2 students were gotten from Igwebuike boys' secondary school Zik Avenue, Awka. The two schools were randomly selected from 4 Government secondary schools in the L.G.A. The participants were 49 females and 51 males. Participants were aged between 11 and 19 years, with an average age of 14.34 years and a standard deviation of 1.996.

#### **Instruments**

The following three scales were used in this study:

**Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ).** The questionnaire was developed by Buri, J. R (1991); is designed to measure parental authority, or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of the child (of any age). The scale contained 30 items with 3 dimensions. This scale is arranged in a 5 point likert format ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree 3= undecided, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. Buri (1991) found an alpha of coefficient of .77, and test reliability of. 72. However, Ugwu (2011) revalidated the questionnaire using 30 Nigerian samples from National Grammar School Nike Enugu state. An alpha of coefficient .84 and a split half reliability of .64 were obtained. Also a

concurrent validity of  $.84, p < .001$ , was obtained correlating parental authority questionnaire (PAQ) with parental support questionnaire by Nwafor (2008).

**Inventory of Callous-Unemotional Trait (ICU);** This inventory was used to measure lack of empathy. It is a 24 item questionnaire, which was originally developed by Frick, (2004), but was validated by (Essau, 2006 and Kimonis, 2008), after the validation, 22 items were retained. The items are rated on a four (4) point Likert scale format *ranging* from; 0 - not at all true to 3 - definitely true. The inventory has both direct and indirect scoring style. 12 items are reversed during scoring, (items; 1,2,4,7,11,13,14,15,17,21,22). The scale is made up of three factors (uncaring, callousness and unemotional). The measure of internal consistency show a total alpha coefficient of the 22 items to be  $.81$ , and for the three subscales were  $.81$ ,  $.80$  and  $.53$  for uncaring, callousness and unemotional, respectively. Nwafor, C.E (2013) revalidated the inventory using Nigerian sample. His internal consistency using the coefficient Cronbach alpha for the total of ICU 22 items was  $.75$  and for the three subscales were  $.71$ ,  $.71$ , and  $.56$  for uncaring, callous and unemotional respectively. Construct validity of the ICU showed significant positive correlation with measure of aggression;  $r = .24, P < .001$ .

**Peer Experience Questionnaire (PEQ).** This is a 10- item questionnaire developed by Vern berg, Jacob, and Hersherger (1999) as a self reported measure of bullying. The instrument encompasses the significant forms of bullying. The measure consist of two(2) items versions including one self reported victimization of others (victim scale) and self reported bullying of others(bullying scale). It is scored on a 5 point Likert scale format ranging from 1-5, were 1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = a few times 4 = about once a week, 5 = a few times a week. High score means positive response, low score means negative response. The test correlated with aggression scale by Orphinas and Frankowski, (2001), with concurrent validity  $r = .24, p < .001$  (Nwafor, 2012). PEQ-B has been found to have high in intern consistency for the total score on bullying scale (Cronbach alpha= $.78$ ) as was determined by Vernberg et al (1999); and Cronbach alpha of  $.71$  in Nigerian sample (Nwafor, 2012). It has only direct scoring style.

### **Procedure**

The researchers in company of research assistants visited each of the schools first to meet with school principals and explain the purpose of the visit. The principal gave permission and assigned a teacher to guide the researchers. The two schools were visited in two days and students were met in the classrooms. The students were met in the classrooms. As a matter of fact filling questionnaires was strange to them. The researchers took time to explain what a questionnaire was and how the response pattern works. After the explanations the students showed willingness and the researchers and research assistants

shared the questionnaires to all the students in the classrooms who were available and voluntarily agreed to fill the questionnaires. This was done in the morning hours while the students were waiting for their teachers and in the afternoon while they were waiting for the closing bell. After about fifteen minutes when the questionnaires have been filled, they were collected back from the students and put in an envelope. The students were assured of confidentiality by the researcher. This process was repeated in the second school the next day. The researchers thanked the students for their participation in the study before leaving the classrooms. Out of the 104 questionnaires distributed, 100 were properly filled and were used for the analysis.

### **Design and Statistics**

Predictive design was adopted for the study. Pearson Product Moment correlations and multiple regression analysis were used to manage data generated.

## **RESULT**

**Table 1:** Standardized Beta Coefficient Result for effects of Parenting Styles and Callous-Emotional Trait on Bullying

<b>Predictor Variables</b>	<b>R2 (Adj R2)</b>	<b>df1 (df2)</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
<b>Model1</b>	<b>.06(.05)</b>	<b>3(100)</b>	<b>16.09**</b>		
A. Permissive style				<b>.20*</b>	
B. Authoritarian style				.40	
C. Authoritative style				<b>.25**</b>	
D. Callous-Unemotional Trait				<b>.23**</b>	

\*\*P< .01, \*P<.05,

The model shows that when enter method was applied for the three two independent predictors parental style (permissive, authoritarian and authoritative) and callous-unemotional trait, the adjusted R squared was .05. This means that the model contributed 5% in understanding of Bullying behavior among sample adolescents. ANOVA summary revealed that  $F(3, 100) = 16.09^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ . Specifically, the standard Beta coefficient for each of the predictor variables showed that for Parenting style (Permissive style  $B =$



.20\*\*,  $P < .01$ , Authoritarian style  $B = .40$ ,  $P > .05$ , Authoritative style  $B = .25$ \*\*,  $P < .05$ ) and Callous-Unemotional Trait  $B = .23$ \*\*,  $P < .01$ . However, result above show that both hypothesis 1 and 2 were confirmed.

## **Discussion**

The study on parenting styles and callous-unemotional trait as predictors of bullying behavior among undergraduates showed that hypothesis 1 was confirmed as significant positive predictor of Bullying behavior among adolescents. According to Georgiou (2008), bullying was brewed from the homes. Therefore, if bullying emanated from homes, it makes sense to explore parental care-giving styles that develop bullying among adolescents. Gomez-Ortiz, Romera and Ortega-Ruiz (2016) reported that non-democratic parenting style (authoritative style) increases adolescents bullying involvement. Consistent with earlier studies, authoritative parenting style was found to be positively associated with bullying among adolescent, while authoritarian style was positively associated with bully-victim experiences (Georgiou, Ioannou & Stavirinides, 2017). The empirical report may find explanations in the social learning theory. According to the assumptions of the social learning theory, adolescents grow up in different homes under the care giver (parents) who adopt different styles. As a result of this each adolescent seem to copy behaviors such parents display on daily bases. Over time, adolescents learn such pattern that is available at home. Such patterns they see are employed in their day to day interactions with fellow adolescents. Situations arise when the older adolescents encounter others that are weaker, earlier learning automatically activates and the application of previous learning of bullying takes over them. Adolescents that were privileged to be in authoritative parenting style learn to deploy aggression, authoritarian learn to apply diplomacy and adolescents from permissive homes may equally apply coercion since they were left to fend for themselves without control.

Result of the present study confirmed hypothesis 2. Consistently, scholars have been unanimous on the association between callous-unemotional trait and bullying behavior among adolescents (Zych, et al; 2019; Ciucci & Baroncelli, 2014; Wang et al; 2019). These studies reveal that bullying behavior has negative association with empathy, and

cognitive and affective components of attitude. Thus, individuals who lack capacity to experience the pains of others (absence of empathy) may be more disposed to bully others. Therefore, a major component that is absent among adolescents with callous-unemotional trait is empathy. According to the social learning theory, behaviors are learnt within the social environment where individuals reside. As the adolescent grows up each day behaviors that are visible before him portrays no empathy, quickly, the adolescent learns that empathy should not be entertained in his emotional repertoires. As a result such adolescent will lack empathy during adolescent and beyond.

### **Conclusion**

The study on parental styles and callous-unemotional trait as predictors of bullying behavior concludes that both concepts predict bullying behavior among sampled adolescents. However, with respect to parenting style, authoritative and to a certain extent, permissive styles both predict bullying behaviors among adolescents. This is because authoritative style employs coercion on training adolescents and adolescents learn firsthand how to apply it in different environments. Since, permissive style allows the children to train themselves without a guide, adolescents learn violence as they grow up and employ it when the need arise.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that parents should adopt authoritarian parenting style because such parenting style cannot lead to bullying behavior. Also, parents should demonstrate empathy behaviors before their growing up children so that the adolescent could learn it as they grow. Such behavior manifestation may reduce callous-unemotional trait among adolescents.

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