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# HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING AMONG NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: IMPLICATION FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION

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## ABSTRACT

*People who engage in same-sex acts or who don't fit the stereotypical ideas of gender and sexuality face a great deal of prejudice and social marginalization worldwide; Nigeria is no exception. LGBT people relate personal stories of being marginalized because of their gender identity and sexual orientation, which present many difficulties. Homosexuality is still illegal in Nigeria, which further marginalizes LGBT people and creates more obstacles to their access to public services and ability to reach their full potential. The worst situation involves teenagers enrolled in school who experience the same attack while they are still there, and the involved parties continue to believe that bullying of this kind does not still occur. Thus, this article highlights the condition of homophobic bullying in Nigeria. It also examines how homophobic bullying affects the bully, the victim, onlookers, and the general atmosphere of the school. Finally, it discusses potential implications for psychological interventions aimed at managing homophobic bullying in secondary schools.*

**Keywords:** Homophobic bullying, LGBT, students, psychological intervention.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, parents and caregivers typically prepare their children early in the morning and take them to school because they believe that the school is safe. However, reports, e.g, Brown (2010) show that many students find the school hostile, with some of them being unwilling to return to school. It has been observed that very few children are able to get along well with their classmates without being bullied or having other disruptions in the classroom (Plamondon et.al, 2018). Given the rising incidence of bullying in Nigerian schools (Ighaede-Edwards et al., 2023), one wonders if this still holds true in the country's current society, even though schools have historically been among the safest places for kids to be, second only to their homes (Fareo, 2015).

Bullying behaviour poses serious concern to parents, teachers, educators, social workers, psychologists, and other social scientists (DeSmet et al., 2018). According to societal expectations, students should feel safe at school despite the growing prevalence of violence and intimidation in schools. As a result, educators often concentrate on the problem of bullying in order to maintain a peaceful and safe learning environment (Margevičiūtė, 2018) .

Smith et.al (2004) defined bullying as “a particular vicious kind of aggressive behavior distinguished by repeated acts against weaker victims who cannot easily defend themselves” (p.547) Bullying has been defined as a social interaction style wherein the victim, who is typically a less dominant individual, has distress as a result of the bully's violent behavior (Aluede, 2011; Fareo, 2015; Omoteso, 2010). One thing that is common in most conceptualizations of bullying is a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. Put differently, bullying doesn't happen when people with similar power disagree. Bullying can also take many different forms, such as individual bullying that occurs one-on-one or group bullying known as mobbing, in which the bullies may have one or more "lieutenants" who appear eager to help the main bully in their actions.

However, no matter the type of bullying, researchers acknowledge five features of bullying (Aluede, 2011; Olweus, 1993; Ttofi, & Farrington, 2011; Wang et.al, 2010; Wang et.al,2015). They include: that bullying consists of behaviour that is directed towards a victim with the intention to harm or instill fear in the victim; it occurs without provocation; it occurs repeatedly over a period of time; bullying occurs within the context of a social group; and an imbalance of power exists between the perpetrator and the victim. There are many different kinds of bullying. Juvonen et al. (2014), for example, categorized bullying behaviors into four main categories: verbal, physical, emotional (sometimes referred to as relational), and cyberbullying. The present research however focuses on homophobic bullying. This form of bullying has been presented as a public health issue (Pascoe, 2013; Rivers, 2011). Bullying behaviors driven by prejudice against an individual's real or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation are referred to as homophobic bullying (Rivers, 2011). It is, thus, a behavior or a statement that causes a child or young adult to feel excluded or unwanted due to a real or imagined sexual orientation. It is a type of bullying motivated by prejudice and identity.

Broadly speaking, bullying is motivated by dislike or ignorance about lesbian (women who are sexually attracted to other women), gay (men who are sexually attracted to other men), bisexual (a person who is attracted to both men and women), and transgender people (people whose gender identity differs from their sex at birth) (Meer et.al, 2017). Bullies can be peers as well as members of staff. Homophobic bullying is a learned behaviour (DeSmet et al., 2018; Peter et.al, 2015). The victims are selected on the basis of negatively perceived and culturally defined difference in sexual orientation or gender identity (Collier et.al, 2013). While those identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender are clearly vulnerable, any other person can still suffer the attack (Meer et al., 2017). Homophobic bullying has been frequently recorded in primary and secondary schools in Western society (e.g., Dankmeijer, 2014; Schneider et.al, 2012).

Like all forms of bullying, homophobic bullying can be in form of emotional, verbal, physical or sexual attack. It can also occur in form of social bullying or social exclusion, or cyber bullying. The violence and discrimination common to this kind of bullying is as a result of sexual orientation and gender identity (Baruch-Dominguez et.al, 2016).

There is poor awareness of homophobic bullying in Nigeria. Many researchers in Nigeria focus their attention on other forms of bullying neglecting homophobic bullying. Sometimes, they lump all forms of bullying together into a single term thereby making homophobic bullying to remain obscure and its effects unclear. In Nigeria today, there seems to be absence of research on the nature and prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools in spite of the fact that causal homophobic language is common in Nigerian schools (Okuefuna, 2016). Peter et.al(2015), noted that homophobic bullying occurs in all countries regardless of beliefs or cultures and Nigeria has been ranked as one of the highest homophobic nation (Izuogu, 2017). Despite all this, many people in Nigeria still claim that homophobic bullying does not exist simply because Nigeria is an anti-gay nation. The present researchers noted that homosexuality is in existence in Nigeria. Many Nigerians travel abroad where homosexuality abound, learn it, and come back to practice it; and some learn it through media. As a result of this homosexuality and homophobia abound in Nigeria (Mapayi et al., 2016). Some individual and families who practice such behaviour are known and there is every tendency that they or their children may be victimized or intimidated based on that.

The theoretical framework of this work is the social learning theory (Bandura, 1973, 1986). This theory's central claim is that social experiences and model observation both forecast the learning process, and that many circumstances affect the possibility of modeling. Drawing from the perspective of this theory (social learning), though same-sex act is prohibited in Nigeria, but school going adolescents still learn it from those who practice it in secret and even from social media.

### **The Nigerian Situation**

Although reports of bullying occurrences in various Nigerian schools date back to several years (Alika, 2012; Aluede, 2011; Egbochukwu, 2007; Eweniyi et al., 2013; Fareo, 2015; Omotoso, 2010), these incidents do not always receive the attention they need. Furthermore, there are no reliable statistics to illustrate the exact number of pupils that are bullied or victims in Nigerian secondary schools. Recently, bullying occurs more frequently among students than in the broader community. Bullying also frequently remains unreported because victims or their relatives fear embarrassment or being victimized again (Okanlawon, 2018). However, little research attention has been given to bullying among this population in Nigeria not minding that Nigeria has been ranked as one of the most homophobic nations (Onuche, 2013). As has been noted by Taylor (2009), this kind of bullying (homophobic bullying) occurs everywhere and anybody can suffer the attack. For example, homophobic bullying does not only affect LGBTI and transgender persons in our nation; it also affects all young people who act in a way that defies gender norms. For instance, it has been found through observations and interviews with parents, teachers, and students that a large number of secondary school students encounter homophobic bullying because of the victims' appearance (Monk, 2011)

Culturally, it is expected that males should dress like males and vice-versa. So adolescent girls for example who look like boys by putting on male attire, or possess body shape different from their gender, are bullied, while male who are fashion conscious and dress like female by braiding or relaxing their hair, putting on earring, wearing tight trousers and having a long finger nail are perceived as different from the norm and this makes them vulnerable to this particular bullying. Not only that some girls who behave like boys, for example, by playing football or any other activity that demands a lot of energy are bullied. Boys who move or dance like girls are also perceived as different from the norm. When this is the case, people assume that these adolescents are homosexuals and because of that they are constantly bullied.

In addition, there are some family structures that make Nigerian adolescents to be homophobically bullied. Some of them who live with single parents are always bullied especially if the parents(s) or the care-taker is the same sex. Also, children of lesbian, or gay parents are often victims of homophobic bullying from peers if their family situation becomes known; and adolescents who are their friends are also bullied (Okanlawon, 2017). Families who have children of the same gender either that they are all male or all female are vulnerable for this attack.

The prevalence of cell phone ownership among schoolchildren in Nigeria has led to an increase in homophobic bullying.

The prevalence of cell phone ownership among schoolchildren in Nigeria has led to an increase in homophobic bullying. Mefoh(2007) noted that children or adolescents bully their perceived enemies by sending menacing text messages via phones and that this kind of bullying is very common in primary and post primary schools. As a result, many young people spend their school years in permanent state of anxiety and insecurity. In the same vein, it has been discovered that adolescents post pictures of those they perceive as gay or lesbian in different social network sites like blogs, twitter, WhatsApp, etc, for others to see and this makes them to suffer homophobic attacks or abuse when people see them physically even though they might have been perceived wrongly (Cooper et.al, 2012).

As it is now, homophobic bullying seems to be going on in secret in Nigerian secondary schools and other school levels because people do not come out easily to show that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). This is because homosexuality is prohibited in Nigeria (Okoli et al., 2014), and a significant number of Nigerians derive their aversion of homosexuality from cultural and religious traditions. They just won't accept homosexuality because they see it as deviant or against nature. So those of them that are real LGBT refuse to come out openly for fear of unknown. Since the Nigerian senate approved a measure on May 30, 2011, which made being gay a crime punishable by up to 14 years in jail, the majority of the country's LGBT community has experienced a noticeable increase in fear and anxiety (Okoli et al., 2014). Even though the bill restricting gay marriage has not yet been signed, it is actually more lenient than what gays must deal with in the Muslim-dominated north of the country, where

homosexuality is illegal and can even result in death by stoning (Olaniyi, 2011). In actuality, the LGBT community in Nigeria feels intimidated by this notion. They prefer to use word-of-mouth and underground routes (networking) to discover other gay individuals to date or engage with, as opposed to coming out publicly (Okuefuna, 2016). However, it has been challenging to understand the extent of homophobic bullying in Nigerian schools due to a dearth of well-documented facts, statistics, and literature.

A review of the literature revealed that bullying in schools is a common occurrence in Nigeria. For example, Egbochukwu's (2007) research of Nigerian schoolchildren in Benin City found that 85% of the kids claimed to having bullied others at least once, while nearly four out of every five participants (78%) reported having been the victim of bullying. In a similar vein, the majority of respondents (62.4%) to Aluede and Fajolu's (in press) study on bullying behavior among secondary school students in Benin City, Nigeria, reported having been the target of bullying, while 29.6% admitted to bullying others throughout the school year. According to a study by Omoteso (2010), 51.2% of the participants had bullied someone else after they had previously been bullied, whereas 88.1% of the participants had been the bullies, 33.1% had been the victims, and 64.7% had engaged in relational bullying. In a related study, Owuamanam et al. (2015) looked at students enrolled in six public secondary schools in Ondo, Ota local government area, Ogun state, during the 2007–2008 session. They found that the students experienced bullying in the following time frames: 1-2 days within a month (29.5%), 3-5 days (9.1%), 6–9 days (5%) and 10–30 days (3–4%). The high prevalence rate reported by Nigeria authors show that bullying is going on in the nation's secondary schools, though none of the authors was able to report specifically whether the bullying is homophobic or not. Guedes et.al. (2016) asserted that most bullying is sexual or gender-based.

Bullied children who are homophobic may suffer emotional, social, and psychological harm, which can negatively impact their academic performance and devastate the school's social atmosphere (Meyer, 2015). The severity of the consequences on a certain child or young person is solely dependent on that person and their coping strategies. There are individual differences in responses to bullying and that makes the effects to differ also (DeSmet et.al., 2018).

### **Effects of homophobic bullying on the bully**

Bullies perform poorly in academics and one of the reasons may be because most of the time they skip classes or school (Espelage, Hong, Rao, &Low, 2013). Bullies also suffer from conduct, school and peer relationship problems because they lack social skills that makes it difficult for them to have a lasting peer relationship and that is why they have few friends. As was noted by Beran (2009), the existence of power imbalance makes it possible for the bully to always feel immune perpetration of homophobic bullying continues in the school and beyond. Researchers, (e.g., Wolke&Lereya,2015)discovered that bullies also suffer from long-term effects like alcohol and drug abuse, cigarettes smoking etc.Similar research on college women revealed that, although the consequences of their drinking may be substantially worse, LGBT people do not drink alcohol in a way that is statistically different from that of their heterosexual counterparts (Kerr, et al., 2014).Compared to their peers who did not bully, former bullies were five times more likely to have a criminal record by the age of thirty and six times more likely to have been convicted of a crime by the age of twenty-four. (Klomek, Sourander & Elonheimo, 2015); and their children are likely to become bullies themselves (Ross & Horner,2014).

### **Effects of homophobic bullying on the victim's education**

Information from literature shows that homophobic bullying has a devastating effect on the victim's education generally, including denial of access to relevant information in the school to poor academic achievement (Peter, Taylor, Ristock, &Edkins, 2015). A young person who is experiencing homophobic bullying is less likely to enjoyschool and achieve his/her full potential.

Studies (e.g., Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2014; Meyer, 2015) have consistently shown that students who experience homophobic bullying often perform worse academically than their peers. These students were also twice as likely, on average, to not plan to pursue any kind of post-secondary education as students in the general student population. (Espelage et al., 2013). Also, the victims of homophobic bullying avoid participating in class discussions due to the fear of being bullied. Because of this, individuals can be mistakenly classified as low achievers, and educators might mistake their silence for a lack of comprehension or drive. These pupils are more likely to skip class, detest learning, have a bad opinion of it, and perform poorly academically as a result. Additionally, it is typical for these adolescents to perform even worse, particularly as the bullying and mocking persist. This kind of situation may result to poor attendance to school. Due to negative reactions from peers and others in the school, most of the time the victim pretends to be ill to avoid being present in school. In the United Kingdom, it was reported that seven out of ten lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners who were the victims of homophobic bullying reported negative impact upon their school work, with half (50%) of those described missing school as a result, one in five (20%) missing school more than six times (Birkett & Espelage, 2015).

In addition to skipping class or missing it altogether, victims of homophobic bullying may discontinue their education as a direct or indirect consequence of verbal and physical abuse at the hands of peers and other school personnel (Birkett et al., 2015; Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2009). In a similar study by Bondyopadhyay, Khan and Mulji, (2005) in three countries, India and Bangladeshi with a sample of gay men, it was found that victims of homophobic bullying in school had prematurely ended their education, which negatively impacted on their life. To sum up, academic performance is impacted by missing classes or school, whereas academic achievement is impacted by early school departure. Numerous studies (Astuti et al., 2017; Carolan & Redmond, 2003; Dubel & Heilkema, 2010) have repeatedly demonstrated that students who drop out of school early have lower qualifications, which affects their chances of finding work in the future. The loss of confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety, psychological stress, and social isolation brought on by homophobic bullying also negatively impacts academic performance and accomplishments (Birkett et al., 2015).

### **Effects of homophobic bullying on mental and psychological health of victims.**

Bullying that is homophobic can harm a child's emotions and have psychological repercussions that persist long into adulthood (Wang, Lin, Chen, Ko, Chang, Lin, & Yen, 2018; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). The more severe and pervasive homophobic bullying is, the higher the chance of these issues occurring. If the youngster lacks the required assistance or positive social support, they are more vulnerable. Children who are subjected to this type of bullying are prone to carry on playing the victim into adulthood. As a result, the victims are likely to continue to struggle with anxiety and despair as adults (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Researchers have demonstrated that the victims of homophobic bullying during childhood and/or adolescence were more likely than non-bullied peers to experience depression and anxiety disorders (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; McCabe, Anthony, Summerfeldt, Liss, & Swinson, 2003; Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015). The victims of homophobic bullying also suffer from loss of self-confidence, low self-esteem and negative body image. For example, sufferers could have a sense of helplessness and an inability to regulate their emotions and surroundings. That is, because they believe bullies have power over them, victims frequently experience a fall in their sense of value (Rodkin et al., 2015).

In the same vein, Sesar Barišić, Pandža and Dodaj (2012) asserted that if bullying persists for a long period of time, the victims may begin to generalize this sense of incompetence to other areas of their lives which may lead to low self-esteem. Furthermore, some kids who experience bullying and harassment might even believe that they deserve it, which is akin to the beliefs held by victims of domestic abuse or other violent crimes (Finkelhor, 2008). This may lead to a rise in eating disorders and body dysmorphia, both of which are detrimental to one's mental and self-

esteem (Wang et al., 2009). In severe cases, homophobic bullying may lead to self-harm, suicide or death. Suicidal thoughts and attempts are therefore common in bullies as well as victims. For instance, studies (e.g., Orth, et al., 2009) indicates that bullying in general, as well as in specific communities like lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender orientation, can result in suicidal thoughts in both bullies and victims (Kim & Leventhal, 2008); and that these youths in question attempt suicide at a rate 2 – 4 times higher than that of their heterosexual peers (Marshall, 2016). Homophobic bullying can also lead to shame, anger or bitterness, self-ridicule to gain social or peer acceptance (D'Urso, & Pace, 2019).

There is a wealth of research demonstrating that victims of homophobic bullying frequently engage in high-risk behavior and are vulnerable to HIV (Dunkle & Decker, 2013; Friedman, Marshal, Stall, Cheong, & Wright, 2008). Young lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who experience homophobic bullying, for example, are more likely to consume drugs or engage in risky sexual behavior. In many other nations, young males who have sex with men are similarly more susceptible to HIV (Friedman, et al., 2008). According to Centkseven, Onder, and Yurtal (2008), homophobic bullying impedes access to services for support, treatment, and prevention while also raising the probability of risky behavior. For instance, data pertaining to lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender students of all races in the United States indicates that during 2006 to 2009 the number of new infections that occur in each year increased among young men who have sex with men, with an alarming 48% increase among young aged 13-27 years old (Carragher & Rivers, 2002). In addition, fear of stigma, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students from seeking HIV testing, counselling, care and treatment. Homophobic bullying makes it difficult for LGBT to be reached by outreach programmes (Carragher et.al, 2002); and because the stigma caused by this kind of abuse can be self-inflicted, it can lead to silence, denial, mistrust and secrecy (Hunt, 2014). Homophobic bullying can lead to emotional stress and this has been confirmed in a study by Rivers (2004) showing a potential link between school-age bullying of any kind and post-traumatic stress during childhood and adolescence. Lesbian and gay youths have been found to report higher rates of school-based victimization than heterosexual peers (Poteat et.al., 2007) which may lead to greater likelihood of experiencing symptoms with post-traumatic stress. Psychological effects of homophobic bullying also include insomnia, bed wetting, guilt and sleep disturbance (Poteat et.al., 2007).

### **Bullying that is homophobic and its effects on bystanders**

Bystanders are also very important in bullying situations. As a result, after seeing a bullying scenario, he or she likewise experiences negative consequences. When they see bullying occurring at school, students may believe that it is a dangerous place (Rivers, 2011). When people observe bullying, they may experience dread and anxiety, which can make school a hard environment. Bystanders may find it difficult to build relationships with other students and trust their classmates (Poteat & Vecho, 2016). In order to avoid becoming targets, bystanders may choose not to assist victims. But subsequently, a lot of people feel bad for not assisting the victim, and those who choose not to intervene lose their feeling of value or respect for themselves. In order to avoid becoming targets, bystanders may choose not to assist victims. But subsequently, a lot of people feel bad for not assisting the victim, and those who choose not to intervene lose their feeling of value or respect for themselves. All things considered, this has the power to alter interpersonal and group dynamics and create a more hostile learning environment. (Poteat et.al., 2016).

### **Impact of homophobic bullying on the school environment as a whole**

It has been demonstrated that a supportive school environment enhances favorable behavioral and socio-emotional outcomes in addition to supporting academic success. A positive school climate has the potential to positively impact students' academic performance, classroom engagement, educational motivation, attendance, self-concept, pro-social behavior, and many other aspects of their success in the classroom. Conversely, a negative school climate can lead to a number of negative outcomes, including emotional and behavioral issues, high-risk

behaviors, adolescent alcohol and tobacco use, increased aggression, and childhood psychopathology (Birkett et al., 2009).

Kosciw et al (2012) report of a nationwide survey, noted that homophobic bullying has made 50% of pupils feel unsafe at school. According to research, a supportive school environment promotes student responsiveness, safety perceptions, and interpersonal connections—all of which are essential for kids' academic success, social development, emotional well-being, and motivation to learn (Birkett et al., 2009). When that is the case, the students get loving encouragement, support, and pushing to study, which results in increased academic achievement.

In addition, there are broader societal consequences on the students. These negative feelings and harmful behaviours go beyond the school setting and contribute to perpetration of the evil more widely in the society. Even students who are not directly involved in bullying are affected by it. A climate of fearful distraction makes learning harder for everyone.

### **Implications for psychological intervention for the management of homophobic bullying problems**

When students report instances of physical violence or bullying, they typically believe that nothing will be done by the school administration. School psychologists, counselors, and other helping professionals are being called upon more and more by school administrators and significant others who are struggling to come up with safety policies and prevent bullying from happening in their schools (Fryxell & Smith, 2000). But an important question to be raised at this point is: how many secondary schools in Nigeria have a school psychologist/school counsellor? Many secondary schools operate without a helping professional like school psychologist, because the government have not fully recognized the role psychologist play in helping students who have problems. Indeed, school counsellors and psychologists are primarily agents of change and prevention within the school system (Astor et al, 2010). Therefore, school psychologists have a duty to strengthen their intervention skills especially those strategies that would help deal with homophobic bullying problems in schools. So, with enough training in intervention skills, school psychologists can intervene effectively to reduce homophobic bullying by: Developing a safe and supportive school climate. Therefore, the negative effects of homophobic bullying that have been x-rayed above have practical implications which call for urgent psychological interventions. This includes:

*(a) Equal access to school:* The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) supports equal access to education and mental health services for all youth within all schools (McCabe et.al, 2008). Homophobic bullying violates the right of student to receive equal educational opportunities and subsequently reduces academic engaged time. Failure to address this form of bullying in the school setting perpetrates an environment that is unsafe and not supportive of academic achievement, social-emotional development, and mental health (Forster, Gower, Gloppen, Sieving, Oliphant, Plowman, & McMorris, 2019). Under the position statement of NASP (2012), school psychologists are responsible for ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to learn and develop in an environment free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, violence and abuse (Curtis, Castillo, & Gelley, 2012). School psychologists with the kind of training received can adopt a whole school approach and encourage the school community to work together to create a welcoming school climate, where all people have a sense of safety and belonging. A safe and inviting climate created by administrators, teachers, parents and student can help stop homophobic bullying in schools. In addition, they can be very effective as leaders in developing comprehensive school bullying prevention program as well as climate improvement strategies. They have the ability to provide direct support as well as indirect services to everyone involved in bullying. For instance, the perpetrators of homophobic bullying need both individual and group counselling and support to change their behaviour alongside the enforcement of consequences. Bullies need to

be helped by showing them that they can work with others by supporting them to develop social skills, engaging them in cooperative learning, giving them an opportunity to exercise power in a socially acceptable way, to act responsibly and to interact constructively with all their peers. In addition, Aluede, (2011) observed that since bullies tend to show little empathy for their target or victim, school psychologists usually intervene by improving students' level of compassion and empathy. These may include activities that foster sensitivity for the feeling of others. Role reversal techniques where students' role play situations in which they place themselves in the position of others may help increase empathetic understanding (Russell & McGuire, 2008). Again, training students early in life to be empathetic can help prevent them from turning into bullies (Aluede, 2011). Interestingly, researchers (Kub & Feldman, 2015) have reported that those who go through this empathy training, when compared with those who have not, are more likely to be less aggressive and less likely to engage in homophobic bullying. If the enabling environment is created, then the right of equal access to school is possible.

- (a) *Developing and distributing a written anti-bullying policy to everyone in the school community.* Another helpful intervention strategy found in the literature in managing homophobic bullying is that of developing and distributing a written anti-bullying policy to everyone in the school community and also consistently applying the policy (Aluede, 2011). Peterson (2005) suggested mapping a school's "hot spots" for bullying incidents so that supervision can be concentrated in designated areas like corridors, bathroom, field/sports centres, and during break time; having students and parents sign contracts at the beginning of the school year acknowledging that they understand it is unacceptable to ridicule, taunt, or attempt to hurt, other students. Thus getting students signing anti-teasing or anti-bullying pledges will no doubt reduce homophobic incidents in schools.
- (c) *Provision of individual and group counselling to victims:* psychologists can provide individual and group counselling to victims, perpetrators and bystanders to prevent internalization of the damages or effects of the harassment. For instance, group intervention, according to Varjas et al. (2008), have been found to be an effective therapy for clients who reported feeling isolated; were experiencing anxiety (Kocoviski, Fleming, & Rector, 2009), and/or depression (Bos, Gartrell, Peyser, & van Balen, 2008; Llera, & Katsirebas, 2010). Group counselling is a form of support for remediation of the potentially harmful effects of homophobic bullying; and it can assist former victims develop feelings of social competence by learning and practicing new ways of interacting with others. Experiencing a structured, supportive social situation through group counselling may also help victims learn and practice skills for managing anxiety.

Also, individual counselling could facilitate adjustment and well-being by offering support, opportunities for developing or improving feelings of competence, and facilitating subjective well-being for victims of bullying. In individual counselling, cognitive reframing may also be used by psychologists to help the victim identify individual strengths (Ovenstad, Ormhaug, Shirk, & Jensen, 2020). It has been found that bullying that is homophobic might cause ineptitude or learned helplessness. Here the psychologist helps the victim to first of all change his/her thinking pattern, improve self-image and learn problem focused coping skills; and also have access to supportive significant people in their lives, including friends, siblings, parents and other adults. For instance, it has been noted from the discussion so far, that there are connections/relationships between homophobic bullying and some other psychological disorders like anxiety, depression, suicide, sleep disturbance etc. Psychologists act as mediators to provide psychosocial support for the perpetrators and victims of homophobic bullying, and make referral if need be.

- (d) *Bystanders' intervention in bullying cases is very necessary:* Majority of students do not intervene in bullying situations for fear of being the next target. Professionals are silent, they contribute to the problem. Having this in mind psychologists as experts in

the area equip the students with the necessary assertive skills through which they will know the correct way to speak out and the right time to intervene. Aggressors, Victims and Bystander Curriculum (Bickham & Slaby, 2012) can be employed to teach the students on how to intervene during bullying incidents. With this the students learn how to stop and size up a bully. If it is not safe to intervene, students are encouraged to report bullying to an adult and console a bullied peer afterward and say something supportive. However, a friendly response from a peer, for a kid who is falling into despair, can be enormously effective. Doing nothing, and saying nothing, only encourages continued bullying. Empowering students to speak out and stand up for victimized students greatly reduces homophobic bullying.

(e) *Developing Act of Surveillance in some areas and ins-service training of the teachers:* though intervention strategies are designed and implemented to address bullying, it is essential to recognize that students can be discreet in devising ways to disguise bullying in order to escape identification. As such, some form of surveillance may be necessary to detect acts of bullying that occur outside the general area of the school (Peterson, 2005). Therefore, increasing public awareness and knowledge about homophobic bullying behaviour problem can be a sure way to reduce it; particularly in Nigeria where many do not want to accept that such an act is going on. This can be achieved through: active involvement of teachers and parents in prevention programme. For instance, proper training for all educators is very crucial. From the review of relevant literature, we discovered that teacher training is a vital aspect of homophobic bullying prevention because most of the teachers do not know how to intervene even when they are aware of it. So, as part of teacher education and training, teachers should receive training regarding homophobic bullying and how to prevent it from occurring within their classroom and school. This will create awareness within teachers and help them to be proactive leaders that understand the effects of bullying and how to implement an effective prevention program.

(f) *Parents' modelling of the rightful behaviour:* Parents should make home a peaceful place for their children. First of all, they should model appropriate emotional control and management for angry feelings. Teach your children how to express their emotions-good and bad; and be the kind of person you expect your children will grow up to be. Furthermore, parents ought to receive training that teaches them how to support victims, promote healthy behavioral patterns, and identify bullying behaviors that call for intervention.

(g) *Continuous research on homophobic bullying:* This is crucial for the bully, bystanders, victims of bullying, and the entire school environment. Early intervention programs in which social skills are taught to students is very important if we want to reduce homophobic bullying in our secondary schools today. Some researchers (Carlile, 2020) suggested that though it is good to begin the intervention programs as early as possible and before their attitudes and behaviours become fixed, one should be sensitive to the cultural practices and religious beliefs of the family.

(h) *Establishing/strengthening of Psychological Service Centre within the school premises:* Deliberate efforts at establishing or strengthening psychological services in schools must be initiated with a view to protecting children from abuse. Therefore, pre-service and in-service capacity of school psychologists must be prioritized. School psychologists should be given the education and training necessary to support teachers and other school personnel, as they are viewed as leaders and valuable resources in the educational system. They should also be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to serve as leaders in the implementation of bullying prevention programs in schools and to train teachers. Schools should also provide psychologists with the chance to attend conferences and workshops so they may increase their understanding of preventative and intervention strategies. Additionally, continuing education will supply and contribute to the development of a prosperous and safe educational environment and prevent homophobic bullying from occurring. There is need to create awareness on homophobic bullying through mass media like television, magazines, newspapers posters, internet/blogs, social networks.

Nigerian government should make sure that psychologists are being posted to schools, be it private or public, including primary schools. Also, educating young people about lesbian,

gay, bisexual and transgender issues and integration of sexual orientation into the curriculum is fundamental to overcoming widely accepted prejudice; and it will also help in building knowledge and understanding. However, no one is advocating that we teach students about gay sex but children/adolescents can and should be taught the fact that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people exist in the media, in schools, in places of work and perhaps in their own networks of affection; and many people now recognize this. When we deny them the simple truth that lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people exist from an early age, we begin to plant negativity and an air of secrecy and shame in their minds, some of whom, despite, however scary it may seem, will grow up to be lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender; and may already be aware that something is different in them. Finally, every school should make sure that there are rules and regulations for dealing with the issue of homophobic bullying and appropriate punishment for bullies should be adequately determined to deter offenders from such acts.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Homophobic bullying occurs in Nigerian schools but it is largely overlooked. The reason is because many do not want to accept that the act (homophobic bullying) exists in Nigeria. As has been discussed in this write up, all hope is not lost because this problem can be managed or reduced to its barest minimum if the government should recognize what psychologists can do in helping students who have problem and psychologists on their own part should implement interventions with high fidelity.

This paper brings into perspective homophobic bullying situation in Nigerian secondary schools and the modus operandi of those (LGBT) who practice it. It x-rays the effect or impact of homophobic bullying on the bully, victim, the bystanders and the overall school climate; and finally describes some of the implications for psychological interventions in the management of homophobic bullying in secondary schools. Interestingly, it also helps to draw the attention of researchers on this type of bullying because it seems to be over looked and it will help the students to be aware of the available interventions or social support, they need to get to help themselves.

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