Bullying Among Schoolchildren: What School Authorities and Parents Can Do

Cecilia Liwanag Calub, Tarlac State University, Phillipines

Abstract

Alarmed by the controversies on bullying and the harm it can do in the lives of every affected children in elementary schools, this descriptive exploratory research was conducted. Identified in this study were children's perceptions and/or experience on bullying in terms of the : 1) the manner and forms; 2) frequency and place of occurrence; 3) who the bully/bullies are; 4) reasons for bullying; 5) effects on the bullied/victims; and 6) how the victims deal with it. The bullies' description of their behavior in terms of: 1) manner; 2) reasons; and 3) effect on them was also determined. Moreover, school authorities and parents' suggestions on how to stop bullying incidence in the school were taken. Based on the findings the following conclusions regarding the victims' experiences on bullying are given:1)Many schoolchildren are victims of physical bullying while some become targets of verbal, emotional, or social bullying; 2) Bullying happens at least once or twice a week; 3) Most bullies are boys; 4) Most children do not know why they are bullied, but they could sense that physical appearance, attitude, and better performance in the school that make them different from the bullies are some of the reasons; 5) The victims feel sad, could not concentrate on their studies, dislike going to school, developed hatred towards the bullies, and think that other do not like them; and 6)To deal with bullying, most schoolchildren just walk away from the bullies, tell them to stop, go with a crowd, or report the matter to school authorities and adults for help. About the bullies' experiences, it is concluded that: 1) Bullies do not like other children, so to show their dislike they avoid getting close to them and hurt them physically, verbally, and emotionally; 2) They bully simply because they do not like their targets/victims and have negative perception of the targets' attitude, physical appearance, popularity, talent, and performance in the classroom; and 3) Bullying has negative physical, psychological, and social effect on most bullies whereas others enjoy it and think that bullying has positive effect on them. Following are conclusions regarding the suggestions of schoolchildren, authorities, and parents to stop or reduce bullying in the school, most of them think that they should work together to stop cases of bullying: 1) conduct regular parents-teachers meetings; 2) hold campaigns/trainings/forums on anti-bullying; 3) discipline the bullies and monitor their behavior; 4) ignoring the bullies; 5) report incidence of bullying; 6) make school and home bully-free; and 6) seek support of the community and police authorities. It is highly recommended that school authorities, parents and schoolchildren/students pool their efforts in order to have peaceful and safe school, home, and society for everyone. This paper may be used as a reference for school authorities in the formulation or development of intervention programs/plans that aim to combat bullying in their school and in the community. Peace education curricula must be mandated by the government and strict implementation on this must be done.

Introduction

Although many researches about bullying have been done internationally, there is a dearth of research conducted locally. Such local researches (Paredes, 1982 and Lopez, 1980, in Bayhon, 2001)[1] are generally exploratory in nature, focusing only on the meaning and characteristics of aggression among males and females. Bullying within the school context is still an expanding field of study and much remains to be established in terms of the causes, the characteristics of those involved and what makes an effective anti-bullying intervention.

In the Philippines, Inquirer.net (2012)[2] reported that Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago asked the Senate to conduct an investigation into the reported bullying in schools and come up with necessary legislation to address the problem. In Senate Resolution 879, Santiago cited the case of Jamie Garcia, a student of Colegio de San Agustin, who has been allegedly a victim of bullying by another student identified as JB Bantiles. According to reports, Garcia's butt and genitals were often poked by Bantiles and another classmate. But when Garcia could no longer take the bullying, he reportedly stabbed one of his tormentors with a ball pen and punched JB in the face.

Alarmed by the controversies on bullying and the harm it can do in the lives of every affected individual, this exploratory research was conducted, and the target participants were children studying in public elementary schools in Tarlac City. Identified in this study were: 1) the manner and forms; 2) frequency and place of occurrence; 3) who the bully/bullies are; 4) reasons for bullying; 5) effects on the bullied/victims; and 6) how the victims deal with it. The bullies' description of their bullying behavior in terms of: 1) manner; 2) reasons; and 3) effect on them was also determined. Moreover, the schoolchildren, school authorities, and parents' suggestions on how to stop or reduce bullying incidents in the school were also taken. Implication of the study to education and peace studies was also given.

Significance of the Study

This survey is an important tool for database decision-making in the prevention of bullying incidence in schools and at home. It is valuable to school teachers, administrators, parents and other family members, police authorities, and government leaders for the following specific reasons:

1. The study provides an intensive examination of the nature and extent of bullying and victimization in individual schools.

2. It can help people raise awareness of bullying that happens in a school, the forms it takes, its effects on vulnerable pupils, how other children feel about their peers repeatedly being bullied, and what they to help them. With such awareness in school and the community, a whole - school approach of prevention and solutions to bullying may take place resulting to an establishment of a school culture of acceptance, tolerance and respect.

3. The entire paper may provide insights that may help school personnel and family members become mediators and understand the characteristics of bullying behaviors that could be taking place in their schools, at home, and in the neighborhood. Research results may then be used to

make database intervention strategies and choices to prevent or stop bullying in their school and at home.

Theoretical Framework

Bullying is the use of force, threat, or coercion to abuse, intimidate, or aggressively dominate others. The behavior is often repeated and habitual. One essential prerequisite is the perception, by the bully or by others, of an imbalance of social or physical power. Scholars (e.g., Olweus, 1992)[4] argued that behaviors used to assert such domination can include verbal harassment or threat, physical assault or coercion, and such acts may be directed repeatedly towards particular targets. Rationalizations for such behavior sometimes include differences of social class, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, behavior, body language, personality, reputation, lineage, strength, size or ability. "Targets" of bullying are also sometimes referred to as "victims" of bullying.

Majority of research have this list of bullying types/forms: 1) **Physical**: Physical bullying involves harmful actions against another person's body. Examples include: biting, kicking, pushing, pinching, hitting, tripping, pulling hair, any form of violence or intimidation. Physical bullying also involves the interference with another person's property. Examples include: damaging or stealing; 2) **Verbal**: Verbal bullying involves speaking to a person or about a person in an unkind or hurtful way. Examples include: sarcasm, teasing, put-downs, name calling, phone calls, spreading rumors or hurtful gossip; 3) **Emotional**: Emotional bullying involves behaviors that upset, exclude, or embarrass a person. Examples include: nasty notes, saying mean things using technology (e.g. cyber bullying using emails, instant messaging), chat rooms, tormenting, threatening, humiliation or social embarrassment; 4) **Sexual**: Sexual bullying singles out a person because of gender and demonstrates unwarranted or unwelcome sexual behavior. Examples include: sexual comments, abusive comments, unwanted physical contact; 5) **Prejudicial**: Prejudicial bullying involves rejection or isolation of a person because of ethnicity, religion, and race. Examples include: gestures, racial slurs or taunts, name calling, making fun of customs/skin color/accent/food choices; and 6) **Cyberbullying**: Cyber bullying is bullying through email, instant messaging (IMing), chat room exchanges, Web site posts, or digital messages or images send to a cellular phone or personal digital assistant (PDA) (Kowalski et al. 2008).[5]

Bullying in our society is at epidemic proportions and perhaps the most underreported safety problem on school campuses. Contrary to popular belief, bullying occurs more often at school than on the way to and from there. Once thought of as simply a rite of passage or relatively harmless behavior that helps build young people's character, bullying is now known to have long-lasting harmful effects, for both the victim and the bully. Bullying is often mistakenly viewed as a narrow range of antisocial behavior confined to elementary school recess yards. School bullying has been a topic of both public concern and academic research only since the 1970s (Craig and Pepler 1997). [6]

Statement of the Problem

1. How is bullying described by the bullied children in terms of:
1.1. Manner and forms ;
1.2. Frequency of occurrence;
1.3. Place of occurrence;
1.4. Who bully them;
1.5. Reasons;
1.6. Impact;
1.7. Dealing with bullying; and
1.8. School authorities' response to school bullying?
2. How do the bullies describe their bullying behavior in terms of :
2.1. Manner;
2.2. Reasons; and
2.3. Effects of bullying on them?
3. How do school authorities and parents respond to incidence on bullying?
4. To help stop bullying in the school what do schoolchildren, school authorities, and parents may do?

Methodology

The research was exploratory and descriptive in nature. A total of 160 schoolchildren enrolled in four (4) public elementary schools situated in Tarlac City, 60 school authorities (1 school principal, 1 guidance counselor, and 13 teachers), and 80 parents participated in the survey. The survey questionnaires designed by Olweus (1978, 1996, 2006) and Rigby (2008) which were published online by the Hazelden Foundation (2007) and the University of South Australia, respectively, were used as references in designing the survey questionnaire and to facilitate inclusion of necessary data to be collected. The questionnaire was in a checklist form and it consisted of four parts/sections: Part 1: Questionnaire for the Bullied/Victim; Part 2: Questionnaire for the Bully; Part 3: Questionnaire for the School Authorities; and Part 4: Questionnaire for the Parents.To attain confidentiality, the respondents were reminded that they may not write their names in the questionnaire. In each participating school, four (4) Grade Six homeroom advisers randomly selected 10 pupils from their classes and asked them to go to a separate unoccupied classroom during their recess period for the survey. However, the teachers were reminded not to tell the pupils the purpose of the assembly. In the classroom, the objectives of the survey was explained in both English and Filipino. Each pupil was given a copy of the questionnaire and every item was orally translated in Filipino. They were given 3 – 5 minutes to go over the items. Queries were entertained. One (1) hour was allotted for this activity. Incidental remarks regarding their experiences on bullying were noted that served as qualitative data.

While the pupils were answering the questionnaire, 15 school authorities (1 school principal, 1 guidance counselor, and 13 teachers from Grades 1 – 6) were also requested to answer the questionnaires intended for them. The school principal and the guidance counselor invited twenty (20) parents to the school on the same day to participate in the survey. Incidental comments or remarks given by the parents were noted and recorded that served as supplement to the data gathered via the questionnaire. Responses were tallied, tabulated, and analyzed.

Summary of Findings

1. Many of the schoolchildren were victims of bullying by their classmates/schoolmates. Majority were teased and called names; bad words were said against their family; threatened to be hurt; given mean looks; hit, kicked or pushed; shouted at; and insulted or laughed at for their appearance. The bullies also took their belongings; pulled their hair; and made other children not talk to them. Thus, the form of bullying that was prevalent in the participating public elementary schools was physical in nature. This is followed by verbal, emotional, and social. Most experienced bullying one or two times a month, while some were regularly bullied at least once or two times a week. The bullies were mostly their male schoolmates and some were female. A few said that their parents bullied them too.

Bullying most often happened inside the classroom while the teacher was not around or even when she/he was around, in the play area, while walking to or from the school, anywhere outside the classroom, even at home. Most of them did not know any reason why they were being bullied, while others said that they were bullied because they were smaller or weaker, not good in class, fat, ugly, good in class, poor, and were different from them.

Schoolchildren tried to deal with the bullies by walking away from them, telling their teacher about the problem, asking the bullies to stop, relating to their parents about the bullying done to them, and some said that they tried not to mind the bullies. For the witnesses of the incidence, they said that they told their teachers and parents about the incidence, while others helped the targets of the bullies, asked someone to help and stop the conflict. Many also said that they just did not mind the bullies at all.

2. Most of the bullies disliked other children in their school, and to show this, majority would not sit or talk with them, called them names, would not play with them, made them cry, or physically hurt them. Most of the bullies said that they simply did not like their victims, and that includes their attitude, their physical appearance, or the way they talked. Others said that they also bullied the bright ones and those whom they thought were their teacher's pets. These young bullies oftentimes suffered the consequences of their act. Majority confessed that they were also hurt in a fight, scolded by their parents and teachers, felt sad, school grades decreased, disliked themselves, thought that their classmates did not like them anymore, and wished to transfer to another school. On the contrary many said that they felt happy bullying the child they did not like, felt they were brave, and had become popular.

3. As observed by the children, most teachers called the bullies' parents after the incident happened. Some would tell the children to stop and leave or solve the problems themselves, sent them to the principal's office, scolded them, or simply ignored the bullies.

4. Most of the children said that for school authorities to stop bullying they have to discipline, scold, or advise the bullies; others said that the school should make rules against bullying and teach about bullying (its meaning, effects, and prevention) in the class. To stop bullying in the school or even elsewhere, school authorities suggested that they have to conduct regular parents-teachers meeting; hold campaigns/ trainings/forums on anti-bullying; make and implement rules/policies/guidelines about anti-bullying; reward children for good behavior, provide

sanctions or punishment for the bullies (especially, the serial bullies), improve supervision of classes/school; monitor identified bullies; and involve parents, barangay officials, police authorities, and other social agencies.

Implications of the Study to Education and Peace Studies

General findings of the phenomenon of school bullying show that bullying is comprised of direct behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing that are initiated by one or more students against a victim. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be more indirect by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion. Whether the bullying is direct or indirect, the key component of bullying is that the physical or psychological intimidation occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse. To let bullying in schools continue without any intervention will most probably escalate the phenomenon to school violence and create a serious risk to students' academic life, including their personal and social life outside the school. Creating a totally peaceful society would be impossible if children grow up showing disrespect and indifference towards other people's rights.

To help address this gaping need for a culture of peace, a culture free from harassment and intimidation, schools must formulate a free and comprehensive peace education all environments–schools, communities and businesses. Classroom teachers should highlight in their teaching the epidemic proportions of bullying and should strive to identify and address the overwhelming complexity of bullying behaviors by asking students to identify and implement ways to combat the unhealthful and life-threatening effect of bullying. School curriculum should offer peace pedagogy for every sphere: personal, social, political, institutional and ecological. Teachers should inspire kind and thoughtful behavior. They should educate for peace and harmony.

To further support the need for peace education as integral to our national and global movements to remedy bullying in our schools and communities, the recommendations given in this study must be promoted and implemented.

Unless schools infuse and maintain a firm and consistent anti-bullying or peace education curricula, teachers will passively create harmful bullies. Peace education curriculum must be mandated by the government. Peace education should not only address national and international epidemic of bullying, it should also create a future generation literate in the ways of right relationship, firmly engaged in social action and invested in a compassionate worldview. Several implications relative to human rights are:
Schools should make known to students and parents specific procedures for reporting bullying and harassment, as well as whom to contact if cases are not handled expediently.
Schools should advise students and parents of alternative reporting mechanisms (e.g., police) in cases of violence or other criminal activity.
Schools should assess whether bullying experiences constitute a potential civil rights violation.
Knowledge of legal, procedural, and policy issues is central for schools in the effort to prevent bullying.

Most legislation focuses on reporting, investigating, and intervening when bullying has occurred, but prevention efforts should be a key focus for school-based anti-bullying and harassment efforts.

Recommendations

1. If a teacher observes bullying in a classroom, he/she needs to immediately intervene to stop it, record the incident and inform the appropriate school administrators so the incident can be investigated.

2. The school should develop anti-bullying intervention program and conduct bullying prevention activities such as all-school assemblies, communications campaigns or creative arts contests highlighting school values to bring the community together and reinforce the message that bullying is wrong.

3. Parents have to educate their children about bullying and remind them that bullying others can have legal consequences. They must also make their home bully-free.

4. Children must avoid going alone to places or situations where bullying usually occurs. They should report any bullying incident to adults they trust. They may also actively involved themselves in anti-bullying campaigns and other similar thrusts of the government.

5. The DepEd/ CHEd should strictly implement the Republic Act No. 10627: Anti - Bullying Act of 2013 (an act requiring all elementary and secondary schools to adopt policies to prevent and address the acts of bullying in their institutions) and monitor if it is strictly implemented in all schools.

6. The government may provide comprehensive training for all teachers and school staff, parents, and community about bullying prevention and intervention.

7. The government may require integration of anti-bullying in the curriculum, course syllabi, textbooks/workbooks, and dissemination through the social media.

8. This research may be used as reference for school authorities in the development of intervention programs/plans that aim to stop bullying in their school and in the community.

9. Peace education curricula must be mandated by the government for all schools to follow and implement.

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E-mail Address: ceciliacalub@yahoo.com