

Bullying in the Countryside: Prevalence, Factors and Coping Mechanism

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Abstract

Bullying though old is now becoming widespread and a worldwide problem especially among schools. Incidence of bullying even in the countryside are becoming observable. The prevalence of bullying needs special attention as current literature confirm its adverse effect to both the bully and the bullied. This study was initiated primarily to determine the common bullying experiences of pupils in two central schools in the province of Romblon, Philippines that may serve as basis for an effective guidance and counseling program for bullying problems. The study is descriptive in nature employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative method using questionnaire and interview as techniques in gathering the data. A total of 187 grade VI pupils, two school heads from two central schools in the District of Romblon, Division of Romblon participated in the study. Findings revealed that the most prevalent physical bullying experienced by the respondents are: being pushed, punched and kicked. These happens more than once to 7 out of 10 pupils. The most common verbal bullying experienced by the respondents are: being insulted, spoken with bad words and being teased. These happens more than once to 6 to 8 pupils out of 10. The usual coping mechanism done by the respondents when bullied includes: telling their parents, teachers and friends. The factors associated with bullying behavior are: a)in terms of family, harsh discipline from parents; b)in terms of peer, influenced by friends; c)in terms of school, lack of policy against bullying; and d)in terms of environment, exposure to violent films and.

Key words: Bullying, Physical bullying, Verbal bullying

INTRODUCTION

Bullying among children is quite common and is not a new phenomenon. Most adults may have experienced being bullied or the other way around. However there seems to be a difference in the way bullying today is exhibited compared before. The prevalence of bullying and its adverse effects are also to be considered in distinguishing bullying before and bullying today. News of students committing suicide because of being bullied in social media is becoming frequent. Such incidence may have been uncommon before. Bullying usually affects both the victim and the bully both physically and psychologically. The British Medical Journal published a report that among the health problems encountered by those who are bullied includes eating and sleep disorders, headaches and stomach aches (William et al., 1996). Other studies also acknowledged bullying behavior in elementary school as precursor of violent behavior and show significant link between this behavior and criminal activity in adult life. Anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression problems are also attributed to bullying experienced repeatedly by

children. Bullying comes in many forms and sizes either physical, verbal or the more popular one commonly called cyber bullying.

The school is among those places where bullying is reported to have shown high percentage of bullying incidence. This is because children with diverse culture, background, personality and status meet there. Schools having a bigger number of student population may show greater risk of bullying incidence and requires a sound guidance program starting from prevention and cure. All types of schools be it private and public, city or in countryside are vulnerable to bullying incidence. As the bullying phenomenon is becoming widespread, schools are encouraged to really make the necessary program that may prevent to some degree the occurrence of such problem and thus lessen its traumatic effect to the students. Such program should be based on empirical study conducted by school authorities. With bullying incidence becoming far-reaching, numerous studies about bullying had also been done. However, there appears limited studies about bullying in the countryside similar to the present investigation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to determine the common bullying experiences encountered by public elementary school pupils as well as the factors associated with the bullying behavior in selected public central schools within the district of Romblon.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the common bullying experiences encountered by the pupils either verbal or physical?
2. What are the factors associated with the bullying behavior as perceived by the pupils?
3. What are the coping mechanism of pupils who have been bullied?
4. What are the programs done by schools to address the bullying problem?

METHODOLOGY

Since this study is descriptive in nature, the survey method was used. Through the survey with the use of questionnaire and interview techniques, the common bullying experiences encountered by the pupils either verbal or physical along with the factors associated with it, and their coping mechanism were clearly described.

Respondents of the Study

The study included a total of 187 grade six pupils from the two (2) central schools in the District of Romblon. Complete enumeration was used in the study considering that almost the entire population of grade six pupils in the said schools were involved. These schools were selected purposively due to its big population.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in gathering data was the questionnaire and structured interview which was constructed based on the statement of the problem and related studies. Part one of the questionnaire deals with the bullying experiences encountered by the pupils either verbal or physical Part two deals with the factors associated with the bullying behavior as perceived by the pupils. Part three is about the coping mechanism of pupils who have been bullied. Part four deals with the programs done by schools to address the bullying problem. The content validation of instrument was done by three experts and was found to be relevant.

Data Processing and Analysis

The data gathered in this study were tallied and tabulated for statistical analysis. The descriptive statistical tools used for the analysis of data includes frequency count and percentage. This study made use of both quantitative and qualitative method of data analysis.

RESULTS

Physical bullying experiences encountered by the respondents

Shown in table 1 is the frequency of bullying behavior encountered by the respondents in terms of physical in the two central elementary schools in the District of Romblon. Based from the table, out of 187 respondents, 59 or 31.55% of them have been punched or hit by their schoolmate at least once and 64 or 34.22% of them experienced the same kind of physical bullying more than once. It appears that a total of 123 or 65.78% of the pupils experienced punching or hitting as a form of physical bullying. This suggest that in every 10 pupils, 7 of them may possibly be bullied physically through punching or hitting.

Pushing as a form of physical bullying was experienced at least once by 64 or 34.22% of the respondents and more than once by 70 or 37.43%. It can be deduced that a total of 134 out of 187 with a ratio of 7 out of 10 experienced pushing as a form of physical bullying.

Kicking as a form of physical bullying was experienced at least once by 41 or 21.93% of the respondents and more than once by 47 or 25.13%. A total of 88 out of 187 with a ratio of 5 out of 10 experienced kicking as a form of physical bullying.

When it comes to money or food being stolen, 9 or 4.81% of them said that it happened to them once while 11 or 5.88% of them said that it occurred more than once. The data indicates that out of 187, 20 or 10.70% of the respondents have experienced to be stolen with money or food suggesting a 1 is to 10 ratio.

Damaging belongings accumulated a total of 74 or 39.57% and out of this number 34 or 18.18% of them experienced it more than once while 40 or 21.39% of them experienced it only once.

Table 1. Physical bullying experiences encountered by the respondents

Bullying experiences	Once		More than once		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. My schoolmate punched/hit me	59	31.55	64	34.22	64	34.22
2. My schoolmate pushed me	64	34.22	70	37.43	53	28.34
3. My schoolmate kicked me	41	21.93	47	25.13	99	52.94
4. My schoolmate stole my money/food	9	4.81	11	5.88	167	89.30
5. My schoolmate damaged my belongings	40	21.39	34	18.18	113	60.43

Verbal bullying experiences encountered by the respondents

Table 2 shows the frequency of bullying behavior in terms of verbal. 68 or 36.36% experienced to be insulted by a schoolmate once while 90 or 47.06% experienced the same kind of verbal bullying more than once. A total of 158 out of 187 experienced insult as a form of verbal bullying. This suggest that 8 out of 10 pupils may possibly be bullied verbally through insult.

33 or 17.65% of the respondents said that their schoolmate made fun of them through name calling only once while 80 or 42.78% said that they experienced the same more than once. A total of 113 out of 187 suggest a 6 out of 10 ratio.

Teasing as a form of verbal bullying was experienced by 62.57% or 117 respondents. 32 or 17.11 of them experienced it once while 85 or 45.45% experienced the same more than once. This suggest that 6 out of 10 pupils may possibly be bullied verbally through teasing.

A total of 73.80% or 138 respondents admitted that their schoolmate said bad words to them. 51 or 27.27% among them experienced it once while 87 or 46.52% experienced the same more than once. This means that 7 out of 10 pupils experienced this form of verbal bullying.

Criticism as a form of verbal bullying garnered 53 or 28.34%. Out of this number, 24 or 12.83% experienced it once while 29 or 15.15% experienced it more than once. This suggest that 3 out of 10 may possibly be bullied verbally through criticism.

Table 2. Verbal bullying experiences encountered by the respondents

Bullying experiences	Once		More than once		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. My schoolmate insulted me	68	36.36	90	47.06	31	16.58
2. My schoolmate made fun of me through name calling	33	17.65	80	42.78	74	39.57
3. My schoolmate teased me	32	17.11	85	45.45	70	37.43
4. My schoolmate said bad words to me	51	27.27	87	46.52	49	26.20
5. My schoolmate criticized me/my family	24	12.83	29	15.51	135	71.66

Coping mechanism of respondents who experienced bullying

Table 3 indicates the coping mechanism of the respondents who experienced bullying. Among the mechanisms, telling their teacher obtained the highest frequency distribution of 103 or 55.08% followed by telling their parents and their friends with the same frequency distribution of 96 or 51.34%. Next is they ignore it with frequency distribution of 88 or 47.06%. Staying away from school received the lowest frequency distribution of 20 or 10.70%.

The data reveal that the most common coping mechanism done by the victims of bullying behavior is telling their teacher which is ranked first. Others coped up by telling their parents and friends occupying the same rank. Staying away from school is the least coping mechanism done by the respondents. These coping mechanisms are still considered to be positive in reference to Cary Sweatre (2003), findings that many times victims will commonly respond to bullying through escape and avoidance behaviors, such as not attending school, refusal to go to certain locations, running away from home, and in some extreme cases, attempting suicide. The coping mechanisms of the respondents in this study may be due to the reason that they have close connection to their parents of which they resort to telling them about the incident rather than staying away from school.

The study however did not look on whether or not these coping mechanism are effective. Parents and teachers of the respondents were also not asked as to the number of times their kids or pupils reported being bullied or what common bullying behavior are usually done to them.

Table 3. Coping mechanism of respondents who experienced bullying

Mechanism	f	%	Rank
1. I retaliate	50	26.74	5
2. I ignore it	88	47.06	2
3. I run away	54	28.28	4
4. I tell my teacher	103	55.08	1
5. I tell my parents	96	51.34	2
6. I tell my friends	96	51.34	2
7. I stayed away from school	20	10.70	7
8. I plan revenge	35	18.72	6

Factors associated with bullying behavior

Shown in table 4 are the factors associated with bullying behavior as perceived by respondents. When asked as to why their schoolmates are involved in bullying activity, most of them believed that in terms of family, harsh discipline from parents is the main reason obtaining the highest frequency of 49 or 26.20%, followed by lack of supervision by parents having a frequency distribution of 37 or 19.79%. Broken family garnered a frequency of 36 or 19.25% and lastly is the permissive parents which got the lowest frequency of 34 or 18.18%.

In terms of peer, influenced by friends got the highest frequency of 90 or 48.13% while being forced by peers got the lowest frequency of 40 or 21.39%.

In the terms of school, lack of policy against bullying obtained the highest frequency of 48 or 25.67% followed by the lack of supervision during recess/ lunch break which has a frequency of 45 or 24.06%. Last is the lack of school discipline which obtained the frequency of 33 or 17.65%.

In terms of environment, most of the respondents said that, exposure to violent films may have been a factor with a frequency of 58 or 31.02%.

It appears that based from the result, harsh discipline from parents, friends' influence, lack of policy against bullying and exposure to violent films are believed to be among those common factors associated with bullying behavior. The findings however is limited only to the general perception of the respondents whom may not have been involved in bullying behavior against their schoolmates.

The result somehow agrees to Bank (2000), who observed that some children are at more risk of becoming bullies and victims than others, although this is in no way predetermined. It depends on a combination of individual, family, peer, and school experiences.

Table 4. Factors associated with bullying behavior

A. Family	f	%	Rank
1. Permissive parents	34	18.18	4
2. Broken family	36	19.25	3
3. Harsh discipline from parents	49	26.20	1
4. Lack supervision by parents	37	19.79	2
B. Peer			
1. influenced by friends	90	48.13	1
2. Forced by peers	40	21.39	2
C. School			
1. Lack of school discipline	33	17.65	3
2. Lack of policy against bullying	48	25.67	1
3. Lack of supervision during recess/lunch break	45	24.06	2
D. Environment			
1. Exposure to violent films	58	31.02	1

Programs done by the schools to address the bullying problem

Based on the interview conducted to the school heads of the two central schools covered in this study, the following are the programs done to address the bullying problem namely: counseling both to the bully and the bullied pupils and seminar on children's right. Although these programs are appropriate, they are still inadequate as the problem of bullying is becoming rampant.

DISCUSSION

It can be gleaned from this result that among the physical bullying experienced by pupils, being pushed is the most common which account to 71.65%. This is followed by being punched, kicked, their belongings being damaged and food or money being stolen as the least. In addition, most of these physical bullying behavior occurred to the respondents more than once. These bullying experiences are in the form of physical that involves behavior such as the perpetrator might punch, hit and/or steal money from victims (Crick, Nelson, Morale, Cullerton-Sen, Casa and Hickman, 2001). Rigby (2001), on her findings on bullying indicated that bullying is a physically harmful, psychologically damaging and socially isolating aspect of a large number of children's school experience. Studies had also highlighted that children who are bullied have a higher level of stress, anxiety, depression and illness, and an increased tendency to suicide. It is however not the scope of the present study to investigate the effects of such physical bullying encountered by the respondents.

The result likewise indicates the prevalence of verbal bullying behavior among the two (2) schools. Among these verbal behaviors, the most common are being insulted, being spoken with bad words and being teased. Moreover, these verbal bullying occurred to them more than once. These findings indicates the existence of various forms of bullying as emphasized by Crick, Nelson, Morale, Cullerton-Sen, Casa and Hickman (2001), that there exist three forms of bullying: physical, verbal and relational. Verbal bullying includes behavior such as the perpetrator making rude remarks and/or name calling toward a victims. Rational bullying also known as indirect bullying. Also, Olsen (2006), explained that bullying consist of both indirect

and direct behavior. Direct behaviors, which are more commonly seen in boys, consist of calling names, teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, using a weapon, and stealing by one or more individuals against a victim. While bullying behavior of boys is usually more direct in nature, girls tend to use more subtle tactics, which can be more indirect in nature. In-direct behaviors includes spreading rumors, exclusion or isolation from peers, and or manipulating relationships and or friendships. In fact bullying victims are also isolated by other non-bullying peers, because these peers do not want to be associated with a victim of bullying due to the threat of becoming a victim themselves.

Although it was stressed earlier that children who are bullied have a higher level of stress, anxiety, depression and illness, and an increased tendency to suicide, this study was limited as to whether or not these effects were manifested by the respondents. In addition, literature also vary as to which type of bullying verbal or physical has more adverse effect to the bullied.

The survey result further indicates that harsh discipline from parents, friends' influence, lack of policy against bullying and exposure to violent films are believed to be among those common factors associated with bullying behavior. The findings however is limited only to the general perception of the respondents whom may not have been involved in bullying behavior against their schoolmates. The result somehow agrees to Bank (2000), who observed that some children are at more risk of becoming bullies and victims than others, although this is in no way predetermined. It depends on a combination of individual, family, peer, and school experiences.

Implication to guidance and counselling program

The study revealed that respondents from the two central schools have experienced various types of bullying behavior from their schoolmates. They encountered such bullying behavior more than once and the possibility of repeating such behavior is high if schools will not integrate into their guidance and counselling program a comprehensive framework that may lessen if not prevent the occurrence of such bullying problem. The framework may include the involvement of various stakeholders so as to make the school a safe environment. The effects of bullying are far-reaching, and should not be taken lightly by school authorities which includes lower attendance and student achievement to increased violence and juvenile crime, and not only does it harm victims and perpetrators, it affects the school environment, teachers disposition, and indirectly students' academic performance and their ability to learn. As the problem of bullying becomes apparent, widespread and rampant, schools in the countryside should not be complacent as they are also becoming vulnerable due to the increasing number of student population and the availability of social media. School authorities from the countryside may now set aside the idea that bullying incidents are common only to city schools and that students from the provinces are far more disciplined and behaved. Reports of bullying incidents from the countryside are now becoming evident thus requiring a comprehensive framework into their guidance and counselling program to prevent or reduce bullying problems to its barest minimum level. As one of the most persistent and destructive forms of violence, bullying deserves the attention of everyone especially the guidance personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings derived from the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The most common physical bullying experienced by the respondents are: being pushed, punched and kicked. These happens more than once to 7 out of 10 pupils.

2. The most common verbal bullying experienced by the respondents are: being insulted, spoken with bad words and being teased. These happens more than once to 6 to 8 pupils out of 10.
3. The most common coping mechanism done by the respondents when bullied are: telling their parents, teachers and friends.
4. The most common factors associated with bullying behavior are:
 - a) In terms of family, harsh discipline from parents
 - b) In terms of peer, influenced by friends
 - c) In terms of school, lack of policy against bullying
 - d) In terms of environment, exposure to violent films.
5. Programs done by the schools to address the bullying problems are still limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings and conclusions of the present investigation, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. The school may create policy against bullying.
2. The school may provide counseling and support for student at risk of being involved in bullying.
3. The parents and teachers must recognize the danger of violent films and discourage their children or pupils from watching them.
4. The school should have supervision to their pupils during break time or recess time.
5. The school may provide a school-wide education, training and bullying prevention programs.

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