

Bullying Tendency among School Children

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Abstract

Bullying is an intentional aggressive behavior that threatens or intimidates others and initiates physical fights. Millions of children around the world experienced bullying. In the Philippines, approximately a greater number of students were bullied on a regular basis in school. Awareness on bullying has shown positive effects on the lives of the bullies and victims with the implementation of prevention programs. This study aimed to assess the bullying tendency among school children in Misamis University, Ozamiz City in the Philippines. A standardized psychological test on Feelings, Attitudes and Behaviors Scale for Children (FAB-C scale) was the instrument used. Result showed that there was a considerable number of school children in Misamis University with bullying tendency with levels ranging from low to very high. A greater percentage of males had a very high level of bullying tendency compared to females. However, females having bullying tendency with levels that ranged from low to high were greater in number compared to the males. The findings may serve as the basis for the creation of bullying intervention and prevention program for the school.

Keywords: aggressive, behavior, prevention, psychological, victims

Introduction

Bullying can have destructive consequences for young people (Obama, 2011). Childhood bullying has been significantly associated with violence, heavy drinking, marijuana use at age 21 (Kim et al., 2011) and crime (Ragatz et al., 2011; Eriksen et al., 2012). Bullying occurs in school of different magnitude (Cardona et al., 2015) and it has to be minimized through awareness orientation (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2010; Evangelista, 2010).

Almost 18% or over 4 million of children around the world were abused or have experienced violence like bullying, physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect (Stoddard, 2012). Approximately 11% of students were bullied on a regular basis in school, with no significant differences in its prevalence by gender or grade (Bidwell, 2006).

In 2008, PLAN Philippines commissioned the Philippine School of Social Work (PSSW) of the Philippine Women's University to undertake a study on violence against children (VAC) in public schools in areas covered by PLAN programs (PLAN Philippines, 2008). Based on the study, at least five out of 10 children in Grades 1-3, seven out of 10 in Grades 4-6, and six out of 10 in high school have experienced violence in school. It was found that verbal abuse is the most prevalent form of violence experienced by children in all school levels. This abuse includes being ridiculed and teased, being shouted at and being cursed or spoken to with harsh words. Bullying in the Philippines is therefore alarming.

Bullying is a phenomenon defined as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend oneself (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). It has been recognized as a health problem for children because of their association with adjustment problems, including poor mental health and more extreme violent behavior (Juvonen et al., 2003). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) represents dominant approaches to diagnosis of mental disorders (Tio et al., 2016). In the manual, bullying is classified under the category of conduct disorder based on the criterion on aggression towards people and animals. The DSM fourth edition, text revision (DSM-IV-TR) has emphasized that children with such behavior have the capability

to bully, threaten, or intimidate others, or initiates physical fights (DSM-IV-TR, 2000).

Conduct problems are associated with bullying (Viding et al., 2009; Fanti & Kimonis, 2012). Conduct disorder and the corresponding problems could develop prior to age 10 (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Children in this stage need to establish social interaction to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities, to develop a feeling of competence and belief in their skills (McLeod, 2013). The ego develops as it successfully resolves crises that are distinctly social in nature (Meilandari, 2017). It involves establishing a sense of trust in others, developing a sense of identity in society, and helping the next generation prepare for the future.

From 5-12 years of age while children are into school or academic endeavors (Santrock, 2011), they would gain greater significance and develop self-esteem when they are with peer group (Feldman, 2012; Tan, 2017). It is very important on this stage that children should feel the need to win the approval of friends, to develop their sense of pride if they accomplished something, and display initiative, industry and confidence in their ability to achieve their goals (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). Failure to resolve the crisis could result to the inability to complete further stages and could have unhealthy personality and a sense of self (Corey, 2009; McLeod, 2013).

Studies of Olweus (1993) and Rigby (2010) showed that awareness on bullying could have positive effects on the lives of the bullies and victims after programs for preventions were implemented. It is therefore necessary to conduct similar studies in order to help prevent bullying in schools especially among young pupils. The Republic Act No. 10627 or the “Anti-Bullying Act of 2013” in the Philippines requires anti-bullying policies in all elementary and secondary schools in the country and to maintain a public record of relevant information and statistics on bullying incidents, without revealing the names of students (Sabillo, 2013; Mangunay, 2013). This study aimed to identify children with bullying tendency in Misamis University, Ozamiz City. The findings of this study may serve as the basis for the creation of bullying intervention and prevention program for the school.

Materials and Methods

The respondents of the study were 280 school children or elementary pupils from Grades 1 to 6. Informed consent from the parents or guardian of each pupil was secured. Only those pupils with signed consent forms were allowed to participate in the study. This study utilized the descriptive research design with survey as the method employed. The survey instrument used to determine the bullying tendency of the respondents was the 48-item standardized psychological test on Feelings, Attitudes and Behaviors Scale for Children (FAB-C scale) by Beitchman (1996). The test measured conduct problems, self- image, worry, negative peer relations, and antisocial attitudes.

The test was carried out in the respective classrooms of the pupils. They were given 15 minutes to complete the test. Children with difficulties in reading and in understanding English were allowed to take longer time to answer and were assisted by the researchers by reading the questionnaire.

The raw scores were converted and analyzed using the standard T-scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 in all samples across all scales using the guidelines for the interpretation on the FAB-C Profile Form. The scores were scaled, categorized, and interpreted and the bullying tendency was assessed using the scale shown in the next page here. For all categories that are interpreted as “should not raise a concern”, it is presumed that the respondents would have no bullying tendency. For categories that are interpreted as “should raise a concern” and “possible significant problem”, the level of the bullying tendency was assessed as low, moderate, high, or very high.

As pointed by Beitchman (1996), pupils with elevated scores in conduct problem scale may have the tendency to do bad things such as bullying, get into trouble, or have a bad temper. Anchored on this framework, the bullying tendency was assessed in terms of its level taking into account the standard guidelines for interpreting the categories of the conduct problem based on the student’s scores.

Scores	Category of conduct problem	Interpretation (based on the guidelines in FAB-C Profile Form)	Level of bullying tendency
<30	Very much below average	Should not raise concern	None
30-34	Much below average	Should not raise concern	None
35-39	Below average	Should not raise concern	None
40-44	Slightly below average	Should not raise concern	None
45-55	Average	Should not raise concern	None
56-60	Slightly above average	Should raise concern	Low tendency
61-65	Above average	Possible significant problem	Moderate tendency
66-70	Much above average	Possible significant problem	High tendency
>70	Very much above average	Possible significant problem	Very high tendency

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents' behavior fall under the average category which indicates that this population of school children do not have the bullying tendency. However, a significant number of school children obtained scores that should raise a concern indicating a low bullying tendency. The percentage of students that showed moderate bullying tendency was also considerable which was a little higher compared to those showing very high bullying tendency.

Table 1. Percent distribution of respondents as to the degree of their conduct problem and the corresponding level of bullying tendency.

Categories of conduct problem	%	Interpretation	Level of bullying tendency
Very much above average	10.3	Possible Significant Problem	Very high
Much above average	4.8	Possible Significant Problem	High
Above average	11.1	Possible Significant Problem	Moderate
Slightly above average	13.5	Should raise concern	Low
Average	45.2	Should not raise concern	None
Slightly below average	11.9	Should not raise concern	None
Below average	3.2	Should not raise concern	None
Much below average	0.0	Should not raise concern	None
Very much below average	0.0	Should not raise concern	None
Total	100.0		

These findings suggest that there are considerable number of pupils in the university who could possibly have conduct problems and thus, the tendency to bully. The relationship of the conduct problems with bullying tendency has been discussed in the paper of Beitchman (1996). Children with a conduct disorder have the tendency to get involved in violent acts and may even steal or lie, without showing any guilt if found out. They may also have inclination to breaking the rules and laws (Sourander et al., 2011). The findings of Eriksen et al. (2012) also show that bullying affects the school performance of the pupils,

increases the possibility of drug use in the future, teenage pregnancy, and future criminal convictions.

As significant number of school children fall above the category that is slightly above average or considered as borderline, further investigation and constant monitoring of their behavior are critical in order to develop a comprehensive intervention strategy. Although there were no major bullying issues yet in the university, early diagnosis of possible conduct problems is significant in order to give the students better chance to improve in their behavior and to prevent the ill effects of bullying. The school can take a significant role in helping the school children with possible conduct problems (Olweus, 1994). Teachers can help to focus on positive behaviors and reinforce work taking place at home and in the community. Tracing the factors and causes of such behavioral problem may also enhance the effectiveness of any intervention program that will be designed by the university.

Table 2 shows the percent distribution of respondents by gender as to the level of their bullying tendency. The findings suggest that both males and females can display bullying behaviors. Greater percentage among male school children had shown very high level of bullying tendency compared to females. However, female respondents with high and moderate level of bullying tendency were greater in percentage compared to the males.

Table 2. Percent distribution of respondents by gender as to their level of bullying tendency.

Level of bullying tendency	Male	Female
Very high	14.9	3.8
High	2.7	7.7
Moderate	9.5	13.5
Low	10.8	17.3
Total	100.0	100

Boys bully mostly fellow boys and girls also bully girls (Stoddard, 2012). The former use physical bullying and the latter use indirect forms (Kyriakides et al., 2006). Girls also use mixed-gender group bullying (Seals & Young, 2003). In relation to bullying behavior, a four-year

period study in both genders showed that all the respondents had criminal records (Ragatz et al., 2011). Also shown in their study is that bullying behaviors and styles vary depending on the demographic profile such as gender. Carlyle and Steinman (2007) gave emphasis on the implication of the prevention approaches in bullying that they should be tailored according to demographic profile targeting the specific areas of program, that is, personalized intervention at the individual level.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is a considerable number of school children in Misamis University with bullying tendency with levels ranging from low to very high. A greater percentage of males has a very high level of bullying tendency compared to females. However, females having bullying tendency with levels that range from low to high are greater in number compared to the males.

The school has to take into consideration the creation of intervention and prevention programs for bullying in order to implement fully Republic Act no. 10627. There is a need for teachers to undergo orientation and training about bullying incidence as persons who could have the first account of bullying in the classroom. Parent-teachers conference should be conducted to discuss bullying problems among children. Intervention and prevention programs should be provided at the individual level taking into account that childhood bullying has serious consequences and early identification of children at risk could prevent these individuals from leading a troubled life.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their gratitude to the support given by the Basic Education Department for the conduct of this study. The parents and guardians of the student-respondents are acknowledged for the trust given.

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