

Bullying Behaviours Among Primary School Pupils: Intervention Imperative



Education

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ABSTRACT

Bullying which seems to be a widespread problem among the primary schools has a harmful effect on the mental, physical and social wellbeing of the child .To prevent such mishaps on the children, this study examined the available bullying practices among the primary schools within Awka urban area, the roles of different stakeholders in education as intervention strategies and made recommendations on how to bring bullying to a stop. This study will be significant to the parents, government and head teachers on how to join hand to ensure a conducive learning environment free from fear of bullying for better academic achievement of the pupils. The study which was limited to public primary schools used a descriptive survey guided by two research questions .A sample population of 80 randomly selected primary six children and ten head teachers from all the 20 public primary schools in Awka urban area were used. The instrument used for collection of data was a 15 Item questionnaire. The study found out that in primary schools in Awka urban area, different bullying practices were available and at a very high frequency such as taunting, fighting, gossiping, stealing and others. The researchers therefore concluded that putting bullying under control should be the responsibilities of all the stakeholders in education such as the parents, educators, non governmental organizations, policy makers, religious organizations and the school pupils involved. Based on the findings, recommendations were made among others is that the head teachers should organize orientations for the pupils and the teachers on human right policy and a parental awareness campaign could be conducted during the Parents Teachers meeting .

Introduction:

Bullying seems to be one of the problems confronting primary school pupils which if it is disregarded , will have negative effects for the general school climate and for the child's right to learn in a safe environment without fear of being molested by another. Olweus (2002) defined bullying as an ongoing verbal, physical or written harassment / abuse that occurs in school settings while the Education and Skills Guidelines (ESG) defined bullying as repeated, verbal or psychological aggression directed by an individual or group against another. For this study therefore, bullying is defined as an aggressive behaviors which is being meted repeatedly on a weaker child by another who is stronger without any course.

Bullying has a serious effect on the physical, mental, social and health of the child. It takes a wide range of forms including hitting,pushing,holding,hostile gesturing,threatening,humiliating ,degrading ,teasing, name calling ,sarcasm ,taunting, sticking out the tongue, silent treatment, eye rolling, manipulating friendship and ostracizing (Beran,2006,Ma,2001).Presence of bullying in school creates a climate of fear and intimidation for the individual victims of that bullying. Evans, (2002), Olweus and Limber (2010) posited that in order for a behavior to be considered bullying, it must be repetitive, intended to cause harm, provide unwanted negative actions and show an imbalance of power between the bully and the victims.

Bullying can exist when a power gap between children is not recognized and resolved with adult support. Without thoughtful adult intervention, young children's hurtful interventions can become a pattern of intimidation and result in long-term relationship problems (Pepler et al 2002).Many things could cause a child to be a bully. Goldstein, Whitlock and DePue,(2004) posit that children whose parents are authoritarian, hostile and rejecting, are more likely to become bullies. In addition, children who are overly protected by parents at home are more likely to be bully victims and that children who are bullied during school often continue to be bullied in the workplace (Schafer,et al,2004). In support of the above assertion, Sourander et

al,(2006),Pepler et al (2006) ,Hourbe,Targuinio,Thuillier and Her-gott,(2006) and Espelage et al (2003) posit that bullies are significantly more likely to be convicted of a criminal offence when they are adults than their non involved peers.

There are different kinds of bullying among the primary school children these ranges from :

1. Physical Bullying: This comprises of hitting, fighting, poking, shoving, kicking, getting another to hit someone.
2. Verbal Bullying: This comprises of name calling, insults, use of abusive words, taunting, teasing, gossiping.
3. Covert Bullying: Lying about someone, mimicking, playing nasty jokes.
4. Psychological Bullying: Threatening, manipulating, stalking someone
5. Sexual Bullying: Bullying a child because of the gender.
6. Cyber Bullying: Using phones, social network, text messages. (Olweus,1994)
7. Racial bullying: Making fun of town, culture, custom, tradition, language.
- 8.Isolation bullying: Made to feel unwanted, exclusion, separation from other peers.

Characteristics of bullying:

Bullying of any kind goes with its characteristics which according to Olweus (1994) ranges from:

1. Lack of empathy and concern for another.
2. Demonstrates a strong need to dominate and subdue others.
3. Hot tempered, quickly becomes enraged.
4. Teases others in a hurtful manner.
5. Picks on others who are weaker, not done in self defense.
6. Intimidate others through threats or reputation.
7. Commits acts of physical aggression.

Intervention Strategies by major stakeholders in education:

The success of intervention programs to prevent or mitigate bullying in childhood and adolescence has been limited (Ross

and Acher,2004). Even when programs have an impact, the improvement appears to be in changing children's knowledge and perceptions, not bullying behaviours .In other words the intervention measures needed to control and prevent bullying demands that all stakeholders must join hands together to change children's orientation on bullying and not stopping bullying .The root cause of it should be dealt with. All the stakeholders in education must be involved. The parents, the school, the pupils and the Government, on governmental organizations, the police must have a role to play to bring bullying to a stop.

The Role of Parents:

The first point of socialization of the child is the home. The parents of the children therefore have a great role to play in controlling and preventing bullying in primary schools. The child spends greater part of his life at home studying the adult models. Remig,(2009),Ireland et al (2004),Peepler et al (2006),posit that where bullying exists, it is very important to look at adult behavior at home as a possible source. Noticing when a negative interaction has become the norm.

Parents should learn to praise children when they do things well. They need to nurture three important skills , (1) Empathy – how to understand how someone feels (2) control – how to address strong negative feelings like anger and fear (3) problem solving – how to think of consequences and not act impulsively (A guide from safe school, 1998).Parents should ensure that children are supervised. Friends to their children must be known by the parents. When adults frequently observe children engaging in hurtful actions towards others , the children must not be seen as “mean ” or “bad,” but as experiencing emotional, physical, or social challenges that are overwhelming (Evans ,2002). The children should be taught that dialogue is better for solving problems than violence. Give time to discuss with your children and keep the communication link open. As a parent, physical punishment and use of weapon should be avoided. Violent verbal outburst as a child repaving method should be avoided. To effectively eliminate bullying by children, the parents and other adults must eliminate bullying by adults.

In support of this, Pepler (2007) and Ireland &Archer, (2004) posit that the thinking of parents about the children, as well as the language they use with them is important step in effectively supporting children socio-emotional growth. Ma (2001) and Smith & Ananiadou (2004) suggested that if parents are aware of bullying issues and are actively involved in school life, they are more likely to prevent their children from being involved in bullying.

The Role of the School: The school plays a central role in a child's socialization, it is important that a safe learning environment be provided for the learners. The school heads should create a peaceful and safe learning environment for the children through ensuring that the school climate is free from bullying .In addition, the school head should:

1. Decrease the likelihood of bullying if he/she will develop, implement and review regularly the school's anti-bullying policy. This could be provided in terms of Code of Conduct where acceptable and unacceptable behaviors of the children will be clearly stated. This code of conduct should be made available to every child that enters the school newly and the school head should review it occasionally.
2. Provide the school children with orientation in school policy child rights and other relevant behavioral expectations.
3. Provide intensive training and development to counselors and other key staff in effective strategies in managing bullying.
4. Ensure an on-going training and development of teachers' **induction of pupils and provisions of information to parents.**
5. Provide a good counseling service in the school for the pupils

counseling.

6. The teachers should develop and foster positive relationship with pupils and families, communicate with the children and engage in cooperative problem solving relationship to address the issue of bullying.
7. There should be a firm policy of zero tolerance for bullying behavior .The pupils need to know that bullying behavior is not acceptable and will have consequences .

Roles of the pupils:

The pupils have roles to play in helping the school maintains safe learning environment by:

- (1) Being respectful towards other pupils and staff.
- (2) Communicating to an adult if bullied or if aware that somebody is being bullied.
- (3) Keeping rules and regulations of the school as contained in the school code of conduct.

4. Making use of dialogue in settling their problems.

The Role of the Government:

The government should ensure that as part of the increasing human right agenda, the individual right must be protected through enforcing the law on human rights. This will help to instill fears into the pupils and the adults involved in child care.

Statement of the problems: Despite the introduction of child rights policy, bullying is still a serious problem confronting primary school children and this if not prevented has a serious harmful effect on the physical, mental and social health of the child. The researchers out of worry carried out a this study on availability and level of occurrence of bullying practices among primary school pupils in Awka urban area.

Methodology:

This study which investigated the availability and frequency of bullying practices in the primary schools within Awka area and the necessary intervention strategies, used descriptive survey design because the study is aimed at eliciting information from both the pupils The population of the study comprised of 80 randomly selected primary six children from all the twenty (20) public primary schools in Awka urban area with their randomly selected ten (10) head teachers. The reasons for using primary six pupils is that they have been in school for at least six years, therefore, if they were exposed to any bullying, it would have taken place by this stage of their schooling. This was supported by Cilliers and May (2002) who posited that most bullying take place in the junior grades on high school. A fifteen (15) Item questionnaire used for collection of data for the study was adapted by the researchers and it was used for collecting data from the pupils and their head teachers. The questionnaire was structured on 4 point Scale and this was validated by two (2) lecturers from the Department of early childhood and primary education and psychology department of Nnamdi azikiwe university, Awka. Cronbach Alpha reliability technique was used to determine the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.88. The questionnaire was personally distributed to pupils and head teachers in their schools with the help of a research assistant tutored on this job. The data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A mean of 2.50 and above indicated acceptance while a mean of below 2.50 indicated rejection. The study was guided by two research questions.

What is the frequency of bullying practices in primary schools within Awka urban.

Which bullying practices are available in primary schools within Awka urban?

RESULT**Research question 1: What is the frequency of bullying in primary schools within Awka urban****Table 1: Ratings by the pupils indicating the frequency of bullying in primary schools in Awka urban.**

	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Decision
1	I teased my fellow mates to make them angry	2.50	27.3	Accepted
2	I get angry very easily	3.1	23.3	Accepted
3	I say things about other children to make others laugh	2.7	26.1	Accepted
4	I fight back when someone hits me first	3.2	35.9	Accepted
5	I encourage other pupils to fight	2.7	30.9	Accepted
6	I push or shove other children	2.6	38.1	Accepted
7	I slap or kick someone	2.3	23.1	Rejected
8	I call others pupils names	3.3	25.9	Accepted
9	I get into physical fight	3.2	26.8	Accepted
10	I gossip with other children's names	2.7	29.3	Accepted

The mean rating of the pupils in table one shows that the items in 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9 and 10 with mean ratings of 2.5,3.1,2.7,3.2,2.7,2.6,3.3,3.2,2.7 respectively indicated acceptance that shows that such bullying practices are frequent among primary school pupils in Awka urban. Items 7 which is slapping or kicking some one was rejected.

Research question 2: Which bullying practices are available in primary schools within Awka urban.**Table 2: Head teachers ratings on available bullying behaviors in primary schools within Awka urban.**

	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Decision
1	In your school, pupils are involved in physical bullying (fighting, hitting, shoving)	4.0	5.3	Accepted
2	In your school, children are involved in verbal bullying (insult, name calling, use of abusive words)	3.9	4.6	Accepted
3	In your school, children are involved in covert bullying (gossiping about someone, mimicking, playing nasty jokes?)	3.9	4.6	Accepted
4	In your school children are involved in psychological bullying? (Threatening, manipulating, stalking someone)	2.7	0.6	Accepted
5	In your school children are involved in sexual bullying?	1.9	2.2	Rejected
6	In your school children are involved in cyber bullying (text messages, social network, phone calls)	3.8	4.1	Accepted
7	In your school children are involved in racial bullying (taunting, making of fun of town, custom, culture, language)	3.1	1.9	Accepted
8	In your school children are made to feel unwanted? (Exclusion/ isolation bullying)	3.8	4.1	Accepted

The responses in table 2 indicated that all the items on available bullying practices were accepted by the head teachers with exception of item 5 which indicated sexual harassment was rejected.

Discussions of findings :

The mean ratings of the pupils in table one on frequency of bullying practices within the schools show that all the items were frequent among the primary school pupils in Awka urban with the exception of Items 7 which indicated rejection by the

spondents that is slapping and kicking of peers were available but not frequent. The mean ratings of 2.3 and the standard deviation of 23.1 attested to that. When such acts are allowed to occur among the primary school children at a high frequency as the findings indicated, they become bullying practice and such will have serious effect on the mental, health and academic development of the children and on their long term relationship with others. This was supported by Ireland & Acher (2004) Evans, 2002, Olweus and Limber 2010 added that for a behavior to be considered bullying, it must be repetitive, of high frequency, intended to cause harm, provide unwanted negative actions and show an imbalance of power between the bully and the victims. Hourbe et al (2006), Olweus and Limber (2010) also assert that without thoughtful adult intervention, young children's hurtful interventions can become a pattern of intimidation and result in long-term relationship problems.

The data from the head teacher's responses in table 2 accepted the availability of all the bullying practices indicated in the questionnaire with the exception of items 7 which is on sexual bullying with a mean rating of 1.9. This shows that other forms of bullying behaviors were available and high in Awka urban primary schools. While sexual bullying as a form of bullying practice rarely occurs among them. In support of the findings, Olweus (2002) indicated that for an act to be called bullying, it must be an ongoing verbal, physical or written harassment / abuse that occurs in school settings. This was supported by Ireland & Acher (2004) Evans, 2002, Olweus and Limber 2010 who posited that in order for a behavior to be considered bullying, it must be repetitive, of high frequency, intended to cause harm, provide unwanted negative actions and show an imbalance of power between the bully and the victims.

The availability and high rate of such bullying practices is an indication that the children learnt the acts either from their parents or their other care givers within their environments. This is because the child spends greater part of his life at home studying the adult models. The views of Remig (2009), Ireland et al (2004), Peepler et al (2006) that where bullying exists, it is very important to look at adult behavior at home as a possible source supports the findings.

Conclusion:

Bullying which seems to be a universal problem among the primary school pupils could be associated with the young children's way of life. It has some negative effects on the children which range from harassment, fear, torments and others. When nothing is done about it, it can cause life long problems to the child involved. The researchers therefore concluded that for bullying to be controlled and prevented it should be seen as the responsibilities of all the stakeholders in education such as the parents, educators, non governmental organizations, policy makers, religious organizations and the school pupils involved.

Recommendations**The researchers recommended that:**

1. The primary schools should have an anti bullying clubs where such cases should be discussed.
2. There should be a code of conduct of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors of the pupils. This should be made available to every child on entering the school and occasionally reviewed.
3. A parental awareness campaign could be conducted during the Parents Teachers meeting and use of news letter will help to communicate to the parents about the problem.
4. Experts could be invited occasionally by the school heads to give talks to the children on the dangers of bullying on their mental, social and health development
- 5 Parents should be good models to their children as it concerns positive behaviors and use of good words on their children.

6. The government should ensure that the human right policy is being implemented

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