Managing Bullying Problems in Nigerian Secondary Schools: Some Interventions for Implementation

Oyaziwo Aluede[1]

Abstract: Bullying problem has remained pervasive and a going concern for all stakeholders of education who desire to make school climate a safe haven. This paper is moved by this desire, by bringing into context the meaning of bullying and prevalence of bullying around the globe. The paper further brings into perspective bullying situation in Nigeria and prescribes intervention for bullying prevention in schools. These include; provision of helping services for schools; sensitization and capacity building of stakeholders in bullying detection and prevention; implementation of bully buster programme; and improvement of students' level of compassion and empathy through empathy training.

Introduction

A school is an institution designed for the teaching of students enrolled in it. The main purpose of the school is to develop the student through knowledge acquisition so that he/she may become a social being. By this, the student is expected to learn how to relate with fellow students, teachers and significant others in the school on the one hand, live in a harmonious way (by blending with societal values) in the society on the other hand. The school is also expected to be a place where students should feel safe and secure, and where they can count on being treated with respect. The reality, however, is that only few students or pupils can harmoniously blend with their school mates without experiencing violence in the school (Fajoju, 2009).

Although the school had always remained one of the safest places, next to the home in a child's life, one wonders if this still holds sway in our present society given the ever increasing spate of violence in our schools. Violence in schools is an issue that has become more prominent in the last few years, as news articles about violent deeds within the school setting is now on the increase. Despite the increasing rate of violence in schools, the society still expects that the school should be a safe place for students. Thus, in order to maintain a peaceful and safe school environment, stakeholders in education have tended to concern themselves with the problem of violence in our schools.

Violence as defined by the World Health Organisation (2002, as cited in Federal Ministry of Education, 2007), is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group of community that either results in or has a high

[1] Professor, Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria.
Emails: oyaziwoaluede@yahoo.com, oyaziwoaluede@gmail.com

likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal- development or deprivation. In this definition, there is a very strong correlation between intentionality and committing of an act itself, irrespective of the outcome it produces. This definition also excludes any unintentional incident, such as road traffic injuries and burns (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). Violence broadly speaking includes any condition or act that creates a climate in which the individual feels fear or intimidation in addition to being victims of assault, theft or vandalism. This, as a matter of fact, is becoming a growing problem in our schools.

School violence wears many faces. It includes gang activity, locker theft, bullying and intimidation, gun use, assault, just about anything that produces a victim. Specifically, students these days physically, mentally or verbally abuse one another. Thus, the use of guns, knives and other dangerous weapons and other abuses – physical or psychological is now more common than ever in Nigerian school system (Aluede, 2006; Fajoju, 2009; Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, the main interest of this paper is to concisely put in perspective the meaning of school violence in the context of bullying, the prevalence of bullying across the globe; situational analysis of bullying in Nigerian schools and finally provide some strategies for adoption in the management of bullying problems in Nigerian secondary schools.

Meaning of Bullying Behaviour

Bullying is a pervasive problem in schools that affects a lot of students. In recent times, it is becoming a bigger crisis with vicious consequences. Bullying is not just a child's play, but a terrifying experience many school children face everyday (Aluede, 2006; Beran, 2005; Craig, 1998; Thornbery, 2010). As Beran (2005) further noted, in spite of school officials, teachers, parents and students exerting great efforts to make schools friendlier and safer places, a reduction of bullying is not always evident, as threats of attacks in schools often leading to breakdown of rules and orders are often the case in many Nigerian schools.

What then is bullying? Defining bullying has been a very difficult task, as no single definition can cover all aspects of bullying. Notwithstanding, bullying is a form of aggression, a particular kind of violence to which students are exposed. It is a form of social interaction in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behaviour intended to cause distress to the less dominant individual (the victim). In some studies, bullying has been conceptualized as acting in any way that threatens or hurts someone less powerful.

Bullying does not occur when there is conflict between people of equal or similar power. This distinction is important because of the effects of being repeatedly attacked or threatened by a

more powerful person or group are likely to differ from the effects of being threatened or attacked by someone of equal power. In the former case, one is apt to feel more helpless (Fajoju, 2009).

Much of what we understand today about bullying is a result of Dan Olweu's work beginning in the 1970s in Scandinavia. Although his definition of bullying has been debated, the vast majority of the published studies use the bully/ victim survey developed by Olweus as a measure of bullying (Aluede, 2006; Bedell and Horne, 2005; Beran, 2005). Dan Olweus, a pioneer in the systematic study of bullying, identifies common elements of this behaviour, such as deliberate aggressiveness and marked inequality in terms of power. Tactics employed in this act include harsh teasing, constant criticisms, insults, gossips and unreasonable demands.

Bullying, a subcategory of aggressive behaviour, is encountered regularly by children and adolescents in the context of schools world wide. Although, bullying is a common experience for students around the world, it is a complex social problem that can have severe negative consequences for both bullies and victims (Hymel, Rocke-Henderson & Bananno, 2005), especially as bullying has the potential to cause either physical or psychological harm to the victim (Bosworth, Espelage & Simon, 1999).

Researches (i.e. Aluede, 2006; Aluede, Fajoju, Omoike & Afen-Akpaida, 2008; Beran, 2009; Thornberg, 2010) have described association between bullying by peers and a number of different dimensions of internal distress and social problems, especially as a single student who bullies can have very far reaching effects on the school thus creating a climate of fear and intimidation not only in his/her victims, but also on bystanders. Therefore, students affected by bullying will be at higher risk of developing depression, anxiety, loneliness, mistrust of others, low self-esteem, poor social adjustment, poor academic achievement and poor health as compared to others (Thornberg, 2010).

There are different types of bullying and bullying behaviour. However, most common definitions of bullying show three things in common: that is, bullying is a repeated action that occurs over a prolonged period of time; there is an imbalance of power; and the verbal, psychological, and/or physical negative actions of bullying are unprovoked. Manifestations include threatening to injure another person for no apparent reason, requesting tasks to be performed that are undesirable to the other individual, and threatening negative consequences to individuals, if their requests are not met by the victims. Additionally, the bully may intimidate the victim by initiating acts such as name-calling, teasing, pushing or shoving and using physical dominance for intimidation (Aluede & Fajoju, in press; Fajoju, 2009).

Prevalence of Bullying in School

According to Federal Ministry of Education (2007), since the last decade, several cases of violence against children such as torture, kidnapping, shooting, sexual harassment, rape, corporal punishment and so on have been reported in various newspapers, magazines and television stations all over the world. However, there is lack of documentation of most of the violent acts. This lack of documentation and increasing violence rate against children were part of the reasons for the global in-depth study of violence against children by the UN Secretary-General as directed by the General Assembly Resolution 57/90 of 2002 to provide a global picture.

Specifically, bullying as a sub-set of school violence among school-age children occurs in many schools across the globe (McEachern, Kenny, Blake & Aluede, 2005). Despite lack of documentation of incidents of bullying across the globe, studies conducted in various countries have indicated that a growing percentage of student population is being bullied everyday across the globe and that the rates of bullying vary from country to country (Duncan, 1999).

In Canada, self-report data indicate that 8% to 9% of elementary school children are bullied frequently (i.e., once or more a week) and about 2 to 5% of students bully others frequently. In addition, among adolescents, at the secondary school level, rates are somewhat higher, with 10 to 11% of students reporting that they are frequently victimized by peers, and another 8 to 11% reporting that they frequently bully others (Hymel, Rocke-Henderson & Bananno, 2005).

In the United States of America, bullying behaviour occurs in many American schools and is perhaps one of the most under-reported safety problems (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). However, American schools harbour approximately 2.1 million bullies and 2.7 million are their victims (Fried, 1997). Specifically, Bosworth et al's (1999 as cited in Kenny et al, 2005) study found that 81% of their sample reported at least one act of bullying behaviour during the last month. Another study found that 82% of the respondents were bullied at some period in their academic lives. In addition, several studies from different parts of the US have reported 10-29 percent of the students surveyed were either bullied or victims (Kenny et al, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, bullying behaviour is also a pervasive problem. For instance, Whitney and Smith's (1993, as cited in McEachern, Kenny, Blake & Aluede, 2005) study of 6,758 students in 24 schools in all areas of the city of Sheffield, UK revealed that 27% of the elementary and middle schools sampled reported being bullied sometimes during the term. In a similar vein, Rivers and Smith's (1994, as cited in McEachern et al, 2005) study of 7000 elementary and secondary school students in the UK revealed that 29% of boys and 24% of girls in the elementary schools

experienced some form of physical bullying. The study further revealed that approximately 41% of boys and 39% of girls experienced verbal bullying.

In the Scandinavian countries, research indicates that approximately 10% of children are frequently victims of bullying. Specifically, in Norway, 14% of the children are either bullies or victims. In Denmark, though little systematic research on bullying has been conducted, one significant study published in that country revealed that in comparison to 24 other countries, Denmark scored high (top three) on bullying behaviour and in the top half for students who reported being bullied (Docholm, 1999, as cited in McEachern, et al, 2005).

In Africa, the pioneering works of Prof. Fred Zindi of Zimbabwe is particularly instructive. Zindi (1994) revealed in his study of bullying at boarding school in Zimbabwe that 16% of the sampled students were bullied now and then, and 18% were bullied weekly or more often.

Situational Analysis of Bullying Problem in Nigeria

In Nigeria, even though cases of bullying had been reported in many schools, this deviant act is not always given any desirable attention. Furthermore, there are no available statistical facts to show the actual number of students that are bullied or victims in Nigerian schools. This lack of statistical facts and absence of well documented evidence have made it difficult for us to appreciate the prevalence of bullying behaviour in Nigeria (Aluede & Fajoju, in press; Umoh, 2000).

Despite the absence of documented evidence of the prevalent rate of bullying in Nigeria, Egbochuku's (2007) study on some Nigerian students in Benin City revealed that almost four in every five participants (78%) reported being bullied and 85% of the children admitted to bullying others at least once. Using moderate criteria, the study further indicated that more than half of the students (62%) were bullied and 30% bullied others. Similarly, Aluede and Fajoju's (in press) study on secondary school students in Benin metropolis of Nigeria revealed that majority of the respondents (62.4%) have been victims of bullying, while 29.6% of the respondents indicated that they have bullied others within the academic session.

In a somewhat first ever nation-wide situational analysis survey of school violence in Nigeria conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education (2007), it was revealed that physical violence and psychological violence accounted for 85% and 50% respectively of the bulk of violence against children in schools. Across school location, physical violence was more prevalent in the rural (90%) than in the urban areas (80%). Across region, physical violence in schools is higher in the southern Nigeria (90%) than in the Northern region (79%). So is the case of psychological violence, which is 61% in Southern Nigeria and only 38.7% in Northern Nigeria. Furthermore,

across gender, physical and psychological violence are almost evenly distributed among males and females in Nigerian schools.

Strategic Interventions for the Management of Bullying Problems

From the situational analysis of school violence in Nigerian schools, it is obvious that our Nigerian school system is littered with every growing evidence of physical violence. Despite the growing incidents, Federal Ministry of Education (2007), reports that its eradication or reduction remains an issue of great concern; largely because of the fact that reporting of incidents of violence in Nigerian schools is generally low. The reason for this is that students generally feel nothing will be done by school authorities if ever they report incidents of physical violence.

As school administrators and significant others struggle with ways to prevent acts of violence from occurring within their schools, they increasingly turn to school counsellors and other helping professionals, especially school psychologists in the school for leadership and help with establishing policies regarding safety (Fryxell & Smith, 2000). Indeed, school counsellors and psychologists are primarily agents of change and prevention within the school system (Eduwen, 2010). Therefore, school counsellors and psychologists have a duty to strengthen their intervention skills especially those strategies that would help deal with bullying problems in schools. Therefore, school counsellors and psychologists should consider adopting the strategies outlined therein for effective management of bullying problems in Nigerian schools

Kenny et al (2005) observed that since bullies tend to show little empathy for their target, school counsellors and psychologists will need to provide interventions to improve students' level of compassion and empathy. These may include activities that foster sensitivity for the feelings 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. In addition, training school children early in life to be empathic can help prevent them from turning into bullies (Aluede, 2006). Therefore, school counsellors and psychologists can be of great assistance to both bullies and victims by teaching them a new style of education called "empathy training". This teaches students as young as five years old to understand the feelings of others and to treat people with kindness. Expectedly, those who go through this empathy training, when compared with those who have not, are more likely to be less aggressive.

Another intervention strategy that has been found to be helpful in bullying management in the literature is developing and distributing a written anti-bullying policy to everyone in the school community and also consistently applying the policy (Peterson, 2005). Peterson (2005) suggested mapping a school's "hot spots" for bullying incidents so that supervision can be

concentrated in designated areas; 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; and teach respect and non- violence beginning in primary schools. Additionally, teaching bullies positive behaviour through modelling, coaching, prompting, praise, social skills, conflict management, anger management, character education, signing anti- teasing or anti- bullying pledges, will no doubt reduce bullying incidents in schools

A bully prevention programme that has been empirically supported and found to be helpful to teachers, school counsellors and psychologists, school administrators and parents who desire to address the increase in bullying occurring in the schools has been the adoption of the "Bully Buster". This is a psycho- educational intervention for reducing bullying developed by Newman, Horne and Bartolomucci (2000). The goals of the intervention are: to increase teachers' knowledge and use of bullying intervention skills; to increase teachers' personal self- efficacy and self- efficacy related to working with specific types of children; and to reduce the amount of bullying and victimization in the classroom. The Bully Buster programme, according to Bedell and Horne (2005), is generally implemented in the form of a staff development training workshop which is typically held over a course of three weeks for two hours per meeting. The contents of the programme include information pertaining to bullying and victimization, recommended intervention, prevention strategies, stress management techniques and classroom activities. The training programme is a composite of seven consecutive modules, each focusing on specific goals: (a). Increasing awareness of bullying; (b). Recognizing the bully; (c). Recognizing the victim; (d). Taking charge (interventions for bullying behaviours); (e). Assisting victims (recommendations and interventions); (f). Understanding the roles of prevention; and (g). Developing relaxation and coping skills.

Even 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 classroom (Peterson, 2005). Therefore, increasing public awareness and knowledge about bullying behaviour problem can be a sure way to reduce bullying. This can be achieved through: (a). active involvement of teachers and parents in prevention programme; (b). vigilance by school personnel for incidents of bullying; (c). The development of firm sanctions and consequences for students who engage in bullying; and (d).teaching assertiveness skills to the bullied victims (Aluede, 2006; Kenny et al, 2005; McEachern et al, 2005; McFadden, 1986; Olweus, 1991)

Bullying problem can be managed in schools if school counsellors and psychologists faithfully follow the seven strategies under the acronym "SCRAPES" provided by Fried and Fried (1996, as cited in McEachern et al, 2005). These are S- Self- esteem and social skills enrichment; C- Conflict resolution and mediation skills; R- Respect for difference, de- prejudicing exercises; A- Anger management and assertiveness training; P- Problem solving skills; E- Empathy training; and S- Sexual awareness training.

In all interventions geared towards bullying reduction, those provided in the Federal Ministry of Education's (2007) *The National Strategic Framework for Violence Free Basic Education in Nigeria* seems exceptionally and particularly instructive. They are as follows:

- Deliberate efforts at establishing/ strengthening counselling services in schools must be initiated with a view to protecting children from violence. Therefore, pre- service and in- service capacity of guidance counsellors and school psychologists must be prioritize. In addition, issues on violence, especially physical violence (byllying) against children must be incorporated into guidance and counselling curriculum

- Violence free consciousness must be promoted among students, teachers and other members of the school communities including parents. Therefore, school counsellors and psychologists should on a regular basis organize seminars on violence prevention and also cause publications to educate students and teachers on acceptable non- violent behaviours.

- School counsellors and psychologists should as a matter of priority endeavour to ensure the promotion of life skills to prevent violence against students in schools. Where appropriate, co- curricular activities in school clubs focusing on violence prevention should be encouraged.

Conclusion

This paper summarises, from available literature on school violence, the concept of school violence viewed from the perspective of bullying behaviour in schools. Though bullying problem remains pervasive and prevalent in several cultures and throughout the world, strategic interventions as outlined in this enterprise can help to ensure a safer and friendlier school climate in Nigeria

References

Aluede, O. & A.S Fajoju,. (in press) "Bully Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Benin Metropolis of Edo State, Nigeria". *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research.*
Aluede, O. (2006) "Bullying in Schools: A form of Child Abuse in Schools". *Educated Research Quarterly*, *30(1), 37-49.*
Aluede, O. Fajoju, A.S., Omoike, D. & J.E. Afen-Akpaida, (2008) "A Review of the Extent, Nature, Characteristics and Effects of Bullying in Schools". *Journal of Instructional Psychology. 35, 151-58.*

Batsche, G.M. & H.M Knoff, (1994) "Bullies and their Victims: Understanding a Pervasive Problem in the Schools". *School Psychology Review, 23(2), 165-174.*

Bedell, R. & A. Horne, (2005) "Bully Prevention in Schools: A United States Experience". *Journal of Social Sciences* (Special Issue), 8, 59-69.

Beran, T. (2005). "A New Perspective on Managing School Bullying: Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes". *Journal of Social Sciences (Special Issue), 8, 43-49.*

Beran, T. (2009) "Correlates of Peer Victimizations and Achievement: An Exploratory Model". *Psychology in Schools. 46, 348-361.*

Bosworth, K., Espelage, L.D. & T. Simon, (1999). "Factors Associated with Bullying Behaviour in Middle School Students". *Journal of Early Adolescence, 19, 341-362.*

Craig, W. (1998). "The Relationship between Bullying, Depression, Anxiety and Aggression among Elementary School Children". *Personality and Individual Differences, 24, 123-130.*

Duncan, R.E. (1999). "Peer and Sibling Aggression: An Investigation of Intra and Extra-familial Bullying". *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 14, 871-886.*

Eduwen, F. I. (2010). *Job Satisfaction among School Counsellors in Secondary Schools in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria.* Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma- Nigeria

Egbochuku, E.O. (2007) "Bullying in Nigerian Schools: Prevalence Study and Implication for Counselling". *Journal of Social Sciences, 14, 65-71.*

Fajoju, A.S. (2009) *School Bullying and Academic Performances of Secondary School Students in Edo State.* Unpublished Doctoral Research Proposal Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria.

Federal Ministry of Education (2007). *The National Strategic Framework for Violence Free Basic Education in Nigeria.* Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education.

Fried, S. (1997) "Bullies and Victims: Children Abusing Children". *American Journal of Dance Therap*y, *19, 127-133.*

Fryxell, D. & D.L. Smith, (2000). "Personal, Social and Family Characteristics of Angry Students". *Professional School Counselling, 4, 86- 94*

Hymel, S., Rocke-Hendereson, N. & R.A Bonanno,. (2005) "Moral Disengagement: A Framework for Understanding Bullying Among Adolescents". *Journal of Social Sciences (Special Issue), 8, 1-11.*

Kenny, M.C., McEachern, A.E. & O. Aluede, (2005) "Female Bullying: Preventions and Counselling Interventions". *Journal of Social Sciences (Special Issue), 8, 13-19.*

McEachern, A.G., Kenny, M.C., Blake, E. & O. Aluede, (2005) "Bullying in Schools: international Variations". *Journal of Social Sciences (Special Issue) 8, 51-58.*

McFadden, J. (1986). "Bullies and Victims". *Primary Education, September/ October, pp 25- 26.*

Newman, D. A., Horne, A. M., & L. Bartomucci, (2000). *Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual for Helping Bullies, Victims and Bystanders.* Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.

Olweus, D. (1991). "Bully/ Victims Problems among School Children: Basic Facts and Effects of a School-based Intervention Program". In K. Rubin & D. Pepler (eds.), *The development and treatment of childhood aggression* (pp85- 125). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Erlbaum

Thornberg, R. (2010) *Victimizing of Bully: A Grounded Theory.* Paper presented at the Conference of European Educational Research Association. Retrieved on October 4, 2010 at http://www.eera-ecer.eu/ecer-programmes/conference/ecer-2010/contribution/1188-2/?no_cache=1

Umoh, S.H. (2000) *Managing the Problems of the Nigerian Adolescents through Counselling.* A paper presented at a workshop organized by the Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State.

Zindi, F. (1994) "Bullying at Boarding School: A Zimbabwe Study". *Research in Educatio*n, 51, 23-32.