# THE ROLE OF COUNSELLINGSTRATEGIES IN REDUCING BULLYING EFFECT AMONG STUDENT IN SCHOOLS

## *BY*

### BILHATU KUMAH DAGARI

UNIVERSITY COUNSELLING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CENTRE,

A.B.U ZARIA.

08036153436

AND

### SA'ADATU ATIKU

UNIVERSITY COUNSELLINGAND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CENTRE,

A.B.U ZARIA.

08035929941

2012

# Abstract

Bullying in schools is a wide spread problems that needs attention to reduce its occurrence. It is a form of violence among students that takes place in school playground, dormitories, neighbourhood, and homes throughout Nigeria. It is a social and interpersonal problem that involves repeated intentional use of aggression against a less powerful other. This paper attempts to create awareness on the effects of bullying on students in various schools in Nigeria. It discusses the concepts of bullying, forms, signs and symptoms. The paper also highlighted the effects of bullying and characteristics of the bully and the bullied victims. Counselling strategies are outlined and the duties of the school administrators in reducing the occurrence of bully behaviour in secondary schools of Nigeria.

# Introduction

Bullying occurs in schools and therefore needs attention to reduce it. Bullying is any behaviour intended to harm or disturb the victim physically or verbally. It is a form of violence among students that takes place on the school playground, classroom, hostel, neighborhood, at home or in the toilet within the school premises. This is an anti-social and interpersonal problem that involves the repeated intentional use of aggression such as assault, teasing, rumour spreading, intimidation and provocative jokes etc. against a less powerful other. This act occurs repeatedly over time and involves an on-going pattern of harassment and abuse which deliberately attempts to hurt, harm, or disturb the victim who experiences an actual or perceived in-balance of power (Olweus, 1993 and Lowenstein 1978).

School bullying can be physical or verbal; as such it is a major problem for students. This is because it occurs in person, directly or indirectly or electronically. It is carried out by one who is bigger and stronger or a group of students against one whom they consider as weak or smaller or one who has difficulty in defending him/herself. For example, in our secondary schools today, the senior or older students who should provide emotional support for the younger or new students easily bully them. Such negative acts create fear and feelings of insecurity among the victims and even those who witness them. These actions are learned through influence in the environment such as home, school, peer group and even the media. The experiences affect the student perception of safety and ability to learn.(Andrea and Andrea, 2003).

A shocking revelation about bullying in schools and within the community is that, it is often not reported to either school authorities or parents. This may count for it's being on the raise daily in schools. Bullying behaviour should not be ignored or down played but be recognized as negative act that need be attended to in order to reduce its occurrence and effects on school students. More so, it should not be treated as a normal part of growing up. Otherwise, there will be a good number of students who will suffer on-going torment and harassment from their peers. This can cause long term damage to students in terms of their mental health, academic achievement, and overall socialization and adaptation in schools and even the society (Lowenstein,1978).

The focus of this paper is to create awareness on the existence of bullying behaviour and its problems among students. The objectives of this paper are to;

a. Gain an understanding of bullying.
b. Identify the causes of bullying.
c. Identify the signs and symptoms of bullying.
d. The characteristics of a bully and the bullied victim.
e. Find out the consequences/effects of bullying.
f. Enumerate the role of counseling in reducing bullying.

1

# What is Bullying?

Bullying is a behavioural problem which occurs on daily basis in school across the country and even in the world. It is an assertion of power through aggression. The word "bully" according to Oxford advanced dictionary (2005) means "a person who uses his/her strength or power to frighten or hurt weaker people". Robinson and Mines (1994) define bully as a person behaving in a way which might meet the needs for excitement, status, material gain or group process and does not recognize or meet the needs and rights of other people or persons who are harmed by his/herbehaviour. Olweus (1993) define bullying as a situation where a person is exposed repeatedly and overtime to negative actions on the part of one or more other person and he/she has difficulty defending him/herself. Nansel, Overpeak, Pilla, Ruam (2001) state that bullying is a physical act of hitting, kicking, verbal attack of name calling and threats, a psychological maneuver in the form of rumours and exclusion- such behaviour are intended to harm or disturb, occurs repeatedly, overtime and there is an imbalance of power, with a mere powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. Wikipedia (2012) define bullying as a form of abuse which comprises repeated act overtime that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power with more powerful individual or group abusing those who are less powerful.

The definitions above revealed four (4) components according to Olweus(1993) as follows;

1. Bullying is aggressive behaviour that involves unwanted negative actions
2. It involves a pattern of behaviour repeated over time.
3. It also involves an imbalance of power or strength.
4. It is directed at a victim.

It can also take any of the following forms according to Nansel et al.(2001), Andrea and Andrea(2003) and Pepler and Craig(1997)

a. Verbal bullying includes derogatory comments and bad names.
b. A social exclusion or isolation
c. Physical act such as hitting, kicking, shoving, spittinge.t.c.
d. Spreading of lies and false rumours.
e. Having money taken or other things taken or damaged by students who bully.
f. Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully.
g. Racial bullying.
h. Sexual bullying.
i. Cyber bullying via cell phone·or internet.

# Causes of bullying

The causes of bullying are varied and many. Understanding the causes couldbe a first step towards addressing the problem. The causes can be grouped into three(3) factors according to Robinson and Maines (1994), Pepler and Craig (2000).

## Societal factor:

This comprises early experiences which influenced the behaviour of the child, they include parental neglect, family instability, and aggression within the house and in the society, family stress, rejection, and isolation, exposure to violent movies, marginalization, child abuse, ignoring, anti-social acts and inconsistent reinforcements.

## Biological factor:

Research studies and science have proved that some individuals behave aggressively due to malfunctioning of the body organs or imbalance in the production of body hormones. Aggressive behaviour such as bullying can also be attributed to poor state of mental health.

## Peer group influence:

Students most of the time, spend alot of their time with age-mates than they do with their parents and teachers. Peer group are seen as the group that a student interacts and play with within his/her immediate environments. In the group, the student enjoys a free world, more independent thoughts and action, has the freedom to discuss matters of interest which may be contrary to the interest shared by adults. Thus, the peer group has a considerable influence on a child's actions or inactions.

# Signs and Symptoms of bullying

Bullying is much more likely to grow when signals of it are ignored and strong decisions are not taken. However, possible warning signs that a child is being bullied may include among others the following according to Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager and Shart-Camil (1994) and Olweus (1993) include being frightened to walk to or from school, not wanting to go to school, changing of their usual routine, unwilling to go to school(school phobia), become withdrawing, anxious or lacking in confidence and starts stammering. Others are attempts or threatening suicide or runs away; experiences nightmares or cries in sleep or having trouble sleeping. They could feel or fall ill in the morning; start doing poorly in school work or losses interest in schooling. The individual could also appear sad, moody or teary when he /she comes home from school, his/her possession could be missing, ask for money or starts stealing money to pay the bully(ies). He/she is frightened to say what is wrong/happened among several others.

Some symptoms of bullying include unexplained cuts or bruises or scratches or books torn. There is loss of appetites, isolation of self socially, difficulty relaxing in the learning environment, withdrawal from activities, being cautious, sensitive or insecure, difficulty asserting self or having poor grades in school. The student may experience depression, low self-esteem, and health problems such as headache, stomach ache or physical ailment. These signs and behaviour could indicate other problems but bullying should be considered a possibility and be investigated.

## Characteristics of a bully

Bullying is an interactional negative behaviour manifested with the intent of causing pains or harmto others. Students, who intentionally bully others, should be held responsible for their actions. Some of the characteristics of a bully according to Olweus (1993) and Garrity et al. (1994) include the tendency of aggression, impulsive, dominating, hyper-activity, disruptive and over active. Bullies tend to be assertive, easily provoked, attracted to situations of aggressive content, get into frequent fights, steal and vandalize properties, some drink alcohol, smoke, report poor grades, carry a weapon, easily frustrated, is delinquent and have conformity to rules.(Lowenstein, 1978). These characteristics are anti-social behaviour and should not be tolerated nor accepted in schools as it makes learning environments unsafe and unhealthy for everyone. Bullies have no empathy for their victims and show little or no remorse about bullying.

## Characteristics of victims of bullying

According to Pepler et al. (1997) there are certain traits that make a student more likely to become the victim of bullying which include being smaller in size, weaker than their peers, non-assertive, socially incompetent, having no friends, shy, anxious, withdrawn and those who are different from their peers. Many victims are too embarrassed or ashamed to report the incident which only gives the bully more power over the victim.

## The effects/consequences of bullying

It is evident that bullying is a serious global problem among students in school that have effects on learning and learning environment. The victims of bullying suffer severe emotional-trauma and sometimes physical injuries that may take some time to heal. The effects on the victims range from loneliness, feelings of humiliation, loss of self-esteem, embarrassment, absenteeism from school, difficulty in socializing with others and mental illness among others. This can easily affects the student and make him/her withdraw from associating with other peers leading to personal-social problems. (Idowu and Yahaya, 1998)

Similarly, bullying can affects the social environment of a school, creating a climate of fear among students which inhibit their ability to learn, and leading to other anti-social behaviour. It can also interfere with a student engagement and learning in school which could result to poor

performance as a result of frequent absenteeism. This is a form of distraction from gaining meaningfully from the process of education leading to eventual abandonment of school.

Research studies have proved that learning can only take place in a conducive environment that promotes cordial relationship between the teacher and the learner and also between the learner, and learner. However, sometimes, teachers fail to listen to student's apparent call to some misbehavior and are unwilling to hear the students out. The student who is tormented would experience the effect of bullying to be devastating. This is so because some teachers and parents have the tendency to consider bullying as part of growing up. Some even believe that bullying will better prepare one for life by toughing one up. If this type of logic and thinking persists, bullying will continue to become an important contribution to youth violence.

Bullying need not be treated as a normal part of growing up but as a public health problem and anti-social problem that should be prevented. The bullies also suffer effects of their actions. They tend to develop behaviour pattern problems that may endure or last into adult life. They suffer poor communication problems and experience difficulties in their cognitive and behavioural deficits that affect their attention and classroom behaviour. They also tend to be hyper vigilant and expect the worst. They may also experience difficulty relaxing in the learning environment and respond aggressively to perceived hostility from peers or authority figures at school. On the other hand, peers also suffer from bullying behaviour by feeling group pressure to join in the bullying; merely observing bullying may lead to distress.

## Counseling strategies in reducing bullying

Counseling is a helping relationship directed at a student who is experiencing difficulties in certain areas of life. Bullying is a complex deviant behaviour problem that requires management using behaviour modification techniques. The objectives of any intervention are to stop or reduce the occurrences of an abuse. The result of using an intervention is to create change in behaviour. The first strategies to implore according to Olweus, Limbre and Mihalic (1999) are to advocate:

a. Isolate the bullying behaviour
b. Provide support for the victim
c. Withdraw and isolate the victim
d. Change the behaviour of the bully
e. Work with the peer group in programs
f. Work with persistent offenders
g. Identify perpetrators
h. Identify peer group that is backing the bully
i. Talk to victims parents, express concern and determination to take action

Furthermore, students who bully should be held responsible for their actions. This is because their action causes pains or damages to their victims and even the society at large. As such, a bully needs to recognize that his/her behaviour is damaging and so he/she needs to change. This

5

is possible when their family, teachers, peer and counselors help them deal with these issues and create a supportive and positive environment that allows for change and growth into positive social contributors. Responses need be calm and the conflict be dealt with in a positive manner. This method would lead to a clear understanding of the nature of bullying which is a search for leadership, support and clarification from adults but is express in aggression.

Similarly, fostering an understanding of the victim's point of view is important for engaging the participation of by standers in stopping the bully. This is possible when a supportive and caring classroom, school and community culture through modeling appropriate behaviour and active participation. It includes teaching cooperation, building self-esteem, encouraging responsibility and empowering students through democratic processes. The victims and by standers should be taught skills of reporting and dealing with a bully as it isoccurring.

The school community should design and implement a policy outline on how to report and prevent bullying. This policy according to Idowu and Yahaya (1998) should include:

1. A definition of bullying; types, severity, identification, dynamics-form.
2. Strategies for preventing bullying through developing awareness and pro-social attitudes where students are taught to avoid bullying and promote cooperative interaction and staff modeling positive conflict resolution.
3. Reporting techniques that include steps for students and staff to follow, to report and ensure communication recording-documentation and follow up.
4. Implementation: the type of change required in school organization and interactions, time and resources required, available strength, necessary training for staff, student, parent and community.
5. Assessment: provision of information and strategies to monitor effectiveness of policy, prevention and intervention.

Conclusively, since bullying is a social phenomenon that transcends gender, age and culture, a formative range of consequences be provided to prevent and give a clear message that bullying is unacceptable but also build on awareness and skills to promote students responsibility in learning to turn their negative leadership to a positive one. The strategies according to Pepler and Craig (2000) are:

1. Make amend that are formative such as work in school dining or classroom
2. Withdraw privileges
3. Lead a class discussion on the harmful effects of bullying and even role play the victims of the behaviours.
4. Teach students about bullying and develop norms and empathy.
5. Recognize differences in family, cultural and regional values
6. Develop strategies to strengthen and protect the victims and reassure them of safety measures in school, build on their strength to develop confidence

7. Counsel to support the victims to cope with effects of bullying, inform parents, promote social skills and anger management.

## Recommendation

For the school administration to play her part in reducing bullying among students, it must create an environment that will reduce or eliminate bullying through:

1. Building trust
2. Promote friendliness
3. Develop emotional control
4. Encourage cooperative learning
5. Teach leadership and decision making
6. Enhance interpersonal relationships
7. Improve classroom and school climate
8. Accept and expects uniqueness
9. Encourage staff and student empowerment
10. Promote problem solving

## Conclusion

Bullying is a serious problem of growing up among youths and students. Therefore alot of information dissemination should be given to youths and students to help in the managements or reduction of bullying in schools. Heads of schools, teachers and parents should be involved in the dissemination of such information if the problem of bullying is to be handled effectively for a safe and healthy learning environment.

# References

Olweus, D. (1993). Bullying in Schools: Basic facts and effects of a school based intervention program.Journal of child psychology/psychiatry. New York: Blackwell.

Lowenstein, L. (1978). Who is the bully? Bulletin of the British psychological society.31:147-149

Andrea, C. and Andrea, C (2003).Bullying: Facts for Schools and Parents.National Mental Health and Education Centre for Children and Families(NASP).

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Contemporary English. 7th Edition 2005.

Robinson, G. and Maines, B. (1994).THE No Blame or Peer Support Approach to Bullying. A paper presented to the British Association of Advancement of Science London.

Nansel, T.R., Overpeak, M., Pilla, R.S. and Ruam, W.J. (2001). Bullying. American Medical Association Journal, 285:2094-2100.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/bully Retrieved 12/10/2012.

Garrity, c., Jens, K., Porter, W., Sager, N. and Shart-Camill, C. (1994). Bullying – Purifying your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Elementary Schools. Longman CO: Sopris West.

Pepler, D.J. and Craig, W. (2000).Making a difference in bullying.Accessed 2012, Nov. 18th.

Idowu, A.I. and Yahaya, L.A. (1998).Systemic Approach as a Strategy for Handling Bullying Among Secondary School Students in Nigeria.

Pepler, D.J.; Craig, W.;O'connolly, J.;Atalas, R.; Sedigdeiami, F.; Smith, C. and Kent, D. (1997).Prevalence of Bullying and Middle School Children.National Crime Prevention Strategy.