

Combating Bullying in Schools: Strategy for Conducive Pedagogy Environment

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Abstract

Bullying is a pervasive problem in most schooling environments and this is wreaking havoc on pedagogy in general. Students are increasingly bullied at schools on a daily basis and this problem of bullying continues to escalate unabated by those saddled with the responsibility to enforce anti-bullying in schools. Undoubtedly, bullied students develop inferiority complex and most times lack self-esteem, and as such these affect their ability to form healthy relationships and develop requisite skill or competency for present and future endeavours. Pursuant to this, there is a need to ensure that effective and efficient strategical interventions are used to combat bullying. This paper finds that it is imperative to strengthen bullying strategic interventions and awareness in order to eradicate bullying in schools.

Keywords: anti-bullying strategies, conducive learning environment, undesirable effects, prohibition, learners.

Introduction

Bullying in schools has become a pervasive phenomenon that has undesirable effects on the broad school setting and it also violates the right of learners to learn without fear in a conducive environment (Kruger, 2011). Also, bullying can create deleterious lifetime consequences for learners who are bullied and the bullies themselves (Piskin, 2002). Learners who are bullied (victims) often display inferior commitment relating to scholastic activities and have social development and psychological wellbeing challenges (Pillay, 2007), while bullies have a high likelihood of developing personality disorders and ferocious attitudes (Ttofi and Farrington, 2011). Bullying behavior is also concomitant with increased possibilities of committing suicide, especially the victims (Guitierrez *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, there is a need to let bullies know that there would be negative consequences for any act of bullying in schools (Courtney-Pratt *et al.*, 2018). As such, it is important to develop and implement effective and efficient anti-bullying strategies to combat bullying (Gaffney, 2019).

Methodology

This paper utilised a literature review research approach by sourcing relevant documents that address issues relating to bullying at schools and strategical

interventions for combating bullying with the google scholar search engine. The information sourced was assessed for a clear understanding of bullying in schools and the adverse effects associated with it. The paper accentuates that there is a need for stakeholders to ensure that learning environments are devoid of acts of bullying. This is said against the backdrop that bullied learners are likely to lose self-confidence, feel inferior, and be unable to comprehend during pedagogy. Consequences literature was utilised to justify that perpetrators should be held accountable and at the same time, preventing and combating literature were used to justify proactive prevention of bullying and outright prohibiting.

Literature Review

It is noteworthy to look closely into the meaning of the word bullying before considering its effects on the system of education in schools. Piskin (2000) defines bullying in schools as a situation wherein a learner is repeatedly or over time subjected to undesirable conduct from one or more other learners. This undesirable conduct could be direct physical conduct such as pushing, pulling, or even hitting, or it could be direct verbal conduct, for example, insulting, hurtful names, and so on. Also, bullying can at times be in a form of indirect conduct, for example, spreading rumors and social. Piskin (2002) further asserts that bullying normally takes place in three different dimensions. In the first instance, it involves antagonistic behaviour or causing deliberate harm. In the other instance, it is executed frequently and over time. Lastly, it takes place within the interpersonal relationship environment characterized by an imbalance of power.

It is noteworthy to look into the impact bullying has on the social and educational life of learners. Of note, the risk factor for bullying may not be equal across learners' groups. Farmer *et al*/ emphasise that learners with physical impairments, that are obese or belong to a particular ethnic or sexual minority appear to be at a greater risk of being bullied by their peers (Farmer et al., 2012). Farmer et al., (2012) established that in most cases female learners, particularly those receiving special education due to their impairments are more likely to be bully-victims when compared with their peers without physical impairments. Also, learners that self-identify as gays, lesbians, bisexual or transgender are more likely to be bullied when compared with their peers (Espelage et al., 2015).

Hodges et al., (1997) submits that having protective friends moderates the association between the risk factors of being bullying. This means that learners who are shy and have low self-esteem have a higher possibility of being bullied if they have physically weak friends or if they are disliked by their peers when compared with those who have physically strong friends or are liked by their peers. It is important to highlight that bullying does not only affect the social and educational life of a learner, but it also has adverse health effects. Nakamoto and Schwartz (2009) opined that adolescents/learners who are bullied are likely to miss classes, avoid schooling, exhibits signs of poor school performance, be a loner, and have higher levels of anxiety and depression than their peers who are not victims of bullying.

In addition, the gravity of negative consequences of bully is associated with the severity and frequency of the bullying experience (Van der Plog et al., 2015). Klomek et al., (2015) assert that bullying behaviour affects both the victim and the perpetrator as bullying perpetrators are frequently shadowed by an increased risk of delinquency whereas the victims have an increased risk of a high level of depression. Moreover, Gini and Pozzol (2015) posit that bully-victims and bullies had a significantly higher risk of psychosomatic problems as opposed to those who are not involved in bullying activities.

Commonly, bullying victims tend to be anxious and insecure as opposed to other non-bullied learners. Bullying victims often experience an excessive amount of hostility. Ordinarily, the victims are to some extent less confident in themselves and less popular among their counterparts or schoolmates than they supposed (Yerger and Gehret, 2011). Moreover, Aluede et al., (2008) asset that the bullied victims are often likely to be suicidal as opposed to their non-bullied schoolmates. Fritz (2006) asserts that the long-term consequences of being bullied is that the victims often turn to experience severe psychological health issues such as depression or at times suicidal thoughts. Whereas Alikasifoglu et al., (2007) submits that, the bullies are more probable to engage in substances and activities such as smoking cigarettes and other toxic substances, consuming alcohol regularly, playing computer games and being sexually active. In addition, those who exhibit aggressive behaviours turn to have greater extents of high-risk personality. Moreover, victims are more likely to be from an inferior socioeconomic status and have difficulty making friends.

Benedict et al., (2015) argue that studies conducted in the subject matter have revealed that youths who bullied others tend to exhibit greater levels of delinquent behaviors, such as school absenteeism, use of alcohol and tobacco, while youths who are being bullied usually displays greater levels of nervousness, depression, loneliness, sadness and mental health issues. In contrast, however, Nansel et al., (2004) does not find increase school absenteeism among the bullies themselves but among the bullied learners. Instead, Nansel et al., (2004) denotes that learners who bully others are the one more likely to be involved in other behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco and other substances. Other studies indicate that suicidal thoughts are strongly linked to being bullied as opposed to bullying others (Klomek et al., 2010). Although there are some controversies in the literature around the relative associations of the different types of bullying behaviour with suicidal thoughts. Kim et al., (2009) is of the view that most literature support the view that victims of bullying are more likely to report suicidal ideation as opposed to perpetrators, whereas some literature argue that those who are both victims and perpetrators have the highest risk of having suicidal ideation.

The social setting of youth is swiftly shifting at the current moment. For this reason, the current paper submits that there is alarming increase in learners using social platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to bully other learners following the advent of the modern technology. With the popularity and easy access to numerous social platforms, learners have discovered another platform to carry out their bullying activities either than their common platforms such as classes, school surroundings and

community parks (Yerger and 2011). According to the National School Safety Centre, the advent of technology through social media has created the aptitude to quickly, resourcefully and at times anonymously convey absurd, insults, intimidations and exclusion through social networking (Coyl, 2009).

This paper also argues that bullying behaviour must be discouraged at all cost as it has a negative impact on the development of children at large. Coyl (2009) substantiates this by alluding that gradually, peers contribute immensely in shaping the social and emotional development of children, which include their educational and physical self-concepts. Coyl (2009) further allude that a child's social network inevitably influences them for the better or worse. Their social interaction is important as an individual and as a learner. Moreover, a child who lacks a health peer networking is in a greater possibility of developing and exhibiting antisocial behaviours, such as bullying (Coyl, 2009).

Bullying behavior in schools

According to Piskin (2002), bullying in schools remains a global problem with adverse consequences for the school environment and the right of learners to perform their learning activities in a safe environment without fear of being bullied or victimized. Bullying is a serious social challenge and can have adverse short and lifelong consequences for learners who bully others and those that are bullied (Olweus,1993). This study stresses that bullying usually ensues in or around school premises, with the outdoor play area being the most common location as learners are not constantly monitored in the play areas. Also, the corridors leading to the learners' respective classrooms are another common space where bullying is likely to ensue. At times, bullying also occurs inside the classrooms and outside the school premises. According to Boulton and Smith (1964), there are three groups of students affected by bullying behaviour namely, the victims, the bullies, and those who bully others and are also bullied themselves.

The Consequences of Bullying

Undoubtedly, bullying behaviour can have an antagonistic effect on the bullied learner and their educational life. Bullied learners are often nervous and fearful in the setting(s) in which bullying took place and in the company of the perpetrators. Hence, they are likely to respond with evasive actions which would have a negative impact on their academic activities. These evasive actions may include absenting themselves from school, avoiding some places at school, isolating themselves, and even becoming suicidal. At times, the bullied learners may even become aggressive and bring weapons to school to retaliate or defend themselves. Such conduct distracts them from their school activities, which consequently results in poor academic performance and sometimes even dropping out of school completely. In addition, victims can be severely affected by bullying to the extent that they become suicidal and refuse to go back to school or even develop chronic diseases such as depression.

These have consequences on the provision of quality education and as a result, precludes the appropriate exercise of the right to education. Undoubtedly, bullying is an impediment in realizing access to education and as such, it adversely affects the psychological, social, and educational development of learners.

Preventing Bullying at Schools

To prevent bullying behaviour at school, the school management must endeavour to enforce the existing anti-bullying rules and policies and also establish new ones when necessary. According to the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention 2012 (CJCPM), developing and imposing vibrant regulations to curb bullying will assist the schools' management to ensure that learners know and understand that bullying will not be tolerated in schools. This means that schools' code of conduct ought to be revised to incorporate the definition and types of bullying, the expected behaviours from learners and clearly stated penalties applicable to those found bullying (CJCPM, 2012).

Of note, anti-bullying policies, regulations, and codes of conduct have social and emotional impact on the entire school community. For this reason, it is important for all members of the school community including the learners, educators, administrators, non-academic staff and parents to be given a chance to contribute to the development of the anti-bullying policies, regulations, and codes of conduct by providing input and feedback. Moreover, schools ought to establish or reinforce institutions to organise school-based bullying prevention activities (CJCPM, 2012). Evidence indicates that bullying prevention/anti-bullying activities in schools work best if its representatives are from the schools and they are the ones coordinating the activities. Also, school safety committees ought to incorporate anti-bullying strategizing into their activities. The organizers of anti-bully activities in the schools must meet regularly for monitoring and evaluation of the activities and interventions. Members or organizers of these anti-bullying activities and committees must include educators and learners from different levels of study, non-academic staff, parents, and school governing bodies.

In addition, schools ought to provide frequent training on how to prevent bullying behaviour. As such, all members of the school community should receive proper information and training in bullying prevention and intervention (CJCPM, 2012). The purpose of the information and training is to assist the members of the school community to better understand the nature, reasons and consequences of bullying, and how to respond to bullying. This also means that there should be ongoing training for new and existing members of the school community to ensure that bullying behaviour is put in the spot-light and that preventative interventions are in line with the developments in anti-bullying practice.

Strategies to Combat Bullying in schools

To combat bullying at schools, it is imperative that victims report this malicious conduct to their caregivers and/ or educators. However, the victims often rebelliously

opt not to report the mischievous actions to either their caregivers or educators. For effective prevention of bullying in schools, this study submits that learners, educators and parents or caregivers of learners ought to acknowledge the existence of bullying behaviour and concede that it is a persistent problem and also implement school-based intervention programs. Furthermore, the school community including parents or caregivers of learners must be conversant with bullying behaviours and their effect on the educational system. The school community must uphold the conviction that this behaviour is malicious and therefore intolerable, and they must encourage learners to imminently report such conduct. Consequently, schools must develop relevant policies and implement appropriate programs such as anger management programs to decisively deal with anger and violence.

Conclusion

This paper highlights that bullying is a serious problem that has negative impacts on the social, psychological, and pedagogic development of the learners who are bullies and the bullied. Students who are victims of bullying often dislike their school life and evade attending classes which consequently results in poor academic performance and low self-esteem with short and long-term consequences. The impact of bullying does not only affect learners who are being bullied. Bullies are also negatively impacted and if left unattended often lead such learners to delinquent behaviours and may find themselves on the wrong side of the law at their early adulthood. Thus, all school personnel and parents of learners ought to stand against bullying collectively to lessen, if not totally eliminate bullying incidents in schools.

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