Bullying Among Junior High School Students: Effects on Health and Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

Bullying and victimization phenomena have serious effects on the wellbeing of individuals. Therefore, the study intends to help the students maintain a normal state of well-being and enhance academic performance as a reference for administrators to develop programs managing the challenges encountered through identification of demographic profile; forms of bullying; effects on health and academic performance; coping strategies and school management. Mixed method approach was employed. Quantitative data was gathered through survey questionnaire and qualitative data through FGD from advisers, parents and students and KII from the principal, guidance counselor and prefect of discipline which were analyzed to corroborate with the quantitative data. Periodical grades were analyzed and compared. Findings revealed that out of 260 students, 232 expressed experienced bullying at a younger age as young as 10 years old. More alarmingly, some students reported recently experienced though rarely. The most common form of bullying identified are verbal, covert and physical bullying. Cyberbullying as the least experienced. The investigation disclosed they sometimes experience the health effects of bullying that are generally a normal response to stress. However, manage to deal with the experience through the support of family and the school. Data showed that students' experience of bullying does not affect their academic performance. Nevertheless, data analysis revealed that victims of bullying eventually become bullies themselves.

Keywords — Bullying, Junior High School Students, Mix Method Research Design, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Bullying and victimization are widespread phenomena that can have a serious effect on the well-being of and individual most specially the growing children. Usually, these victims are bullies themselves. The observable effect of bullying has caused the students to manifest low self-esteem that leads to social isolation. At the same time school performance is also affected but defending on how a student copes.

Jansen, Verlinden, Berkel, Mieloo, Ende, Veenstra, & Tiemeier (2012) found out that children from families with a low socioeconomic background have an increased risk of this behavior that encompasses physical aggression, threats, teasing, and harassment. In any form, bullying is unacceptable antisocial behavior that can undermine the quality of the school environment, affect students' academic and social outcomes and even jeopardize the life of an individual. It can have harmful effects on childhood development and detrimental influences that can even stretch into adulthood, depending on how victims handle the trauma.

Furthermore, Arseneault (2017) study showed that higher rates of anxiety and panic attacks among victims of bullying, and such experiences are increasingly linked to mental health and behavioral problems later in life. Worldwide, several incidents had been reported to affect children and youth who even went to the extent of committing suicide. Although Anti-Bullying Act has put into law, still the magnitude of incidence is increasing.

Whatever environment the children are exposed to particularly the parents' important role in molding and/or rearing their children, they are vulnerable to adopt it. However, in spite of being bullied children or victims, they were able to cope and become successful in their life.

As members of the healthcare team, the researchers interest arouse thus the conceptualization of this paper in order to aid identify coping strategy to maintain normal state of well-being and enhance academic performance and aid in the development of a program which can help and/or assist a bully and victim student to manage the challenges he or she will encounter.

In the environment where we are currently employed, the incidence of bullying has been observed and shared by colleagues wherein the victims were tremendously affected.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed method approach. It took into consideration the research ethics whereby a consent was secured from the participant's parents as well as from the school administrator. Students' bullying experiences and coping strategies were determined using survey questionnaires. Purposive sampling was used in determining the student participants for the quantitative component of the study. These participants comprised of the 260 Grade 7 and Grade 8 students enrolled in Junior High School of Notre Dame University. NDU-JHS is a newly established junior high school that envisions to produce students of excellence and character despite its diverse populace in terms of socioeconomic status, cultural background, and faith.

The self-constructed instrument was subjected to pilot testing. The test for its reliability utilizing Cronbach's Alpha which has a minimum value of .700 yielded .861 which is interpreted to be highly reliable. Focus group discussion was conducted among selected parents, class advisers of student participants and students to further describe and validate the quantitative data gathered through an in-depth analysis of the effects of bullying to the health and academic performance of the participants. Key informant interviews were also done to the

school principal, guidance counselor and prefect of discipline.

The collected data were treated using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from FGD and KII were subjected to in depth-analysis to extract themes and patterns. Qualitative data was used to validate and expound the quantitative data gathered. The coping strategies identified focused more on health effects rather than academic performance. Furthermore, a review of secondary data was compared and examined with the use of T-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The incidence of bullying in schools is increasing. Although students rarely experienced bullying, the high number of students who experience it is alarming as they experienced it as young as ten years old. In contrast with the study of Lister, Merrill, Vance, West, Hall, and Crookston (2015) as cited by Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) that bullying by peers was negatively related to age. The incident of bullying at the research site is increasing. NDU-JHS has drawn up programs such as organizing a committee to address bullying among students. Parent representatives are part of the committee.

The participants experienced different forms of bullying with verbal and covert bullying being the most commonly experienced. Students are physiologically and socially affected by bullying manifested by their tendency to work alone and their low self-esteem. In contrast with the study of Yang & Salmivalli (2013) where in the bully-victims are the perpetrators and targets of verbal, physical, indirect and cyber bullying. Moreover, they perpetrated significantly more physical and verbal bullying. Students cope by crying and fighting back eventually making those bullies as well. Their academic performance is not severely affected although their first and second grading grades were extremely high and low. The extreme range of their grades could not be attributed to their bullying experiences alone.

The parents and the student participants verbalized that they frequently experienced bullying in school especially before the seminar and orientation on bullying. According to them, most of the bullies are their classmates, oftentimes their schoolmates and even their teachers. They experience bullying from their siblings and parents less often. In contrast with the parents' and students' views, the class advisers, guidance counselor, prefect of discipline and principal verbalized that students seldom experience bullying even before the seminar and orientation. The seminar and orientation on bullying did not only awaken the students' awareness of the forms of bullying and how to avoid being bullied.

Teachers were also taught on how to apprehend bullying inside the classroom.

According to the students, most bullies are the intelligent ones because they see themselves as superior, overly self- confident and do not want to stoop down to the level of the slow ones. Others are bullies because of envy, jealousy, insecurity. Those who get easily annoyed also have the tendency to bully others. Students, teacher's , advisers and guidance counselor verbalized that bullies had bullying experience either at home or outside their home and are influenced by bullying in the social media. As a result of these experiences, they also bully others.

Data from the focus group discussions described the features of students who are mostly bullied. These features include being slim or thin, fat or obese, dark-skinned, a slow or low performer in class, those with a physical disability, low self – esteem and lack of self- confidence, those who refuse to counterattack the bully because of fear and those who cannot pronounce words correctly.

The most common forms of bullying identified are covert and verbal bullying. Although there are some, who verbalized to have experienced physical and cyberbullying. Physical bullying is common among boys while verbal bullying is common among girls. However, there are others who reported that they experienced verbal bullying from boys. Bullies usually attack during break time or when teachers are not around. These results are similar to the study of Seo, Jung, Kim & Bahk (2017) that boys are more likely to experience physical victimization whereas girls are more likely to be targets of indirect bullying.

Students' coping strategies to counter bullying varies and is mainly dependent on how they perceived the act. There are students who took their experience of being bullied as a challenge. These students use the experience as a motivation to strive hard and prove the bullies wrong, thus quite inconsistent with the study of Seo, Jung, Kim, and Bahk (2017) that lower academic achievement was associated with victimization. Moreover, the students unanimously said that they retaliate and fight back the bullies by shouting and punching back. Other forms of responses to bullying are crying, hiding, avoiding the bully, preferring to work on their own and reporting to their grandparents, teachers, and friends. Interestingly, they do not report their experience of being bullied to their parents because of fear that their parents might confront the bully.

One parent and one student shared that they also bully their younger siblings. This claim is agreed upon by Menesini, Camodeca, Nocenteni (2010) that sibling bullying and sibling victimization were associated with bullying and victimization at school. Some participants believed in "karma" and just kept

quiet hoping that they would be avenged by fate. Other participants shared that they bravely talk and confront bullies.

In order to address the incidence of bullying the school administrators conducted a seminar on anti-bullying at all levels of the junior high school. A resource speaker was invited to facilitate the orientation and discussion among students and teachers the different forms of bullying and tips on how to handle bullying cases inside the classroom. According to Schultes, Stefanek, van de Shoot, Strohmeier, & Spiel (2014) school bullying requires that educators use strategies and approaches available to them when such situations occur.

However, the key informants verbalized that the school does not have programs in place yet to address bullying. Instead, they are strengthening the Child Protection Program (CPP) of the CHED, a program that caters to the needs of students who are either bullies or victims of bullying. CCP personnel examine and handle cases of bullying. Despite the absence of a regular program to arrest bullying, the administrators make sure that it is properly addressed. Most of the time, the class advisers resolve the case within the classroom. When the act becomes recurrent, the bully is brought to the prefect of discipline. When the student continues the aggression, s/he is recommended for counseling because bullying is considered as a behavioral problem, thus requires counseling.

The school administrators want to change students' distorted notion that if they are asked to report to the guidance counselor, they will be subjected to punitive disciplinary actions. Matters of resolved bullying cases are documented and communicated to students. Parents of identified chronic bullies are also informed.

School administrators talk to parents separately to avoid violent confrontations. However, if both parties agree to meet, then the case is settled amicably between them. Part of the dialogue with parents is requesting them to sign an agreement that the case should not be discussed outside the school premise. They are also asked to sign a waiver stating that if something happens to their child outside the school campus, the school will not be held liable.

NDU-JHS administrators admit that there is really a struggle on their part on how to properly handle bullying cases since most of the teachers have less teaching experiences. On the other hand, informants are also aware that some bullying cases are not documented for reasons that victims keep the incident to themselves for fear of retaliation.

The incidence of bullying in schools is increasing. Although bullying is rarely experienced, the high number of students who experience it is alarming.

This could be attributed to the modeled behavior of the parents or significant persons during the students' growing up years. This scenario is generally observable in every secondary school's as part of the growing up years of the adolescent especially the school populace is diverse. Moreover, the students in this study are mostly the eldest child among a mean brood of three and whose parents are mostly married and with extremely low monthly earnings. The result is congruent with the findings of Seo, Jung, Kim, and Bahk (2017) that significantly families with a lower socio-economic status seems to be correlated with bullying victimization.

With the current technological expansion, adolescents live a different lifestyle. They are computer and/or gadget literate making them more vulnerable to give in to the pressure of having the latest gadget or else they are labeled as outsiders, unable to conform to their peers' social status. A status akin to that of an outcast makes them more susceptible to bullying.

Bullying experiences differ from one student to another. The most common forms of bullying that students experience are verbal and covert bullying. As expressed, participants experienced being called by names such as "idiot," or bawled with bad words, insulted, judged, criticized, teased and played with nasty jokes to their embarrassment and humiliation. The fact that most of the student participants are female tends to explain the greater frequency of the preceding verbal and covert forms of bullying. The male participants were more engaged in physical form such as pushing, hitting or kicking. According to Wang, Lanotti, and Luk (2012), boys' bullying is more physical, whereas girls tend to bully psychologically such as by spreading rumors.

The least experienced form of bullying is cyberbullying. Student participants reported that they were sent negative messages via email or being bashed in social media. This could be attributed to their awareness of the existing anti-cyberbullying law especially so that the school, in collaboration with the University Guidance and Testing Center conducted an orientation on bullying. One of six of the students of NDU-JHS said they had been a target of cyberbullying within the past 12 months and girls were more than twice more likely to be targeted than boys (Rivara, & Le Menestrel 2016). The outcome of the focus group discussion with the class advisers, parents and students validated the responses of the participants that they encountered verbal and covert bullying more frequently compared to physical and cyberbullying. They added that the experience usually occurred during break-times, inside the classroom and when teachers transfer from one room to another for their succeeding classes.

Physical	f	Verbal	f	Covert	f	Cyber	f
Pushed	73	Called by name e.g. ugly	131	Played w/ nasty jokes to be humiliated	81	Sent w/ mean text messages	23
Pinched	61	Thrown w/ bad words	120	Mimicked	67	Made fun of by edited photos	21
Punched	52	Insulted	107	Gestured w/ negative facial & physical expression	51	Posted w/ humiliating comments	18
Kicked	47	Teased	106	Made fun in front of many people	51	Bashed in social network	14
Hit	46	Criticized/ judged	105	Accused of things I never known	48	Sent w/ negative rumors thru email	9
Locked in the room	45	Asked to give food	42	Looked contemptuously	45	Sent w/ embarrassing videos on social networks	6
Bumped	45	Threatened	29	Intimidated	30		
Boxed	36	Forced to give money	25	Spread w/ bad rumors	25		
Harassed	28			Target of speculations	25		
Elbowed	29						
Bitten	6						
Poured w/ water	1						

The bullying experiences of students have slightly affected their health. There were no indications of their being at risk of depression or of committing suicide. However, this area was not examined in-depth. Their physical responses to the bullying experience are classified as a normal form of stress such as fast heartbeat, getting cold moist hands and feet and rapid breathing. According to Hans Selye's General Adaptation to Stress, a person's response to stress is either to fight or flight. Similarly, students' experience of bullying produces physiologically response to the stimuli. Over time, this reaction can weaken the immune system and may cause a variety of health problems such as dizziness, headaches, stomach upset and physical injuries (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

Physical Health		SD	Description
I experienced			
1. Fast heartbeat.	1.58	.739	Often Experienced
2. Rapid breathing.	1.39	.745	Sometimes Experienced
3. Cold moist perspiration.	1.27	.788	Sometimes Experienced
4. Cold moist hands and feet.	1.49	.841	Sometimes Experienced
5. having black eye/s.	0.97	.721	Sometimes Experienced
$\ensuremath{6}.$ Bruising or having a scratch or scratches on my skin.	1.30	.806	Sometimes Experienced
7. Loss of appetite to eat or drink.	1.38	.774	Sometimes Experienced
8. Pain on the affected area.	1.32	.817	Sometimes Experienced
9. Having cut or wound.	1.18	.740	Sometimes Experienced
Weighted Mean	1.32		Sometimes Experienced

Experience of bullying affects the psycho-emotional health status of students. Indicators of this include the development of low self- esteem and the anxiety on the presence or perceived danger in their environment. Consequently, their social health is also affected as manifested by their preference to work alone, being forced to obey when asked to do good or bad things and not trusting anyone. Likewise, the study of Rivara (2016) generated that bullying has a big mental and emotional impact, bullied feel unaccepted, isolated, angry, and withdrawn. One parent shared that her daughter bullies her younger siblings at home supporting the qualitative data result that students tend to fight back due to the experience.

Psycho-emotional Health	Mean	SD	Description
I experienced			
1. An unpleasant feeling caused by anticipation /awareness of danger.	1.37	.811	Sometimes Experienced
2. becoming angry.	1.82	.859	Often Experienced
3. loss of interest to participate in any activities.	1.33	.718	Sometimes Experienced
4. being submissive/giving in to the control of others.	1.24	.800	Sometimes Experienced
5. Sudden overpowering fright.	1.26	.819	Sometimes Experienced
6. An abnormal, uneasiness & overwhelming fear.	1.20	.806	Sometimes Experienced
7. Being irritable/easily gets impatient.	1.39	.856	Sometimes Experienced
8. Trauma resulting from mental or emotional stress/physical activity.	1.16	.774	Sometimes Experienced
9. indifference/showing little or no feeling & concern.	1.32	.801	Sometimes Experienced
10. being low in spirit or sadness.	1.37	.773	Sometimes Experienced
Weighted mean	1.35		Sometimes Experienced

The Movement against Bullying reported that during the teen years, adolescent craves for dependence and do not want assistance. They, therefore, attempt to deal with their problems on their own because their coping skills are not developed enough to deal with complicated situations such as bullying. As a result, they begin to internalize the problem and develop a sense of helplessness. This is the reason why they cry, hide, avoid the bully and would prefer to work on their own. Some of them report to authorities except their parents because of fear that their parents might confront the bully. On the other hand, there are students who took their bullying experience as a challenge. It motivated them to strive hard, to prove the bullies wrong and show them otherwise, (Ju and Lee (2019). Furthermore, according to Seo, Jung, Kim, and Bahk (2017), a perceived poor relationship with parents was related to bullying thus a warm and positive parent-child relationship is associated with both emotional and behavioral resilience which might reduce the risk of being bullied or lead to an effective response to victimization.

Student unanimously said that they retaliate or confront the bullies by shouting and punching back. Some believe in "karma" and just kept quiet when bullied. These students rely on fate to avenge for them. Other participants bravely talked back and confronted the bullies. Still, others become angry to the aggressors or even to themselves especially when they feel that they cannot do anything. This is one limitation of the study where in-depth qualitative data could have supported this claim in the form of a case study.

Psycho-emotional Health	Mean	SD	Description
1. Preferred being alone.		.793	Sometimes Experienced
2. Experienced withdrawing myself from others.		.883	Sometimes Experienced
3. Experienced of not trusting anyone.		.811	Sometimes Experienced
4. Prefer to work on my own.		.875	Often Experienced
5. Isolate myself.		.779	Sometimes Experienced
6. Bully others especially those smaller than me.		.792	Sometimes Experienced
7. Become independent.		.879	Sometimes Experienced
8. Easily influence by my classmates to harm others.		.815	Sometimes Experienced
9. Obedient when ask to do good/bad things.	1.46	.840	Sometimes Experienced
10. A trouble maker.		.737	Sometimes Experienced
11. Feel I am a disgrace to my parents.		.827	Sometimes Experienced
Weighted mean	1.31		Sometimes Experienced

Thus, the Philippine government has enacted into law the Anti-Bullying Act known as Republic Act 10627 of 2012. The Anti-Bullying Act mandates the school administrators to institute measure to manage and prevent bullying in schools. Collaboration with individual parents and parent associations are encouraged to help respond to the issue of bullying. For NDU-JHS, the school has organized a bullying committee headed by the principal with the guidance counselor and prefect of discipline members. The advisers are considered as first level managers to address bullying incidents within the classrooms. It is important to note that the class advisers expressed that they need training in handling bullying cases.

CONCLUSIONS

The grades 7 & 8 high school students of JHS-NDU rarely experienced bullying as early as 10 years old. The commonly experienced forms are verbal bullying among grade 7 paralleled to covert bullying for grade 8 students and its effect on their health are the commonly normal response to stress. Typically, they tend to isolate themselves by working alone and becoming a bully themselves. However, they manage to deal with the tremendous experience due to the family and school support; thus their academic performance is not much affected though extremely high and low.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcome of the study, the following are recommended, (1) Advisers and teachers to undergo training on handling bullies and victims. (2) A more visible process flow on how to manage to bully based on the antibullying act which will be posted and disseminated to students, parents and other stakeholders including documentation. (3) Guidance counselor enrichment skill to manage to bully. (4) Program formulation to prevent and address bullying in school and clearly stipulated in the students' handbook. (5) In depth study or case study of the bullied and bully students for better understanding of the student; thus, appropriate measures can be instituted to help the students manage the bullying experience.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The outcome of the study could be explained and translated through a journal article for international publications, newspapers, social media, brochures

and leaflets and other means of information dissemination that will be made available for the end users (nurses, school administrators, teaching personnel, nursing academic administrators, learners). Moreover, the findings of the study will help the school administrators and policy makers (Government agencies e.g. Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education and other agencies) in the attainment of its goal as well as mapping out strategies in formulating policies that will aid in the holistic development of the learners by providing a healthy environment in school or at home. Additionally, this will create a meaningful learning experience that will result to the production of graduates who are equip with competence, value-laden and stable emotional quotient. As such, these graduates will be able to navigate in their chosen profession nationally and internationally.

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