

# Bullying in a Public Elementary School of Countryside Philippines

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**Abstract:** The study presents the kinds of bullying experienced by students of a rural elementary school as well as the effects noticed by teachers and their parents. A total of 55 bullying victims, bully-victims, bullies, their parents, teachers, and friends were the participants of this study. Data gathered through FGD and face to face interviews. Results of the study showed that bullying in the rural communities is similar to those in the urban areas except the absence of cyberbullying. Most of what the pupil experience is under the category of verbal bullying and fewer cases of physical bullying. The relational type was also observed. Little has been done to manage effects of bullying or to minimize it. The school has no trained personnel to handle such issue and is left to the management of the teacher who is also unqualified to treat the problem specifically the serious cases of bullying. There is no psychologist or guidance counselor in the school. Except to few parents, many do not see it as a major issue and find it normal as the child grows. Effects include the reluctance of the bullied student to go to school or becoming a bully themselves to protect them or prevent others from bullying him.

**Keywords:** verbal abuse, physical abuse, rural, Samar, Philippines

## **1. Introduction**

The effects of bullying especially to the fragile state of children cannot be ignored. Victims of bully including bully-victims (those victims who also bullies others) are at increased risk of poor health, wealth, and social relationships outcomes in adulthood (Wolke et al., 2013). Students who are victims of bullying and bully themselves have experienced reduced life satisfaction and support from peers and teachers compared to those who are by standers (Flaspohler et al., 2009). Other effects include depression and suicidal ideation of bullied boys and girls (van der Wal, 2003). Bullying is not a new phenomenon, it is a well-studied social issue, but it is still prevalent to date. It is estimated that 246 million children and adolescents experience school violence and

bullying (UNESCO, 2017). In a study of Glew et al. (2000), around 17% in Australia, 19% in England, 15% in Japan, 14% in Norway, 17% in Spain and 16% in the USA. The prevalence of bullying appears to be high at age 7 and ages 10 to 12 (Glew et al., 2000; Nansel, 2001) with boys as the more likely perpetrators and victim than girls.

Bullying is a form of aggression, a kind of violence to which children are exposed where the bully exhibits aggressive behavior intended to cause distress to the less dominant individual, the victim in various forms to include verbal or electronic expression, physical act or gesture or any combination thereof. (Congress of the Philippines, 2013; Smith & Thompson 1991; Farrington, 1993). RA 10627 or the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 enumerated

bullying as any but not limited to the following;

*a. Any unwanted physical contact between the bully and the victim like punching, pushing, shoving, kicking, slapping, tickling, headlocks, inflicting school pranks, teasing, fighting and the use of available objects as weapons;*

*b. Any act that causes damage to a victim's psyche and/or emotional well-being;*

*c. Any slanderous statement or accusation that causes the victim undue emotional distress like directing foul language or profanity at the target, name-calling, tormenting and commenting negatively on victim's looks, clothes and body; and*

*d. Cyber-bullying or any bullying is done through the use of technology or any electronic means.*

School violence is not confined to urban schools; it is also prevalent in sub urban schools. In the Philippines, about 7 and 8 out of 10 students in the Elementary and Secondary respectively have experienced verbal abuse from their peers in urban areas while it's only 3 and 4 out of every ten respectively in the rural areas (Plan Philippines, 2009). For School-Year 2012-2013, the Department of Education (DepEd) listed a total of 1165 cases of bullying and 291 child abuse cases for the entire country. In the DepEd report, the National Capital Region reported the most number of cases while other regions have

less than 10 cases. In the study of Wong and Wong (2017) showed that bullying happens more than once to 7 out of 10 pupils in one school of Romblon which contradicts the report of DepEd. This suggests that many schools in the country do not report the many cases of bullying in their campuses despite the directives issued by the RA 10627 and the directives of DepEd (2012).

Bullying characteristics and frequency are different in rural and urban setting according to the study of Mazur et al. (2017). They presented that bullying is associated with the type of community. They discovered that the dominating influence of delinquent behavior is visible only in big cities while smaller towns and rural areas are quite different. Smaller communities tend to have stronger social bonds resulting into a reduced level of bullying in their schools. Is this similar to a rural community in Samar Philippines?

## **2. Objective**

The study aims to investigate the kinds of bullying in a rural elementary school and document the observed effects in the bullied pupils.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The study is qualitative research using focus group discussion and face to face interview with identified students.

### **3.2 Participant Identification**

The six (6) teachers of a remote rural elementary school were invited to a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) together with three (3) pupils to gather preliminary information about bullying in the campus.

Through the FGD, about 28 pupils were identified to probably have experienced bullying. About 13 boys and 15 girls aging 10 to 14 years are mostly coming from the intermediate grade levels. To substantiate and validate whatever information is gathered from them, additional interview was made from their parents and friends.

### 3.3 Data Gathering Procedure

Before the face to face interview, consent later was sought from the parents. The FGD used audio recording with the knowledge of the participants to make the discussion more fluid without the distractions in taking notes. All discussions were done in the vernacular. The other interview conducted was to follow-up or validate the responses of the 28 identified bullied pupils. In totality, there were 55 participants in the study.

### 3.3 Data Security

Recordings were destroyed after the research data were transcribed. Names were secured and were never revealed in the transcribed report. Names used are pseudo names only.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Most of the pupils at the start of the data gathering are unaware what is bullying. When they were given examples that were the time they were able to express their experiences.

Shetgiri (2013) cited physical bullying and verbal bullying as direct forms and relational bullying as an indirect mode. Physical bullying may include hitting, pushing, kicking, chocking, forcefully taking something from the victim. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, threatening,

taunting, malicious teasing, psychological intimidation using words and the like. Stealing, destroying things of others and making faces or offensive actions are other forms of bullying (Ferguson et al., 2007). The relational type of bullying includes gossiping, slandering, sabotage, and convincing peers to exclude victims.

### 4.1 Types of Bullying

Bullying in the countryside is quite similar to that in the urban areas or cities. There is a variety of bullying as cited by Shetgiri (2013) except for the cyberbullying because pupils in the sampled school have no internet connection, almost all have not even had access to it.

During focus group discussions and interviews, it was described that bullying includes different actions such as spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally and excluding someone from a group on purpose. Verbal bullying is one kind of bullying experienced by the pupils. The result shows that 17 pupils experience being called mean names in a hurtful way and are being teased cruelly by their classmates.

*"...Gadlaw an ira permi gin tatawag akun..." said Boy 1. (Grade 6 pupil).*

*"They never call me with my name. Instead, they always call me Barotel. I don't know what they mean by Barotel" (Boy 2, grade 5 pupil).*

Bullying also appears to be relational. It involves hurting someone's reputation or social relationships. The result shows that there were four pupils who experience being left out of the group of

their classmates and is being shoved around by other pupils.

*“They always tease me because of my hair that’s why they never enclose me in their group.” (Girl 1, grade 4 pupil).*

*“They always laugh at me every time I attempt to participate in class discussions. I do not know why they are doing that to me. It insulted me”. (Boy 2, Grade 6 Pupil).*

Bullying seems to involve hurting a person’s body. About seven (7) pupils responded that they are being hit, kicked and pushed by other pupils. Most of them feel they were subject to such bully because they are relatively weaker or smaller than the bully themselves.

*“Even if I am not doing anything, He would just hit my head.” (Girl 2, grade 5 Pupil).*

*“He thinks he is good in karate and he would just simply kick me or my other classmates.” (Boy 3, grade 5 pupil).*

#### 4.2 Reasons for Bullying

UNECEF (2017) summarized drivers of school violence including bullying. The global report identified six drivers namely; disability, gender, poverty or social status, ethnic/linguistic/cultural differences; physical appearance and gender identity or sexual orientation.

Pupils in the countryside are subjected to bullies if their family does not belong to the norms of the community if they are perceived to be weak or look

different. Being poor for example may result in the student looking not too presentable because of his/her old or loose hand-over clothes and others.

*“I am poor, so they make fun of how I look, I use hand-over clothes, I have few new clothes” (Boy 4, grade 5 pupil)*

*“I have few friends; I find it hard to mingle, I am ashamed of them. They make fun of me”. (Girl 1, grade 4 pupil).*

Bully victims are created by unstable households (Wilson, 2014). Parents who create unstable homes are fostering victimhood in their children. Narcissism, alcoholism, neglect, abuse, divorce, and heated arguments can lead to an unsound environment for a kid. Kids in this kind of environment could not develop the needed self-confidence necessary to protect themselves (ibid).

*“I am bullied because they perceive that I cannot defend myself and that I am weak.” (Boy 3, grade 5 pupil).*

Bullies are often created due to problems in their homes such as family breakups, quarrels, fighting and physical abuse between parents, poverty and vices (Nor, 2016).

*I have a broken family that’s why they bully me. (Boy 5, grade 5 pupil).*

Violence in the hands of other children and young people at school is more common than those perpetrated by adults (UP Manila et al., 2016). The same report suggests that

there is indication of the importance of the home-school link, and that parenting approaches may impact on children's behaviour, even in school settings.

Children's previous experiences of violence, especially in the home, also drive bullying behaviour in schools (ibid). Many bullies come from homes where there are harsh discipline and a lack of warmth (Schwarz, 2006; Olweus, 1991) or families where there is low cohesion among members of the family and believing that their siblings as being powerful (Bowers, 1994).

*"I am aggressive that sometimes I get bullied." (Boy 6, Grade 4 pupil)*

Teasing a friend may or may qualify as bullying. There are however cases that making fun, teasing or ragging a friend does not mean that the "bullies" do not like you, in fact, it is usually the opposite (Scotti, 2016). According to Peter Gray, the idea of teasing helps reinforce friendship by poking fun at one's flaws as a way of showing someone is a close friend.

*"I have many groups of friends that sometimes they bully me." (Girl 2, Grade 5 pupil)*

*"I do not know why I am bullied." (Girl 3, grade 6 pupil).*

There are also bully-victims in the countryside. They are victims of bullying who bully others. Bully-victims tend to have more psychological problems than either pure bullies or pure victims (Dewar, 2017). Compared with pure bullies, bully-victims may be more anxious, depressed, lonely, high-strung and impulsive. They are more likely to engage in more frequent acts of

bullying than pure bullies are (Kochel et al., 2015).

*"I see bullying as a good action so that others will be scared of me." (Boy 7, grade 5 pupil).*

Students who stated that they bully others have high level of bully personality, family dysfunction and low level of avoidance of bullying including family and teacher support (Eşkisü, 2014). On the other hand, students who stated they are bullied have similar but one section of family dysfunction specifically on behaviour control.

#### 4.3 Frequency of bullying

There is a clear indication that the pupil - respondents experience bullying. When asked "How often you have been bullied?" All of the respondents stated that they are bullied by their classmates in the school almost regularly. They also said that they experience bullying in and outside of the school with their classmates and/or peers.

*"Every recess, I am being bullied by my classmates." (Boy 8, grade 5 pupil).*

*"I am being bullied every time I recite during class discussions." (Girl 1, grade 4 pupil).*

*"They bully me when I play in the school playground." (Girl 4, grade 6 pupil)*

Friends teasing or making fun a friend is not anymore an act of loving or friendship when the subject finds the act as malicious or annoying (Dell Antonia, 2012).

#### 4.4 Effects of bullying

Bullying can affect everyone – those who are bullied and those who bully. It is linked to many negative outcomes. There are different effects towards children.

Majority of the pupil responded that they became more reluctant to go to school or doesn't want to go to the school that leads to miss, skips or drops out of school. They lose interest in the activities they used to enjoy in school.

*“I am always having fun being with other children in the community unlike with my classmates that is why I sometimes skip classes.” (Girl 1, grade 4 pupil)*

Their academic achievement also decreased. Their self – confidence lessens. Some of the respondents also said that they are greatly affected that they always get into fights with others pupils. Sometimes they can be far more hidden like the pupil became more often alone.

*“I just exclude myself from friendship group at school.” (Boy 9, Grade 5 pupil)*

Most of the respondents believe that no one should have to put up with bullying. They believe that the school authorities lack measures to prevent the bullying acts in school. They also suggest that students involved in bullying should face counseling and other penalties. They also believe that teachers should provide a positive and non – violent discipline in the classroom for them to feel safe at school.

Teasing and bullying were found to have association to drop out rates in the high school (Dewey et al., 2013). The prevalence

of peer victimization is an important factor in the academic performance of students (ibid).

#### 4.5 Interventions from Teachers and Parents

The teachers interviewed reveals that the interventions they have provided are not sufficient and could not address the psychological help the bullied pupils and the bully themselves need.

*“I have seen a pupil bullied by his classmates, what I did was just call the attention of the bully and the bullied pupil. To the bully I tried knowing the reason; however, I feel I am not capable of resolving it. All I could do is to lecture the child about how wrong his actions were. However, my actions have a little impact on him.” (Teacher 1).*

Some of the interviewed parents have expressed concern about his child who has experienced bullying. The parent was worrying as his child is no longer interested in going to school.

*“One time I saw my child outside of the campus. In my thinking he was cutting classes, I spanked him for doing such. He never told me the reason at first. Many times my child does not want to go to school, sometimes I forced him and only to find out he did not go to school. I found out later the reason, and that is because of bullying.” (Parent 1).*

*“I tried calling the attention of the parents of the bully and*

*asked them to discipline their child or else I will report them to the police. The threat somewhat stopped the bully pupil from bullying my child” (Parent 2)*

Bullying needs special attention and schools need to have their psychologists or guidance counselors to handle these sensitive situations. Teachers have limited skills in handling these psychological issues.

Some parents also consider the issue as not alarming. They said except when their kids are physically bullied that they react. If the bullying is slight, to them it is normal. They said that these things are part of being a child and will eventually grow out of it (O’ Moore, 2014).

*“It is part of my child growing up the stage, name-calling, teasing, are childish things, they will grow-out of it.”(Parent 3)*

*“Just don’t hit my child, I will be okay.” (Parent 4)*

*"Maybe I will react when my child is already severely affected. I always tell my daughter just to go on and ignore them; they just envy you. My child's bully is not affecting her; she is still okay, in fact she still performs well in school" (Parent 4)*

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Pupils in the rural elementary schools also experience similar bullying categories to those in the urban setting. There are physical, verbal and relational

forms of bullying and no cyberbullying as the facility is not yet accessible in the study area. Causes of bullying are associated with their family status, perceived of being weak or looking differently. Projecting to be bully or becoming a bully themselves are coping mechanisms used by some of the bullied. Most bullied pupils performance in school are affected, some would have issues coming regularly to school to avoid being bullied.

There is little professional support the students who are subject to bullies get as most countryside schools lack or has no counselors. There is a need to capacitate classroom teachers to handle bullying issues professionally.

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