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## Effective Interventions for Managing the Effects of Bullying Behaviour on a Child's Development

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### **Abstract**

*This article addresses the prevalence of bullying behaviour, in our daily transactions and its impact on the development of the individual child. The paper provided definitions of the term bullying, and explained with clarity the forms of bullying behaviour covering physical, verbal, emotional and sexual respectively. The social context of bullying and its underlying causes which includes home; institutional, environmental, peer influence and socio-cultural determinants were discussed. The paper has also analyzed the consequences of bullying acts on a child's development with specific reference to psychological, educational, emotional, sociological and medical effects. Finally, strategies to be educating bullying such as development of school rules against bullying, teaching to increase social awareness and behaviour management system etc. alongside with recommendations were offered for maximum realization of smooth child socialization.*

**Key Words:** Effective Interventions, Managing, Effects, Bullying Behaviour and Child Development

It is a sad fact that humans do not always treat each other well. People have stereotypes and prejudices that can lead them to commit brutal acts, and discriminate against members of various groups; or treat them with less respect. Social acceptance is a very important and necessary element for children and young people to achieve steady growth and smooth development. Hence, secured and closed contact, friendship and causal relationships provide youngsters with rudimentary support within which they can establish themselves as individuals and to be identified as part of a social system. Thus, our ill-attitudes toward group members as a whole, and more specifically, to children can influence our everyday behavior and later personality development.

Developmentally, children begin to form a bond with family members as from two years, and establish friendship with other children outside the family group from three years (Grave, 2019, Santrock, 2005 & Sharp & Cowie, 1998). They also begin to feel the pain and distress of social isolation respectively (King, 2016 & Roygor, 2005). Bullying behaviour at homes, in schools, and at places of social gathering disrupt and

threaten friendly environment which affect children's sustainable development (Cowie, Boulton & Smith, 2017; Ansell, 2016 & Regoli & Hewitt, 2003). Therefore, bullying behaviour has made children victims of a wide range of non-fatal offences in our domains, including threats, injuries, exposure to hate words, physical assaults, and feeling of rejection and victimization of all kinds which create psychological discomforts and maladjustment among them; hence the need to analyse further its effects in this paper.

### **Definition of Bullying Behaviour**

Cohen and Strong (2020) viewed bullying as a deliberate attempt to hurt a person (physically or verbally). Rose, Joe, Shields, and Caldwell (2014) described bullying as any assault or injury on a person. Santrock (2005) defines bullying as a verbal or physical behaviour intended to disturb someone less powerful. According to Sharp and Cowie {2003}, bullying behaviour has been ascribed three key definitions:

- It is a type of aggressive behaviour.
- It involves a systematic abuse of power.
- It occurs over a prolonged period of time.

Similarly, Regoli and Hewitt (2003) defined bullying as negative acts carried out against other people (especially children) repeatedly over time. Bullying from this content therefore, refers to a behaviour that intentionally harms other people by inflicting pain or injury on them. Bullying is a form of aggression where behaviour is directed at a person or object by way of causing injury to that object or person.

### **Forms of Bullying Behaviour**

The nature and patterns of bullying behaviours vary from one place to another and from one person to the other. Ultimately, bullying can be physical, verbal or psychologically, and it can occur between two people, or take place within large groups. Thus, Graven (2019), Garmy, Vilhjalmsson, and Kristjansdottir (2018), Regoli and Hewitt (2003) and Olweus (1993) have identified four types of bullying as follows:

- 1. Physical Bullying:** This involves hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, slapping, bodily hurt, and taking personal belongings or destructions to properties.
- 2. Verbal Bullying:** This includes taunting, malicious teasing, nasty names and making threats and assaults.
- 3. Emotional Bullying:** This comprises of spreading of rumors, manipulating social relationships, or engaging in social exclusion, extortion and intimidation.
- 4. Sexual Bullying:** This covers sexual harassment and assaults and engagement in actual sexual abuse and rapping.

The above forms of bullying behaviours collectively sum up the meaning and definition of bullying by Dan Olweus (1993), and Ahmad et.al., (1991) in Sharp & Cowie (1998) as:

*When a child or group of children say nasty or unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, or when no-one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is*

*difficult for the child being bullied to defend himself. It is also bullying when a child is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. It is not bullying when two children of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel (p.98).*

It is remarkable to note that the categories of bullying behaviours explained in the foregoing are clearly distinguished from other pains or injuries as accident, medical treatment or perhaps, some other forms of disciplinary measures that are interpreted within socio-cultural contexts.

### **The Social Contexts of Bullying Behaviour and its Underlying Causes**

Bullying behaviour has been linked up to the social environments around us. This comprises all the factors in the society: both positive and negative; that impact on individuals. Hence, the contextual nature of bullying can be considered in terms of home activities, school neighbourhoods, peer and cultural influences, mass media, personal experiences and lot of others. According to views of Garmy, Vilhjalmsson, and Kristjansdottir (2018), Regoli, Hewitt, DeLisi (2016), Adeyanju and Salamon (2014), Baji (2010), Defrain and Olson (2006), Sharp and Cowie (1998), Regoli and Hewitt (2003), social contexts contribute to the likelihood of bullying taking place in the following ways:

- 1. Unresponsive parenting:** Parenting style that is intrusive, demanding, and unresponsive produce children who are aggressive and notorious. Parent-child relationships characterized by intense emotion were linked to higher levels of peer victimization, and promote self-doubts and worries among children (Ibrahim, 2015 & Santrock, 2005).
- 2. School environment and organization:** It is justifiable to be concerned about the impact of schools on children development. The nature of school environment and its organizational structures socialize youngsters by way of setting rules and standards that define and limit their behaviour, feelings and attitudes. School, which are socially disadvantaged in terms of poor administration (autocratic or rejecting), poor profile of anti-bullying policies, poor school-students' relationships and poor social security are more likely to experience disruptive acts (Moon, 2018 & Pearce, Sewell, Cooper, Osman, Fugard & Pybis, 2017). Schools where the head teachers or principals operate democratic rule, tend to provide social security to arrest anti-social behaviors {sexuality, drug abuse, violence etc) and systematically tackle bullying problems (Akpunne, Lanre-Babalola & Alo, 2019, Baji, 2010, & Cowie & Sharp, 1998).
- 3. Environmental impact:** The nature and organization of environment influences the level of bullying behaviour (Adeyanju & Salamon, 2014). The reason is that bullying behavior can occur in the play or sport grounds, markets, work or worship places and organizations. Whitney and Smith (1993) maintained that when environmental supervision and monitoring is minimal and there is a more informal atmosphere, bullying may be evidenced. Similarly, the study of Moon (2018) posited neighborhood and ecological risk as underlying causes of child abuse. The environment, in this case,

comprises of all elements that are injurious or hazardous to the growth and well-being of children.

**4. Peer influence:** Peer group is another striking factor responsible for bullying behaviour. The dynamics of peer group provide a fascinating insight where a highly aggressive child deliberately set up aggressive incidents so that they can be observed by other peers. Wachtel (1973) in Sharp and Cowie (1998) observed that the destructive behaviour among peers increase during active, rough and tumble play and teasing. As a result of this, the leader of the clique and other members use bullying tactics to maintain their own position within the group and to control the behaviour and attitudes of others. Peer group influence also dictate to it members behavioural patterns both in and out of home or school system (Baji, 2019). Contextually therefore, bullying behaviour occur among children due to domineering, use of force, tactics and imitation by peer members.

**5. Socio-Cultural Influence and Affiliations:** Virtually, all cultures have as a value that children are sacred gift which should not be hurt or maltreated. In all cultures, children must be fed, toilet-trained, protected from illness, taught to control sexual and aggressive impulses. However, there are cultural variations in achieving these goals. The cultural prescriptions for childrearing in some cultures call for gentle handling of infants, whereas other cultures advocate a severely frustrating treatment of young children (Ansell, 2016 & Baji, 2006). Hake (1972), observed that the type of punishment usually meted out to children among Nigerian parents are whipping, reprimands, and the use of threats and deprivation of privileges (like food, sleeping in the house, etc). This means that cultural variations and relativism in childrearing practices, disciplinary measures, and monumental love and affections toward children are tantamount to causes of bullying behaviour if they are carried out without discretion.

**6. Socialization patterns and personal experience:** The kind and manner of socialization or training given to a child will reflect his personality. If parents use an aggressive pattern of training, it may cause children to imitate a bullying syndrome as a model. Hence, some children bull others because they were bulled, or because they see people engaging in bullying.

### **Effects of Bullying Behaviour on a Child's Development**

Bullying has long and short-term consequences on the personality development of the individual child. Akpunne, Lanre-Babalola an Alo (2019), Garmy, Vilhjalmsson, and Kristjansdottir (2018), Baji, (2010), Santrock (2005), Sharp and Cowie (1998), Roygor, (2005) and Regoliand Hewitt, (2003) outlined the following effects of bullying acts on child's growth and development.

- First, children who are bullied often feel lonely, unsecured, embarrass easily, and have low self-esteem (Olweus, 1993).
- Second, the impact of chronic bullying follows children into adulthood where they face substantial risks of depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and often commit suicide (Roygor, 2005).
- Thirdly, the effects of bullying can cause loss of interest in school work, truancy, drop-out syndrome and poor academic performance and failure in school achievements.

- Also, children who are bullied record negative self-evaluation, physical complaints, shy behaviour and exhibit withdrawn personality syndrome (King, 2016).
- Furthermore, bullying is characterized with serious lower global self-worth, poorer self-perceptions in social relationships, attractiveness and conduct. Children who are bullied have trouble in making friends, and are often rejected by peers (Rose, Shields & Caldwell, 2014).
- In a related development, children who engage in bullying are also affected by their own behaviour, as they may abuse animals, vandalize buildings, shoplift, fight and use illegal drugs and alcohol (Regoli & Hewitt, 2003). According to Olweus (1993), bullies are more likely to be chronic offenders and adult criminals.
- Similarly, bullying behaviour is a manifestation of a serious problem of impaired concentration, psychosomatic illness, disturbed sleep and generalized anxiousness (Regoli, Hewitt, & DeLisi, 2016). On the contrary, children who were free from disruptive acts are more satisfied with life, higher in self-esteem, greater in feeling of personal control, well fitted and highly confident (Sharp & Cowie, 1998).

### **Interventions for Managing the Effects of Bullying Behaviour on a Child's Development**

Bullying behaviour is a complex, social phenomenon which requires a wide-range of management interventions. Olweus (1993) provided the following interventions that significant others can use to reduce bullying behaviour on children:

- Get older peers to serve as monitors for bullying and intervene when they see it taking place.
- Develop school-wide rules and sanctions against bullying and post them throughout the school and community.
- Form friendship groups for children who are regularly bullied by peers.
- Incorporate the message of the anti-bullying programmes into religious centers (churches and mosques), schools and community activities.

Sharp and Cowie (1998) also suggested a systematic and consistent approach for effective interventions against bullying through developing a whole school policy to include:

- Emphasis on affective domains in schools to increase social awareness, relationship formation, management skills and conflict resolution strategies.
- Behaviour management system which reinforces appropriate social behaviour and discourage anti-social behaviour.
- Opportunities for students to discuss problems in peer relationships and develop solutions to those problems.
- Definite guidelines for immediate, short-term and long-term actions when bullying arises.
- Definite guidelines for actions to be applied if bullying re-occur among the same children.
- Ways of supporting persistently bullied children.

Other interventions for managing the consequences of bullying behaviour on children's development include:

1. **Problem solving approach.** This approach involves the use of "method of shared concern" (Tervola, 2018). This is a forum where individuals that are directly involved in bullying will meet to discuss together the effects of bullying behaviour and its patterns and ways to stamp it out. This practice assists to detect principal actors and management techniques of bullying.
2. **Peer Group Interventions:** This is an intervention technique in which peer group is taught and encouraged for collective responsibility in tackling bullying by way of supporting the victims verbally, physically and instrumentally (Cowie, Boulton, & Smith, 2017).
3. **Individual interventions:** This is an intervention in which individuals are coached to imbibe the spirit of supporting a bullied child at any point in time. Through this approach, children together with adults are trained in making an assertive response as a buffer against bullying (Graven, 2019). Assertive behaviour involves being clear, direct and calm based on mutual respect for self and others to deescalate a conflict situation such as bullying.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are hereby offered for reducing the destructive effects of bullying behaviour on a child's development:

1. Parental role and supervision: Parents should excise their responsibilities as home keeper, provider, and monitor as well as adopt a problem-solving method rather than a blaming approach. This will reduce aversion, anxiety, aggression and over-rejection as underlying causes of bullying.
2. Socialization through the media should be guided and selective to avoid wrong and negative imitation and role modeling.
3. Schools should structure anti-bullying and sexual harassment policies to provide social security and forestall disruptive behaviour among staff and students in a school setting. School standing committee comprising the school leadership, senior masters, form masters, labour masters and representative of school prefects should be put in place to monitor, check mate, report and tackle cases of bullying behaviour in order to reduce its reoccurrence in schools.
4. Advocacy and sensitization of the public through public enlightenments, lectures, focus group discussions, workshops, seminars, and conferences should be mounted among school communities, parents' teacher' associations, school based management committees, and old boys' associations to discuss the underlying causes, consequences and strategies for reducing bullying behaviour at homes, communities and schools.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed bullying as a social phenomenon that is being influenced by the social dynamics of the immediate home and its neighborhoods, peer group and the wider systems within the school setting, as well as the peculiar cultural dimensions of the society. As a form of problem behaviour, its attendant effects on a child's growth and personality development have been highlighted. In conclusion therefore, adults and other relevant agents who are working with children are required to

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assume a thorough checking, monitoring, and prompt remedial services when there is a case of bullying behaviour to control and reduce its occurrence and effects.

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