NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCING BULLYING IN THE NIGERIAN CHILD

F. O. Okoro

Abstract

The paper examines the characteristics in the neighbourhood that promotes bullying in the Nigerian child. Three neighbourhood characteristics are analyzed to bring their relation with bullying behaviour. They are extreme poverty, illiteracy and insecurity in the neighbourhood. The paper established that these neighbourhood characteristics can influence bullying in the Nigerian child. The systemic counselling approach was advocated for tackling the problem of bullying.

Human relation is an essential ingredient in the promotion of friendship and love. To foster human relationship contract, certain norms are established in human societies. These norms vary from place to place even though there are some common norms in every human society. One of such norms which promotes friendship and discourages aggressive behaviour is positive interpersonal relationship which is being threatened by deviant behavior such as bullying among secondary school students in Nigeria (Idowu and Yahaya, 2006).

Bullying can be described as a deliberate aggressive behavior involving the display of power by a supposed stronger person (the bully) to intimidate or dispose another person considered to be weak (the bullied or victim). Pepler and Craig (1992) defined bulling as an assertion of powerful dislike towards someone considered to be worthless, inferior and undeserving of respect. Similarly, Adewale (2004) says bulling is a hostile behavior displayed by an individual in other to harm another person or a group of others. Bullies engage in the act, in order to establish power and control over colleagues whom they consider to be weaker.

Idowu and Yahaya (2006) asserted that bulling has become a source of concern to counsellors, teachers, school administrators and parents due to its adverse effects on relationship among students. This concern is "fuelled" by the fact that cases of bulling have been reported in many schools in Nigeria but the deviant act is not usually given the desirable attention (Umah, 2000).

Pepler and Craig (1999) among other researchers found that bulling take place in school and are actually encouraged by the audience who are on lookers. The researchers noted that the victims of bully are mostly insecure, the least liable and the most unsuccessful in school. Also, children who are victims of bully appear to be at the greatest risk of adjustment difficulties.

The problem of bulling as a form of school violence has not received greater attention because according to Asomibare(1998) some school personnel have not seen it as a serious problem and subsequently pay little or no attention to it." this lukewarm" attitude has encouraged deviant behavior and discourages research into bulling. This may be responsible for the penalty for lack of literature in bulling among secondary school students in Nigeria (Idowu and Yahaya 2006).

There are neighborhood factors that aid the development of bulling behaviour in school. Okoro, Ikekhua and Oghiagbephan, (2007) posited that the important role of the neighborhood in the upbringing of the Nigerian child for a better future has been de-emphasized and overlooked in recent times. This neglect has implications for bulling behavior. Certain neighborhood characteristics produce stress in families which help to influence bulling character in the Nigerian child. This paper therefore discusses bulling and the Nigerian child from the perspective of the neighborhood characteristics of poverty, delinquency and social insecurity.

Pepler and Craig (2000) identified five major forms of bullying. They are:
(a).   Physical violence and attacks
(b).   Verbal taunts name, calling and put downs
(c).   Threat and intimidation
(d).   Exertion of stealing of money and other possessions
(e).   Exclusion from peer group.

They observed that the type of aggression and the relationship context change with age. The following diagram represents types of aggression according to development stages.

Types of Aggression by Developmental Stages

	Childhood ages 4-9	**Adolescence age 10-13**	**Late adolescence 14-18**
Form of aggression	**Context of aggression**	**Context of aggression**	**Context of aggression**
Verbal	Same-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers
Physical	Same-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers
Bullying	Same-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers
Social		Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers
Sexual harassment		Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers	Same-sex peers Opposite-sex peers
Date violence			Romantic relationship
Gang behaviour			School and community
Delinquency			School and community

Source: Pepler, D.J. & Craig, W., 2000

Causes of Bullying
There is no one single cause for bullying among children but generally, causes of bullying can be grouped into social, biological and peer factors. Which include family, individual school and community variables that can place a youth at risk for bullying?

Conceptual Framework
Neighbourhood is described as a district area of a town and the people who live there while neighbourhood characteristics according to Cutrona, Wallace and Wesner (2006) include but not limited to the percentage of neighbourhood residents who are poor, jobless, illiterates or well educated or members of an ethnic minority group. It also consists of those who exhibit negative behaviours, the extent to which neighbourhood residents behave in an uncivilized manner, threatening behaviour, that is, social disorder.
This paper opined that new characteristics that were not a peculiarity of the people of that neighbourhood can be introduced to the neighbourhood by some external conditions this new characteristics are capable of influencing strange new behaviours as bullying in the neighbourhood. The author also observe that most neighbourhood communities in the Niger-Delta region have experienced such new characteristics as 'deve' (extortion of land development levies from property developers), increase joblessness, extreme poverty, illiteracy, kidnappings, child and adolescent prostitutions. These new characteristics are brought about by the near total neglect of these

neighbourhoods by oil exploration and exploitation organizations and the federal government. It is within this characteristic that the framework for the paper is developed.

Neighbourhood Characteristics Influencing Bullying in the Nigerian Child

The relationship between neighbourhood characteristics and bullying behaviour can be established in several ways. This paper discusses three of such ways.

i.   extremePoverty and bullying
ii.   Illiteracy and bullying
iii.   Insecurity

Extreme Poverty

It has been advocated in certain forum that extreme poverty is a disease. Thus where there is severe poverty in the neighbourhood arising from either a disaster, displacement or is a prominent feature in the neighbourhood family interest and survival is taken wholistically and survival of the fittest becomes the order of the day. In the contest for survival the strong within the neighbourhood will begin to oppress the weak by intimidating or threatening them (bullying) to take their possession or steal from them.

A growing up child in the neighbourhood observes this skill of survival and imitates this pattern of aggressive behaviour and grows with this kind of personality trait. This behaviour are then exhibited or displayed in school when the opportunity of schooling arises. Thus the characteristics of extreme poverty can bring about bullying in the Nigerian child.

Illiteracy

Illiteracy is another neighbourhood characteristic that can influence bullying. Illiteracy and school drop out have been linked to youth movement which is also a neighbourhood characteristic. The uneducated are ignorant of societal norms and values and operate within their own 'law' as deem fit to the detriment of others.

Semi-Illiterate members of a neighbourhood community display a lot of ignorance when dealing with other literate members of the community. As with the practice in most community today, illiterate children and youths between the ages of 15 – 25years set their own guidelines and rules. They then use their neo-gang structure to intimidate other members of the community who might want to oppose their mode of operation.

This mode of behaviour is then transferred to the school environment where such youths exhibit violent behaviour by even threatening not only their peers and colleagues but also their teachers. This deviant act of bullying when not checked is transferred to the next generation and the circle goes on except it is curtailed.

Insecurity

The Nigerian child seems not to be scared at the sound of guns or the sight of uniformed men. This notion is as a result of the numerous conflicts they have experienced in their neighbourhood communities. The Niger-Delta Region that has witnessed series of crisis which brings about insecurity and social disorder is a case in point.

Due to the numerous conflict in the region, the Niger- Delta child or youth has witness especially in the rural communities, the culture of violence tend to have been imbibed by them which they display in the school setting on those perceived to be weak. Even at home bullying behaviour begins to manifest in form of temper tantrums and temperamental difficulties. The level of insecurity and social disorder enables the Nigerian child from this region to be impulsive, hot headed; have difficulty following rules and views violence in positive ways which are characteristics of bullying.

These characteristics in the neighbourhood influencing bullying, creates numerous problems in our society especially in our schools. Thus there should be a way out.

The Way Forward

      Idowu and Yahaya (2006), advocated the systemic counselling approach in handling the problem of bullying which is recommended. This paper however, recommends the adapted systemic approach developed by Pepler and Craig (2000). As it has been found effective in reducing bullying which would be suitable in curbing bullying in Nigeria schools. It has the following format.

A systemic approach of bullying
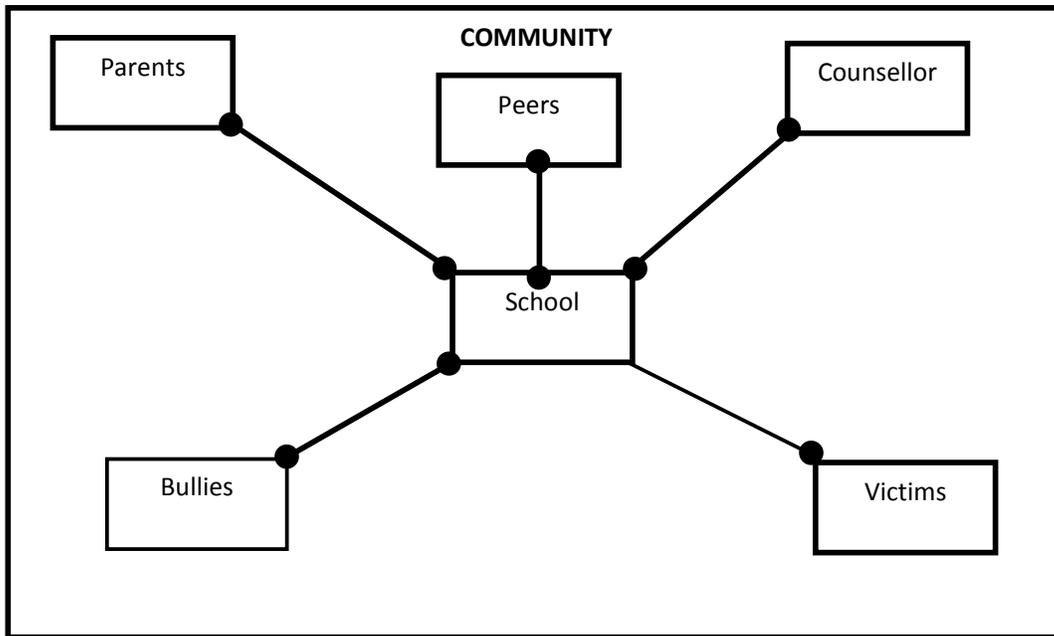
Adapted from: Pepler D.J. & Craig W. (2000)

Community

      Community as agent of socialization should ensure a Community Based Organization (CBO) which replaces the neo-gang structure of community youths where aggressive behaviour like bullying are developed. The community should instill and teach cultural values and social norms to the children while they grow up to respect of human dignity.

The School

      The school is a very important institution in the socialization of the child. Classroom management technique and other effective approaches should be employed by teachers to inculcate discipline and good moral values on the Nigerian child. School authorities should not treat the problem of bullying with kid gloves as it is becoming a potent factor in school violence and youth restiveness. The paper advocates a synergy between the school, parents, community and Government in handling bullying and school violence.

Parents

      Parents as first agent of socialization of the child should be good role models and live by examples. They should develop clear and consistent rules within the family and reinforce good behaviour. Make it clear to the child that bullying is a serious offence and will not be tolerated.
Spend more time with your child; monitor his/her activities and friends.
      Share your concerns with your child's teachers, counsellor or principal. Work together with them to stop bullying.

Peer Group

Peer group should imbibe cooperative attitude towards one another to promote good behaviour. They should engage in social and educative programmes to overcome negative influences.

Bullies

They need to be educated and enlightened by school counsellors of the implication of bullying and the dangers inherent in bullying. They should be taught social skills and interpersonal relationship skills.

Counsellors

Counsellors should explore all opportunities at their disposal in handling the problem of bullying as it relates to the various counselling technique. An eclectic approach is advocated.

The problem of extreme poverty, illiteracy and insecurity should be addressed by the government and community leaders. This will help to discourage the up coming generation from the culture of bullying.

Conclusion

Bullying is a deviant behaviour which calls for a concentrated effort to handle by all stakeholders. These neighbourhood characteristics promoting bullying behaviour need to be nipped in the bud so that younger growing children in the neighbourhood will not be negatively influenced thereby reducing bullying and violence in our schools.

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