

**COPING MECHANISMS OF CHILDREN BEING BULLIED AT SCHOOL: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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Abstract

Bullying is a common annoying scenario that is encountered by children in the recent times. The purpose of this study is to identify some of the coping mechanisms children do when they are bullied in a school setting. This is a phenomenological inquiry on the experiences of ten (10) Leyte Normal University-Integrated Laboratory School pupils who encountered bullying. Colaizzi's method of phenomenological interpretation was utilized to arrive at meaningful themes. The analyses of the researchers on the phenomenological inquiry appeared that children used several strategies/mechanisms to cope with victimization or being bullied in school. These are Self-Defense, Seeking Social Support, Stand Up to the Bully, Distancing, Tension/Reduction/Externalizing, and focus on the positive. Seeking social support in this study was often used by victims that was viewed as one of the more successful approaches. Victims found that seeking social support and advice helped them learn different ways of addressing their bullies as well as providing them with positive feedback and support from peers and adults they trusted. School intervention which involve the students, teachers, school administration and parents might successfully challenge existing social conditions that tolerate and promote bullying. This study could provide ways of understanding how pupils experience bullying in the different forms and providing them and other future cases the necessary assistance or school intervention.

Keywords: Educational Psychology, Bullying, Qualitative Research, Colaizzi's Method of Data Analysis, Leyte, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

"Do not do unto others what you don't want others do to you" - Confucius, Over the past decades, concerns as to the prevalence of social problems experienced by children and youth has increased, such as bullying and depression. As violence in schools continues, questions have been raised about the ethical and spiritual climate of our youth (Dixon, 2004).

Victimized children were often found to have impairment in their psychological, behavioral, cognitive, and academic functioning.

Nowadays, there have been rising incidents that affect pupil's social interaction and motivation to learn in school such as bullying. It has great impact in the performance of a learner. It is believed, however, that children must be exposed to a safe and conducive learning environment and that social interaction of the children vary depending on their social environment.

A survey conducted revealed that bullying or abuse is experienced by one in two Filipino school children and this statistics is back up by a report in an Australian newspaper involving 117, 000 nine-year olds from 25 different countries, stating that Filipino students are being bullied in school (Ancho, et al., 2012). Bullying robs children of dignity and could have adverse consequences for their social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development (Dombrowski and Gischlar, 2006). In order not to experience these consequences, schools must find out the coping mechanisms of children who are being bullied in school.

Hence, it is important to conduct a study on such case since it affects the nature of the teaching-learning process. It will give insights for educators to help students cope up from being bullied.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Most, if not all, children will experience bullying at some time in their lives: they may be the victim, they may bully or they may witness the suffering of others. Bullying is defined as negative actions which may be physical or verbal have hostile intent, are repeated overtime, and involve a power differential. It may involve one or more perpetrators and recipients (Farrington, 1993).

Bullying may also be indirect rather than direct, and this type of aggression often involves peers. For example, indirect bullying might subtle social manipulation such as gossip, spreading of rumours, and exclusion (Lagerspetz et. al., 1988) or aversive levels of competition and social comparison (Besag, 1989).

The problem of bullying is pervasive. In a series of recent surveys of almost five thousand (5,000) Canadian elementary and middle school children (aged 5 to 14), 38% reported being bullied at least "once or twice" during the term; and 15% reported being bullied "more than once or twice" during the term. The prevalence of perpetration is almost

as high: 29% reported bullying others “once or twice” during the term and 6% reported bullying others “more than once or twice” during the term (O’Connell et al., 1997).

Bullying is centered on the systematic abuse of power. It is typified by the bully and victim’s inequality of access to power in favour of the bully. It may be physical (for example, hitting, kicking or punching) or verbal (saying nasty things to a person) and be intentionally hostile (Olweus, 1991; O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). It includes being ‘sent nasty notes’ (Smith & Sharp, 1994, p. 13). It may also be indirect by, for example, involving subtle social manipulation such as gossip spreading of rumours, and exclusion (Lagerspetz, Bjorkvist, & Petonen, 1988) and it may cause physical and psychological distress (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Most recently, Smith and Shu’s (2000) nation experiences of being bullied in nineteen (19) schools found that 30% the bullying to no one, a proportion larger for boys and for older victims.

In Norway, research by Olweus had found that about one in seven (7) pupils were involved in bully/victim problems during any school term (Olweus, 1993). The background research, plus several suicides due to bullying, led to a national intervention programme carried out in the mid-1980s, in which schools were encouraged to adopt anti-bullying measures at the whole-school, class and individual level. Olweus, (1993) reported an evaluation of this intervention in Bergen schools, decline in reported bullying. Both direct and indirect bullying fell by 50 percent or more, and there was a similar decline in reports of bullying others. The schools also experienced a decline in other antisocial behaviours, and an increase in student satisfaction with school life. Another evaluation was carried out by Roland (1993), in Stavanger schools, three years after the programme started; this reported much less improvement, with some schools showing more bullying, although it was reported that schools which had made more use of the pack had better results.

Lazarus (2006), defined coping as an individual’s effort to manage environmental stress and resulting emotions. The ability to cope with the stressors of life is essential in fostering psychological and emotional well-being (Lazarus, 2006).

Furthermore, research findings have been mixed with regards to gender differences in coping strategy preference. Seeking social support and internalizing are strategies that may have been preferred by girls whereas externalizing are strategies that may have been used frequently by boys (Hunter, et al., 2004; Kristensen & Smith, 2003; Naylor et al., 2001).

Lazarus (2006) defined coping as an individual's efforts to manage environmental stress and the resulting emotions. The ability to cope with the stressors of life is essential in fostering psychological and emotional well-being (Lazarus, 2006). Coping research has produced several models to facilitate a greater understanding of this concept (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Roth and Cohen, 1986; Ayers, Sandler, West & Roosa, 1996).

Research has found that certain coping strategies may be associated with positive or negative individual outcomes (e.g. Ben-Zur, 2005; Hampel et al., 2009; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). Emotion-focused coping may be associated with distressing emotions felt by the individual, whereas problem-focused coping may be connected with increased adaptive emotional regulation and problem-solving skills (Ben-Zur, 2005; Causey & Dubow, 1992; Hamper et al., 2009). Adaptive coping strategies have been found to help mediate the negative effects of victimization (Hampel et al., 2009; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner, 2002; Lazarus, 2006) and also may serve to prevent future bullying and victimization (Varjas et al., 2009).

Tenenbaum, et.al (2011) found out that victim's self-reported coping strategies did not always fit into the distinct categories of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping and that children often implemented multiple strategies simultaneously. While most school discipline policies prohibit violence between students, some victims found that addressing the bullying situation with physical force was necessary and effective (Skiba, 2006). Studies have shown that these social and emotional disturbances can have a long term consequences, affecting children throughout their school-aged and into adulthood (Boulton,et.al, 2010). Drop out rates as compared to non-victims, which can have a significant negative impact on academic achievement (Boulton,et.al; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002).

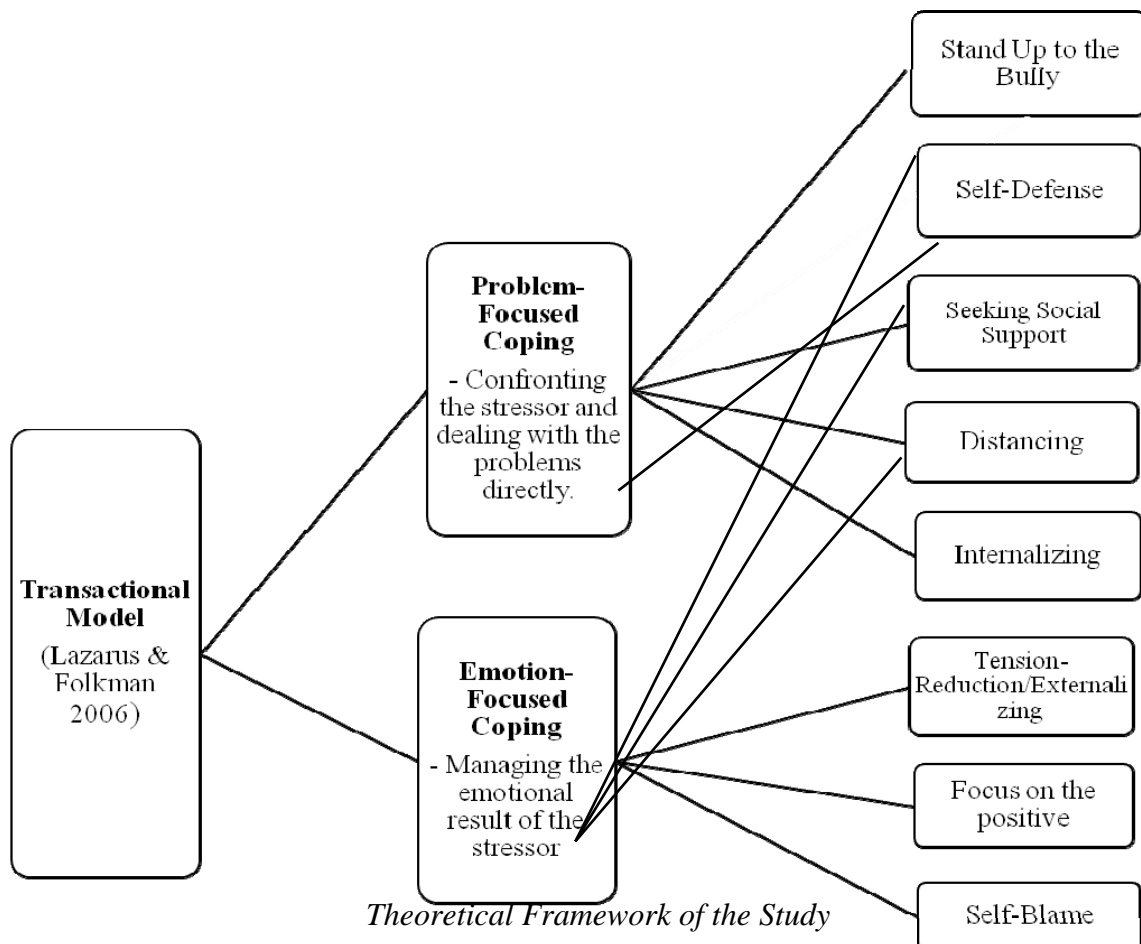
In a previous study involving 960 10-year-olds their thought about who gets bullied were discussed (Erling & Hwang, 2004). The most common characteristic noted was that children who are bullied have a different appearance. Similarly, the most common response by the adolescents as to why individuals are bullied was that they having different appearance as well. It seems that both adolescents and 10-year-old children believe that physical appearance is actually related to bullying (Sweeting and West, 2001).

The existing literatures reported on the rampancy of bullying case in a school. This urges the researchers to conduct this study to identify the coping mechanism of children being bullied and to provide empirical basis for viable school policies that will reduce the case of bullying.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While victimization impacts millions of schoolchildren worldwide (Nansel et al., 2001; Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005), adults are often unaware of the scope of the problem and children may not receive help because they are fearful of telling someone about their victimization (Hunter et al., 2004; Naylor et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Rivers and Smith, 1994). Telling somebody about bullying situation is one of many strategies, or coping mechanisms, victims can use to address their problem and manage the stress of being bullied (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner, 2002). g=

The diagram below shows the theoretical framework which is anchored on this study and is believed to have some bearing on the problem ventured to.



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Bullying is rampant ever since especially among students. It greatly affects not only learners, but also their parents and teachers. Hence, it is already a given reality that it should instead be dealt or coped up by the ones being bullied so as to empower them for positive

social interaction. At this stage in the research, the coping mechanism from being bullied will be generally defined as protecting mechanisms and overcoming perceptions of being bullied.

The data gathered in this phenomenological study will help in identifying the coping mechanism that children do when they are bullied in a school setting. This study will provide ways of understanding how pupils experience bullying in the different forms and providing them and other future cases the necessary assistance or school intervention.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive-qualitative study (Yin, 2003) which helps describe the intervention or phenomenon and the real life context. The researchers followed the Colaizzi's method of phenomenological inquiry realities. Interview procedures was used to enable researchers develop first person descriptions of diverse human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989; Kvale, 1996; Thomas and Pollio, 2002). Phenomenological interview was conducted so that participants in the study will be describing their experiences of some phenomenon with as little direction from the interviewer as possible (Polio, Henley and Thompson, 1997). Unconcerned with issues of causality, phenomenological interviewing concerns the "what" of an experience and seeks to capture the specific meanings uniquely characterizing that experience. Once noted, these meanings are then named using either the language of the participant or the more conceptual of the investigator's discipline.

After asking the initial question, phenomenological interview procedures largely under the direction of the participant will follow. The freedom of the participant is recognized to locate frames of reference both for the ones conducting the interview and the interviewee. Questions emerging within the flow of the dialogue are meant to provide clarity and understanding; additionally they may serve to promote more focused and intimate dialogues. Descriptions deriving from interviews of this type supply a rich and nuanced source of information concerning the personal meaning attributed by the participants to the phenomenon under consideration (Kvale, 1996; Polio, Henley and Thompson, 1997; and Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Participant

The participants of this study were ten (10) elementary and high school students of Leyte Normal University-Integrated Laboratory School. The participants of this study were purposefully selected because of their recorded bullying case in the school based on the

classroom adviser's file. These respondents were exposed ten (10) to fifteen (15) minutes interview. The demographic characteristics of study participants are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Grade Level
1	11	Female	Multigrade
2	11	Male	Multigrade
3	11	Female	Grade 5
4	13	Male	Grade 5
5	13	Male	Grade 6
6	13	Female	Grade 6
7	14	Male	Grade 7
8	14	Female	Grade 7
9	10	Male	Grade 4
10	10	Female	Grade 4

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers seek the permission of the study participants through a formal letter and they were scheduled for interview. Further consent was given to their Principal and parents for protocol reasons.

One-on-one interviews were conducted using a semi – structured interview guide by the researchers. The interview was recorded using cellular phone recorder. Bracketing exercise was followed the Colaizzi’s method of data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978 as cited by Sanders, 2003) in the interpretation of data. Specifically, it followed the following procedures:

1. Acquiring a Sense of each transcript
2. Extracting Significant Statements
3. Formulation of Meanings
4. Organizing formulated meanings into clusters of themes
5. Exhaustively describing the investigated phenomenon
6. Describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon
7. Returning the result of the themes and supporting statements to the participants

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A descriptive analysis on the data gathered revealed six (6) major themes on the phenomenological inquiry of coping mechanisms of the children being bullied in school. Each of the six (6) major themes were “labeled” based on their own language in describing specific meanings. It is understood that the themes constructed, however, are not hold in abeyance as independent of each other but as interrelated aspects of a single over-all pattern or gestalt. The six major themes are as follows:

Theme 1: “I just do nothing but I secretly put their names in our logbook so that our teacher will know”: **Self-defense**

Theme 2: “I don’t want to cry. I just tell it to my teacher”: **Seeking Social Support**

Theme 3: “I just answer them back in a nice way by telling I am not affected of their actions. I defend myself for me not to cry”: **Stand-up to the Bully**

Theme 4: “I don’t fight back. I just ignore them”: **Distancing**

Theme 5: “I fight with them. I also bully them by teasing”: **Tension-Reduction/Externalizing**

Theme 6: “I feel hurt but I just forget and think of happy thoughts like being with my loved ones. That’s all”: **Focus on the positive**

Theme 1: Self-Defense

Some participants reported that once somebody bully them they take protective physical action in order to shield their self from being bullied. Some of them took these certain actions because they felt as though they had no other choice.

One student reported:

“Ahmmm... nothing lang Ma’am and I secretly put their names in our logbook”.

(“I just do nothing but I secretly put their names in our logbook so that our teacher will know”.) (P3)

Theme 2: Seeking Social Support

All of the participants admitted that they share or discuss their problems of being bullied to other individual (peers, teachers, parents) in order to receive support and advice.

“Na diri na ak matuok. ay, ginsusumat ko kan mam, ginsisiring ko la kan mam”.

(“I don’t want to cry. I just tell it to my teacher”.) (P7)

“Ginsusumat ko ngadto tak bestfriend”.

(“I am telling it to my bestfriend’.) (P5)

“Ha akon mga parents kay para po hira makaaram an akon experiences ha school ba mga sugad po hiton”.

(“I tell my experiences to my parents so that they will know”.) (P4)

Theme 3: Stand-up to the Bully

There were participants who make a choice of responding to the bully directly by saying something to the bully in an attempt to make his views known and resolve the situation.

“I just kuan, nakun la ako na diri ba makaarawod gud. Nayakaan ak, anuman ito hiya yana? Para di ba makuan ba. Something like that para ha akon tak ginhihimo la ginkukuan ko la. Diri gud magtinuok”.

(“I just answer them back in a nice way by telling that I am not affected of their actions. I defend myself for me not to cry”.) (P9)

“Sometimes ginsasaway ko hira”.(Sometimes I reprimanded them”.) (P6)

Theme 4: Distancing

Detaching oneself from a stressful bullying situation is one of the coping mechanisms that some participants mentioned. Here are some of the statements of the participants supporting this them.

“So I don’t fight back, naiwas la po ak ha ira. Diri ko la po ginpapansin”.

(I don't fight back. I just ignore them".) (P1)

"Nahuyo nala ako".

("I just keep silent".) (P2)

"Diri nala ak mamati ha ira. Mastop naman it hira pagbully".

("I don't listen to them. Anyway, they will just stop bullying".) (P8)

Theme 5: Tension-Reduction/Externalizing

This theme reflected a coping mechanism that involved letting off steam in order to reduce stress. Children who used this coping mechanism reported yelling at someone, physically harming somebody else or taking deep breaths to relax.

"Gin-aaway ko hira, gintatamay ko gihap hira".

("I fight them. I also bully them by teasing".) (P4)

"Nagtitinangis po ako ngadto ha amon room".

("I cried in our room".) (P6)

Theme 6: Focus on the positive

There were some participants who did not let others know about his/her experiences being bullied. Some of them maintains a positive attitude in general and thinking positively about the bullying situation. The student's response indicating their theme are as follows:

"Parang nahuhurt ako pero gin foforget ko dayon, na forget ko ha happy thoughts, thinking happy thoughts, company of the loved ones, that's all".

("I feel hurt but I just forget and think of happy thoughts like being with my loved ones. That's all".) (P10)

"Diri ko nala hira ginpapansin kay bangin ngadto ha ira balay ngan pamilya bangin hira pirme ginkaka-isgan".

("I just don't mind them maybe they are always being scolded by their parents at home".) (P8)

CONCLUSION

In summary, the analyses of the researchers on the phenomenological inquiry appeared that children used several strategies/mechanisms to cope with victimization or being bullied in school. These are Self-Defense, Seeking Social Support, Stand Up to the Bully, Distancing, Tension-Reduction/Externalizing, and focus on the positive.

Seeking social support in this study was often used by victims that was viewed as one of the more successful approaches. Victims found that seeking social support and advice

helped them learn different ways of addressing their bullies as well as providing them with positive feedback and support from peers and adults they trusted. School intervention which involve the students, teachers, school administration and parents might successfully challenge existing social conditions that tolerate and promote bullying.

EXHAUSTIVE DESCRIPTION

Children who experienced being bullied in school still continue to strive in giving their best to excel and show interest in their studies. They still manage to control their feelings whenever they encounter bullying through the use of varied coping mechanisms. Furthermore, most of the children being bullied would likely prefer peace and order by not resorting to violence.

IMPLICATIONS

This study could help the other victims of bullying, teachers, school administrators and parents by sharing the identified coping mechanisms of children being bullied. Further, the results of this study will allow the other victims in overcoming psychological difficulties in facing the problem on bullying in a school setting.

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