Experiences of College Students on Bullying

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Abstract

A Phenomenological Qualitative Study on the perception and experiences of 3rd and 4th year college students was conducted in Adventist University of the Philippines. A survey was performed to identify participants for the said study. The researchers then conducted an interview using a semi-structured questionnaire that would allow the participant to share as much information as possible to answer the questions that were raised. A total of 11 participants were interviewed for this research. Results revealed that the views on bullying as perceived by the participants were represented by major two themes namely, Torment and Debasement. Experiences were represented by three major themes namely, Depreciation, Denouncement, and Physical Violence. Lastly, effects of bullying were represented by two major themes, Positive and Negative.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world as we know today offers many circumstances that preoccupy an individual. In the light of the demands of everyday life, one may become oblivious and nonchalant with the many issues that plague our society. In October 22, 2013 in the town of Sparks, Nevada, a 12 year old boy, armed with a 99-millimeter semi-automatic handgun open fired at a middle school killing a teacher and leaving two other students wounded. The shooter is believed to have been bullied. This is just another statistic of bullying related violence that made headlines after the Columbine High School Shooting in 1999. An organization Make Beats Not Beat Downs reported that harassment and bullying have been linked to 75% of school shootings in 2009.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2012 released its latest statistics that showed 20.1% reported being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey; he prevalence was higher among females (22.0%) than males (18.2%). 16.2% reported being bullied electronically (email, chat room, website, texting) in the 12 months preceding the survey; the prevalence was higher among females (22.1%) than males (10.8%). Locally the Department of Education reported that as of September 2013 there were 1165 cases of bullying nationwide that accounts for 80% of school related violence as compared to 20% or 291 cases of child abuse. This prompted the DepEd to launch a child protection policy through DepEd Order Order no.40, s.2012 to promote zero-tol-
II. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design that determined the perception and experiences of college students on bullying. Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research method designed to explore and understand people’s everyday lived experiences (Shoza, 2012). This was so adapted to qualitatively describe and examine the perception and experience of the students in relation to the said phenomenon.

The researchers utilized currently enrolled 3rd and 4th year students of the Adventist University of the Philippines who are in the different colleges namely: CON, COB, CST, CAH, COT, COD, COE, COH, for the second semester of the school year 2013 – 2014. Sampling technique used is criterion sampling. Students from each college who experienced bullying are included in the study group.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used as the instrumentation for the study of which the participants were asked during the interview. It served as guiding questions so that the researcher may extract enough information based on the participants’ view and experiences related to the study.

Prior to the conduction of the study, permission was obtained from the college deans of the 8 colleges through an official letter. Upon approval, the researchers identified students that fit the profile required by the study by conducting a brief survey asking if they have had been bullied or happen to know someone who have been bullied. Identified students were asked if they would like to volunteer and take part in the study. They were asked to sign the consent for a video recorded interview which will be scheduled according to the time most convenient them. A well-lighted, well ventilated interview room was prepared within the College of Nursing building. There was one interviewer, and external observer from the psychology department who took notes and interpreted nonverbal expressions, and one transcriber of the interview process. In order to establish rapport and create a comfortable atmosphere, the interview began with a discussion on how they are coping with their studies and how they feel about taking part...
of this study. It was soon followed by a brief discussion about the research study being conducted which will serve as an introductory phase to the interview. The interview sessions were held for about 30 minutes utilizing 3 reflective questions. A conversational style of questioning was performed rather than the utilization of the conventionally ridged and formal questioning in order to encourage students to eloquently share their emotions and experiences. The students were thanked and provided with a simple token of appreciation for their participation.

Content and thematic analysis using the Colaizzi method was employed in this study. The following steps represent Colaizzi process for phenomenological data as cited in Shosha’s study (2012).

1. Each transcript was read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content.

2. For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study was extracted. These statements were recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and lines numbers.

3. Meanings were formulated from these significant statements.

4. The formulated meanings were sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes.

5. The findings of the study were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.

6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon were described.

7. Finally, validation of the findings were sought from the research participants to compare the researcher’s descriptive results with their experiences and this was studied in contrast with the interpretation by the external observer.

To ensure validity of the results, Data Triangulation was done wherein the researchers’ themes were studied in contrast with the external observer and the literature gathered lastly, validation of identified themes and results of the participants through follow-up consultations. A licensed psychologist/guidance counselor was invited to serve as an external observer during the interview process. The non-verbal observations made were noted and studied in contrast with what was verbally expressed in order to achieve triangulation. The non-verbal observations helped give the transcribed interviews a more significant perspective.

III. RESULTS

A total of 11 currently enrolled 3rd and 4th year students who fit the criteria participated in the study. The research aimed to answer three questions from which main themes have been identified. The three main questions focused mainly on definition of bullying, the experiences of being bullied and the long term effects of having been bullied.
Insult, It is defined as, “to do or say something that is offensive to; to do or say something that shows a lack of respect for someone; to behave with pride or arrogance; to treat with insolence, indignity, or contempt. According to Mr. H (2012), bullying was also defined as spreading false accusations or rumors that are offensive or shows disrespectful comments about a person. On this particular context that Johnson (2012), mentioned that verbal bullying has become more dominant than physical bullying. She also defined bullying as a verbal harassment.

2. Oppression. Webster (2012) defines it as unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power. A sense of being weighed down in body or mind. An example shared was “harassment, like making fun or making one feel inferior to the other.” A part of the bullying definition described above mentioned, “an imbalance of power exists between the perpetrator and the victim.” This specifically points out the direct unjust exercise of authority among the bullies towards their victims. Negative emotions come to fore because of inability to cope with unpleasant experiences. Psychological instability and inferiority complex are made possible because of such inadequacy (Estoque, 2006). According to Bott (2012), Bullying is any behavior that takes advantage of an imbalance of power between the harasser and the target-based on size, age, ability, language, social status, socioeconomic circumstance, intelligence, athletic ability, appearance, wardrobe, gender identity, gender expression or lifestyle, sexual identity culture, religion, race, or heritage. Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior manifested by the use of force or coercion to affect others, particularly when the behavior is habitual and involves imbalance of power (Manuel, 2013).

3. Degrading. It is defined as to treat someone poorly and without respect. To make
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Table 2:

Bullying Experiences of College Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depreciation</td>
<td>Insult, Physical Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denouncement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
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<td>Violence</td>
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Based on the transcribed experiences, the statements were divided into five subthemes. Firstly, there were four statements noted to be an assault to the persona which is the person’s way of behaving or talking with other people. This is the image or personality that a person presents to other people. There were seven statements that directly attacked the person’s physical attributes, which are the physical appearance presented to other people. There were six statements that attacked the capacity of the person’s ability, classified as Assault on Abilities. There were three statements that passed judgment on the person, and so we classified it as Judgmental Comments. Lastly, seven statements revealed the use of physical force to inflict pain to the person, which is classified as Physical Violence.

Miller (2012) states that, bullying can also be understood as microaggression, a concept borrowed from the field of critical race theories that focuses on how people of color experience unconscious and con-scious affronts throughout the course of daily interactions. Microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

The participants of this study enumerated the following experiences:

1. Assault on Persona. Persona is defined by Webster (2012) as the way you behave, talk, with other people that causes them to see you as a particular kind of person: the image or personality that a person presents to other people. An example of an experience shared was, “They called me ‘gay.’” Personal frustration could come into play where the cause of frustration might be the individual himself (Estoque, 2006). This particular experience directs to the attack on the persona of a person.

2. Assault on physical attributes. According to Estoque (2006), there are several examples of personal frustrations such as low intelligence, physical deformity, a lack of skill or even insecurities which hampers the attainment of a certain objective. This particular experience attacked the physical appearance of the participants. An example of an experience that was shared was, “teasing of my fingers.”

3. Assault on Ability. Bullying was defined by Bott (2012) as any behavior that takes advantage of an imbalance of power between the harasser and the target based on size, age, ability, etc. An example of an experience shared by our participant was, “mocking me because of my mistake.” Shallcross (2013) mentioned that college students may be targeted for being too smart while other schools, students may be bullied for being not smart enough.

4. Denouncement. Webster (2012) defines this as, to publicly state that someone or something is bad or wrong: to criticize someone harshly and publicly. Three out of 11 participants have expressed that their experience of bullying has involved a form of denouncement. An example of an experience that was shared was, “you are going to have a heart problem and die soon.” According to Miller (2012), this bullying experience includes threats, or rumors that intentionally inflict social cruelty on someone. Estoque (2006) mentioned that this particular instance aims to distort or fal-
sify the perception of reality.

5. **Physical Violence.** As mentioned by Miller (2012), physical violence is the use of physical force to intentionally inflict pain on another person. This includes hitting, kicking, pushing, stealing, sexual misconduct, killing someone. An indirect way of inflicting physical force is by physically moving away from someone as a means to be hurtful. Seven out of 11 participants have shared that their experience of bullying has involved a form of physical violence. An example that was shared by one of our participants was, “teacher slapped me in front of class 3 times... on the cheek.” As Demanet (2012) mentioned, “willfully and repeatedly hurts other people, either physically or psychologically” is bullying. The pleasure at causing harm to others and dominating non-consenting others in a relationship are both risk factors present for those who move on to larger forms of violence, such as campus shootings (Shallcross, 2013). As mentioned by Manuel (2013), bullying involves a great deal of physical aggression such as shoving and poking, throwing things, slapping, choking, punching and kicking, and beating, stabbing, pulling hair, scratching, biting, scraping, and pinching.

| Table 3: |
| **Long-Term Effects of Bullying on College Students** |
| **Themes** | **Subthemes** |
| Positive | Resilience, Self-Awareness, Motivation |
| Negative | Trauma, Retaliation, Avoidance, Suicidal Ideation |

Lastly, the main themes formulated under the long term effects of bullying were Positive and Negative. Resilience, Self-Awareness, and Motivation were the subthemes categorized under the main theme, Positive. Whereas, Avoidance, Trauma, Retaliation, and Suicidal Ideation were the subthemes that were categorized under the main theme, Negative.

According to Estoque (2006), emotions principally divided into two parts, the positive emotions and the negative emotions. Since emotion is inevitable in human experience and since emotion affects the physiology of man, its best that one has emotional maturity and is able to control his emotions. Furthermore, there are no firm standards of emotional maturity and controlling emotions such as there are for physical development. Nor are there easy rules to follow in attaining it. Behavior, derived from a combination of reason and emotions, has a mixture of origins. It may originate partly in one’s genetic code, partly in learning, chemistry, and in the values of the society in which one resides.

It has been noted that all of the bullying has occurred during their elementary and high school years. While bullying is still experienced at present, they are able to manage based on their learned response after their previous experience of bullying. The partici-
pents of this study enumerated the following long-term effects of bullying.

1. **Resilience.** Webster (2012) defines resilience as the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens. Always take control of the options and changes that are being made. It is better to be a friend than enemy. It is better to make peace than make war. It is better to forgive than to seek retribution or revenge (Estoque, 2006). Of the 11 participants, there were nine respondents that showed resilience. An example of their statement is “bullying can’t change my heart.” Estoque (2006) added some individuals run from the source of frustration, others fight while others face the very source of frustration. When a person is well adjusted, a person copes with it in logical and ethical manner ensuring the satisfaction of his needs.

2. **Self-Awareness.** It is defined as the knowledge and awareness of your own personality or character. According to Manuel (2013), victims often make positive statements about themselves or the resolution of the problem. This is to counteract the negative bullying effects on the bullied. Three responded with an effect of self-awareness. As mentioned by Videbeck (2011), self-awareness is the process by which a person gains recognition of his or her own feelings, beliefs and attitudes. A person must learn to accept these differences among people and view each other as worthwhile person regardless of that person’s opinions and lifestyle. A person can accomplish self-awareness through reflection, spending time consciously focusing on how one feels and what one values or believes.

3. **Motivation.** It is the process of giving someone a reason for doing something: the condition of being eager to act or work: a force or influence that causes someone to do something. Two responded with a sense of motivation. One of the statements made was, “I want to be more successful.” Motivation can come in different forms. According to Adler (1997), he cited, if they have understanding, encouraging parents, they may compensate for their inferiorities and transform their weakness into strength. He added that the Goldstein’s master motive, in fact, is the only motive that the organism possesses. What appear to be different drives such as hunger, sex, power, achievement, and curiosity are merely manifestations of the sovereign purpose of life, to actualize oneself.

4. **Avoidance.** Webster (2012) defined it as obsolete, an action of emptying, vacating, or clearing away. An act or practice of withdrawing from something or someone. Out of the 11 participants, three have responded with an act of avoidance. One of the participants shared that “I would just ignore them.” Manuel (2013) mentioned that people who then opt to ignore the abuse or the bullying act. There are a number of reasons why other people prefer not to intervene. Typically, they are worried that they would worsen the situation or risk of becoming the next bullied/victim. According to Estoque (2006), avoid emotion-provoking situations, this pertains to situations where experience, particularly negative emotions dominate the situation.

5. **Trauma.** Webster (2012) defined it as a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time. Out of the 11 participants, only three have
mentioned an effect of trauma due to their experience. One of the shared experience was “I’m afraid to stand in front of class.” As mentioned by Manuel (2013), they often become shy type, timid and anxious. As a result, their self-esteem declines.

6. Retaliation. It is defined as to do something bad to someone who has hurt you or treated you badly: to get revenge against someone. Aggression is also closely related to this because it is defined as motivated by a desire for a noxious outcome. It is a behavior whose goal is the injury of some person or object (Hoyenga, 1984). Nine out of the 11 participants have responded with an effect of retaliation. One of the shared experience was “I became more aggressive.” Furthermore, aggressive behavior has been related to an aggression motive such as anger or hostility. A distinct aggression motive would represent a need, desire, or drive that could be satisfied only by aggressive behaviors. Estoque (2006) suggested a way to cope with such bullying experience. He mentioned to find substitute outlet. Sigmund Freud has a relative term for this concept, displacement. Though displacement is a form of a defense mechanism, some problems simply have no direct solutions. Thus, the utility of an indirect solution is a better alternative than no solution at all. He added that displacement is the expression of an impulse or emotion that is redirected from a more threatening source to a less threatening source. According to Shallcross (2013), for bullied persons, there can be an anger and resentment present. Victims often become bullies (Johnson, 2012).

7. Suicidal Ideation. This is defined by Webster (2012) as wanting to kill yourself: showing a desire to kill yourself: destructive to one’s own interests. Four have expressed suicidal ideation. An example of the statements made was, “Relapses... every now and then I just want to end it all. I actually have plans on how to do it. It is more of a back-up plan.” According to Shallcross (2013), not every student bullied will become suicidal, but that can be an ultimate choice and there is no second chance. As mentioned by Estoque (2006), introjection is known as internalization. This refers to the incorporation of external standard or values into the ego or self-structure in a way that an individual is not affected by external factors. This defense mechanism is very closely related to the ideation of committing a suicide of a person.

IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Bullying is defined by the participants as an act to insult, oppress, degrade and inflict physical violence to an individual repeatedly overtime.

2. Bullying experience are predominantly composed of assault on persona, assault on physical attributes, and assault on ability, denouncement and physical violence.

3. Long-Term effects of bullying are divided into two main themes: Positive and Negative. Resilience, Self-awareness, Motivation, and Indifference fall under the Positive effects of bullying, while Trauma, Retaliation, Avoidance, and Suicidal Ideation are categorized under the Negative effects of bullying.

Considering the statements given by the participants of the study and the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that:
1. The definitions that come into the minds of the participants are composed of insult, oppression, degradation, and physical violence.

2. The episodes that were experienced by the participants were assault on persona, assault on physical attributes, and assault on ability, denouncement and physical violence.

3. The Long-term effects of bullying on our participants were Resilience, Self-awareness, Motivation, Avoidance, Indifference, Trauma, Retaliation and Suicidal Ideation.

After meticulous study and analysis of the participants’ statements and with the psychologist’s professional opinion, the researchers recommend that to overcome the negative effects in their present behavior, counseling and stress debriefing be made available or be done as needed especially certain participants that have been identified and endorsed to need urgent attention due to suicidal ideation which is a prolonged effect. Furthermore, we strongly encourage that the participants be informed that there is help available for them and that they are entitled to take that opportunity.

Since the study revealed that bullying is represented in several different types, the researchers recommend that teaching with complete awareness of the actions and gestures shown to students be exercised at all times to promote a more harmonious environment for learning. This will minimize if not eliminate the occurrence of bullying in the classroom and clinical setting. To the academe, we recommend that they should conduct special programs to be able to identify the students which had a bullying experience in the past and be able to address the negative effects brought about by such incidents. To the nursing practice, we recommend them to shed awareness to the nursing population to be able to intercept the factors that could lead to the spread of this social problem and come up with a solution the problems in existence.

Further research should be done regarding the topic to help improve the relationship of teachers, clinical instructors, and students among themselves. We recommend for the future researchers to conduct a Quantitative Study based on our research. Furthermore, to look into having a study of the perspective of the Bully and not from the victim.

REFERENCES


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