

Bullying in Public Secondary Schools in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya: Appraisal of Administrative Interventions

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ABSTRACT

The Global School-based Health Survey 2017 ranks Kenya among the top countries in the world with high prevalence of secondary school bullying (UNESCO, 2017). This study considered current administrative interventions that address bullying in schools. The study adopted qualitative design with an ex-post facto strategy. The objectives of the study were to: analyse whether the current bullying interventions in public secondary schools reduce the vice, and examine whether students are equipped with self-skills to handle bullies. Census sampling was used to identify respondents of different public secondary schools in Uasin-Gishu County. Data was collected through questionnaire, document analysis, Focused Group Discussion and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that the current administrative interventions do not discourage the behavior, but facilitates its spreads; thus entrenching the culture in the schools. In addition, findings revealed that there are no ongoing programmes in schools to equip students with skills to handle bullies. We recommend that bullies be held responsible for their actions i.e. violation of others' rights; prefects should be restricted to detecting and reporting of students' misbehavior, and all students should be equipped with skills for self-defense in order to handle bullies. We concluded that failure to hold bullies accountable for their actions by school authorities can transform them into a generation of entitled adults, who think they are untouchable and above the law.

Key words: Bullying, School management appraisal, Interventions

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying, which is expressed in various forms, is a repetitive aggressive pattern of behavior intended to provoke, hurt or distress others. These others appear different in physical appearance, social, economic, racial or ethnic backgrounds (Hernandez, 2015, Boezaart, 2014, Kassiem, 2007, Lumsden, 2002)). Causes of bullying are varied, they

include but not limited to dysfunctional family backgrounds, revenge, school culture, peer pressure and inactivity of stakeholders (UNESCO, 2017, 2016 and 2015, UNICEF, 2003-2008). Bullying is an acknowledged vice that confronts most basic learning institutions worldwide. Some governments have ongoing measures of interventions in place to combat it (UNESCO 2017, Boezaart, 2014: WCG, 2012: Sampson, 2009; Kassiem, 2007). Gains made against this behavior has influenced need to rid schools of this problem based on UNESCO (2016) guidelines for willing countries, localized to suit various institutions. Several countries around the world, Canada, Norway, United States of America, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Senegal among others (UNESCO,2017, Lumsden2002,Harnandez, 2015) have localized and implemented the guidelines, and reported positive outcomes.

Some of the specific interventions programmes include; National Child Prevention System (Rwanda), Stop Violence Among Children (Croatia). Others are; The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (Norway), Safe School Programme in (Ghana and Malawi piloted by UNICEF (2003-2008), Learn Without Fear (Senegal, Dominican Republic, Yemen, and Congo) and The Good Schools Toolkit (Uganda) (Devries, et al 2013) The positive interventions outcomes were a result of concerted campaigns by all stakeholders aimed at removing fear from school environments and replacing it with security for meaningful learning ((UNESCO, 2017). These efforts are an assurance to bullied learners that people know and care about their welfare and act when they receive information on their situations (UNESCO, 2017, 2014 WCG, 2012, UNICEF, 2003-2008, Kassiem, 2007, Olweus, 2005, Smoswisk & Kopasz, 2005). Such interventions communicates schools zero tolerance to bullying.

Foundation of successful interventions is the basic responsibility of school heads, who act as daily managers and administrators of school routine, working through staff members. Marishane, Merwe, Zengele,& Zyl(2013) argue that school managers have a primary

responsibility to create a child friendly learning environment culture, which is a basis of fighting bullying and other vices, saying, "If an organization has nothing going for it except one thing-good management - it will succeed. If it has everything except good management, it will fail" (pp1)

Good management is a result of active support of managers by teaching staff which creates desire to implement collective aims and goals on child friendly learning atmosphere. The safety of learners becomes top priority concern of teachers and a foundation of suggested anti-bullying culture that,

- i. Develops , promotes & fulfils human rights
- ii. Equips learners with skills to assert themselves in the face harassment
- iii. Creates awareness of forms of harassment
- iv. Creates trust , a key element of students opening up and enforcing rules on the same

(Marishane, Merwe, Zengele, & Zyx, 2013).

This culture creates awareness of what constitutes bullying, provides skills to face bullies and knowledge of actions taken by school on the vice. When bullies see response by management on their vices, they can act with caution, which slows down its spread in schools. Silence, fear by victims and non-action by schools are the ingredients bullies require to continue with vices with full knowledge that nothing will be done against them. The importance of self-skills to confront bullies was expressed by Obama (2018) saying that;

.....every time i went to Euclid parking she would make quiet, cutting remarks, as if by just showing up ,l'd ruin every one's day. As summer went on, DeeDee's comments grew louder. My morale began to sink. I understood that I had choices. I would continue as a picked on new girl, I could give up on the Parkway and just go back to my toys at home, or I could attempt to earn DeeDee's

respect. And inside the last choice, lay another one. I could try to reason with DeeDee to win her with words or some form of kid's diplomacy, or I could just shut up. The next time DeeDee made one of her remarks, I lunged at her, summoning everything my dad had taught me about how to throw a punch.....when it was done, some sort of baptism had taken place. I was officially accepted as a member of the neighbourhood tribe..... (pp. 24)

While physical fighting may not be an option for all bullied learners, but other forms of self-skills are critical to confront bullies and stop the silence by victims worldwide.

The constitution of Kenya (GOK, 2010) emphasizes the provision of quality education and training as a fundamental right of all Kenyan children. It recognizes education as the foundation of overall economic development of the nation. The Kenyan government is aware of bullying in schools and has legal provisions in place to protect rights of learners and empower school administrators to address it (GOK, 2010, 2013, 2015). The Education Act, 2013, outlaws any form of psychological or physical punishment of students. It spells out punishments for those who contravene this, which includes upon conviction, jail terms or payment of fines. These interventions are time consuming, in theory but in reality, nobody has ever been convicted based on the same, knowledge well known to bullies.

National Education Sector Plan (NESP) developed by Ministry of Education to guide the development of education and training, acknowledges challenges of bullying in schools. It points out that appointment of institutions heads, Board of Management among others, which is another problem, should be based on professionalism rather than who is who in society, The Koech Commission (1999) noted and recommended appointment of school heads devoid of external interested parties, but it is yet to be implemented. How does then, the government expect good management from school heads, who should create

conducive learning environments without investing in their proper preparation and appointment?.The NESP focus on education quality, equity, access, governance, accountability, social competencies and values (MOE, 2016) cannot be realized fully without addressing bullying through realistic interventions.

At school level, heads are responsible for day to day administration and management of school routines. Prefects come at the bottom of the administrative ladder, whose main role is to maintain law and order among students. . The old administrative structure of prefects has been replaced by a new structure that consists of Class Secretaries/Representatives, Governors, Members of Constituency Assembly (MCA) and Presidents. In addition, while prefects were previously appointed by staff members, they are currently elected by other students after structured campaigns for the various positions. In some schools, they are sworn in by members of the judiciary before taking office, an indicator of seriousness held by schools to the process. Some schools have enabled prefects to enjoy several privileges as, sleeping in cubicles (when others sleep in open hall), eating top layer, provision of daily snacks, assigned errand boys/girls, enjoy yearly trips, are punishable by principals only and consulted in decision making (Wanzala, Iraki, Oduor, Nyabundi, Kagotho, Thuo, 2017). These privileges have created a clique of students who have become powerful tools of bullying others in the name of maintaining law and order. The Ministry of Education Act (MOE, 2014), allows them to administer minor punishments to other students but under the supervision of deputy-principals. Here lies the basis upon which prefects have become a powerful force in schools, as punishments to other students are no longer minor and are not supervised deputy head teachers (MOE, 2014).

Other interventions measures include; transfer of bullies to other institutions, expulsion and suspension. It is a well-known secret that expulsion is a long process, while transfers exports bullying to other schools, spreading it. Corporal punishment, though illegal, is secretly the common instant method in use by schools, which in itself, is a common form

of bullying in schools by teachers and well known to parents, which prefects observe and misuse on other students. All these interventions are weak and do not appear to discourage bullying but results into unintended outcome of spreading the vice. This has denied bullied students conducive learning environment, a basic require for quality learning (Ingule, Rono, Ndambuki, 2013). The guidance and counseling offices are available as first line of strategies where bullied students can seek help (GOK, 1999, 2013). These offices are not active as responsible teachers are overloaded with academic work, to give meaningful attention to them and they are not professionals in counseling.

Statement of the problem

In early 2017, the media revealed long standing bullying culture in one of the national schools after investigation by Teachers Service Commission. This revelation was accompanied by graphic pictures of the bullied, in response, the principal of the school retired (Ouma, 2017, Oduor, 2017). Claims of high cases of sodomy and other rampant forms of bullying emerged in another school of similar status; the principal was suspended by the Ministry of Education (Okello, 2017, Nyabudi, & Odhiambo, 2017). In both schools, the administration and management, acknowledged reality of this practice but appeared to be groping in darkness on how to address it. The Board of Management in one of the schools threatened to resign unless the principal was reinstated (Magut, 2017). This move was supported by the association of old students which appealed against the suspension. This is not an isolated incident, it mirrors bullying in some public secondary schools characterized by denials and blame shifting instead of action. They only come to public domain when victims suffer serious physical injuries or death. The code of silence by schools has placed Kenya among countries with highest levels of bullying globally (UNESCO, 2017). This study focuses on interventions administration can put in place to address bullying

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative methodology with a survey design with Ex-post facto strategy. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents from public universities in Uasin-Gishu County, pursuing different degree courses. The target population was 158 participants comprising 32% (first years), 30% (second years), 54% (third years), 28% (fourth years), 8% (fifth years), 12% (sixth years), representing 78 (49%) females and 80 (51%) males .Data was collected through questionnaire, document analysis, Focused Group Discussion and analyzed by Inferential and descriptive statistics.

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Analyse whether the current bullying interventions in public secondary schools reduce it
2. Examine whether students are equipped with self-skills to handle bullies

Research questions were;

- i. Do the current bullying interventions reduce it?
- ii. Are students equipped with self-skills to handle bullies?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Bullying by Prefects and Senior Students

When participants were asked to list individuals who bullied them, prefects topped at 46%, closely followed by senior students at 37% and others at 12%. The most common form of bullying by prefects was corporal punishment, while senior students preferred name calling, isolation, theft personal items, running errands, and buying provisions for bullies, and ridicule among others. On the item of which time they suffered most during the bullying experiences, 73% agreed it was intense in form one, and marked the most uncomfortable time of their memory in secondary school education. Respondents identified school areas where bullying was most likely to occur as; playgrounds (41%),

dormitories (21%), dining halls (13), and washrooms (10%). When asked to recall whether they signed upon entry to school any anti-bullying rules, majority (73%) said no.

On the item of whether respondents reported the incidences to school authority, majority (65%) said no, while 20% indicated yes. The majority who decided not to report explained that their decisions were influenced by fellow students, who had been bullied but the administrative interventions were either too weak to make any meaningful change or at worse no-action was taken. Prefects, who form part of school administrative chain, are required to maintain discipline among students by reporting breaches of school Rules and Regulations to school authorities. In addition, they can also administer minor punishments under supervision of deputy principals, who are in charge of general school discipline (GOK, 2014).

This power is widely abused in schools in the process of execution of their general duties. It was best captured by the media reporting that;

.....a prefect at one of the top national schools in the country brutally beat up a form two student. The matter was reported to school principal who promptly investigated the case, established the prefect's culpability, and suspended him.....a day later, the school captain stormed the principal's office at 7.16 a.m. and threw ties belonging to other prefects at his desk in an act of solidarity with their suspended colleague.....prefects who talked during the Board of Management meeting demonstrated open contempt for the principal, calling him incompetent and undeserving to run the school....They said the principal is emotional and unprofessional. He does not conduct himself like a national school principal.....the renegade prefects were reinstated unconditionally..... (Wanzala, pp8)

The perception of prefects' body through the captain of principal and poor judgment on the side of Board of Management is a clear testimony of their untouchable raw power in schools. It stamped their power not only on other students but staff in general. The administration and the Board of Management inconsistent response to bullying, was unfortunate, as it has to be addressed from a collective platform. This communicates strongly school's stand on the vice.

Bullying by Teachers

On the item of whether participants were bullied by teachers, majority 42.5% said yes. When required to mention methods used, they listed caning, ridicule on weak academic performance, profiling, detention over lunch, kneeling down during lessons, sleeping on the grass face up during dry seasons, among others. Some teachers bully indirectly by ordering errant group of students to cane one another. This places such teachers on the right side of the law that banned corporal punishment in 2001 (Amutabi, 2013). Use of corporal punishment, a long standing bullying method by teachers in schools was tolerated by parents during and after colonialism. They erroneously believed it was the best method to produce good academic results. This belief was clearly illustrated by Ngugi (1965) who noted that;

And mothers and fathers waited, expecting their children to
Come home full of learning and wisdom. Parents would feel
proud, very proud, when a son came home in the evening
with a tear-washed face. Beaten? There, don't cry. You are
a man, and he is a teacher, you know. That teacher is good,
he beats them hard. And to the teacher passing through the
village hey, teacher, Yes? Beat them hard, we want them
to learn. The children saw the enthusiasm of their parents
.....they were the hope and glory of the tribe.....
....., pp 68

The same belief holds true even in our modern society, despite ban of corporal punishment by the government (Amutabi, 2013). Most parents want good results from their children, any process justifies the end. It is not uncommon for them to advise their children to persevere, especially if they are in prestigious national schools (Hart, 2017). This contributes to use of various bullying methods by teachers, especially caning, which is well known to school administration to produce highly valued grades. Most of the bullied students have nowhere to seek audience, either at home or school and continue to suffer in silence. Schools are central to reduction of bullying, but when teachers turn into perpetrators while others become onlookers, it increases its prevalence. Good management practices, with safety of students at heart, give the tone on how students should be handled by all members of school community.

School Response to Bullying

Participants were asked to list actions taken by schools against bullying, suspension (45%) was mentioned as the most common response, caning for non-prefects (30%) and verbal warning (21%). The affected students dismissed it as a slap on the wrist compared to the level of psychological and physical injuries inflicted on them by bullies. These interventions created more fear, and bullied students directed their focus on how to survive rather which it intensified the vice as other prefects ganged against the victim. This created more fear as the bullied interpreted, and correctly, as a warning to anyone who dared report them to authorities (Respondent, 2017). Guidance and counseling in schools should be the first line of coping strategy for bullied students, contributions from Focused Group Discussions indicated students did not trust these offices; this was summarized by one of the respondents saying that;

These offices are a big joke in schools, you visit once and you realize your issues are now subject of discussion in staffrooms; even other teachers use the information to make fun of you. How can students expect such help from office, and sensitive information kept on bullying confidential? (Respondent, 2017)

When there is no trust in teachers whom students look up to for help, they will keep away. On asking the participants in Focused Group Discussion whether they ever bullied junior students in revenge, majority (68.8%) said no. They said it was not right to bully others, based on their religious, family, and personal values which played crucial role in restraining them from transforming into bullies. This pool of students can be trusted to help school administration in campaigning against bullying in various forms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bullying is a recognized vice which is a challenge in many schools worldwide and should be acknowledged and addressed, rather than denials. Many countries have put collaborative measures in place, and campaigned against it, which has resulted in positive outcomes. This has greatly improved learning environment of bullied students, enabling them maximize their academic potentials. There is need in Kenya to accept the presence of bullying in schools and campaign against it with moral and financial support from all stakeholders, including students at school level. Denials will never be solution as bullied students are subjected to untold cruelty as adults who are responsible for their safety look the other way. Time is now for actions, otherwise schools will transform bullies into a generation of entitled adults.

Recommendations

- i. Bullies should be held responsible for their behavior which is unacceptable and violation of others rights by professional school administrators, managers and Teachers Service Commission. Punishments of misbehaving students should be the sole responsibility of administrators and regular campaigns against this evil should be done at schools, and be subjected to monitoring and evaluation by Ministry of Education.
- ii. Students should be equipped with skills to handle bullies by schools, and avoid playing role of victimhood and self-pity, they should associate with

positive friends, be consistent in saying no, remain active, avoid withdrawal from daily routine activities, be assertive, this indicates that they are not easy prey

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