INTRODUCTION

School bullying has been around for time immemorial and it has become a pressing issue for schools today. Research indicates that bullying has an invasive effect on the learning environment of a school (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Notably however, empirical research on bullying is a relatively recent focus. The earliest studies emerging were from the 1970s in Scandinavia (Olweus, 1978). In several countries, including the United States of America, public concern about school bullying increased dramatically in the late 1990s (Marr & Fields, 2001; Godfrey, 2005). Since then, bullying has received unprecedented attention in the media and in academia, both nationally and internationally (see e.g., Norelawaty, Zuria, & Noran-Fauziah, 2008; Jimerson, Swearer, & Espelage, 2010; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010; Wan-Salwina et al., 2014) and remains a significant concern among parents and educators.

Bullying has been defined as a subcategory of interpersonal aggression characterized by intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power, with abuse of power being a primary distinction between bullying and other forms of aggression (see e.g., Smith & Morita, 1999; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Bullying, may takes many forms. It could be in the form of physical bullying (direct physical harm); verbal bullying (verbal taunts and threats); to relational or social bullying (exclusion, humiliation, and rumor-spreading); or cyberbullying (electronic harassment using texts, e-mails, or online mediums). Although physical and cyberbullying are often the cause for alarm, the more common forms of bullying experienced by students are actually social and verbal (Vaillancourt, Trinh, et al. 2010).

There are a growing body of evidence on the concurrent and long-term consequences of bullying for both bullies (see Rodkin et al., 2015) and victims (see McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Research is needed to establish policies and interventions designed to prevent bullying and its negative effects.

Therefore in bullying cases, to succeed in suggesting an intervention measure which assists these students to stop their harmful aggressive behavior, there’s a need to be able to recognize and appropriately address the underlying motivations behind a bully’s behavior. Toward that objective,
firstly, this article will focus on distinguishing the characteristics of bullies and some of the factors that lead to such behaviors. Literatures on the importance of counseling as an intervention measure in dealing with bullying cases are discussed. Next, a case study of an identified bully and the factors that may lead to such behaviors is investigated. Drawing from the analysis of the information gathered from the identified bully, a possible intervention measure using counseling services is suggested.

Spotting a Bully: Patterns of Behavior and Underlying Factors

Several researchers have argued on the best means and guidelines for assessing bullying and victimization (see e.g., Cornell & Cole, 2012; Swearer, Siebecker, Johnsen-Frerichs, & Wang, 2010). In reality assessing such complex behavior involves multiple participants and is influenced by various factors and could not be based simply on one single method or standard. Notably, bullying has been assessed via parent, teacher, and peer reports, as well as direct observations and self-report assessments (Pellegrini, 2001) and interviews (Huddleston et.al, 2011).

According to Lyznicki (2004), a bully may witness physical and verbal violence or aggression at home. They have a positive view of this behavior, and they act aggressively toward other people, including adults. They may hit or push other children and are often physically strong. More often than not they have trouble following rules and show very little concern for the feelings of others. Interestingly enough, many bullies think highly of themselves and often expect everyone to behave according to their wishes. Bullies are often not taught to consider other people’s feelings.

A study conducted by the Center for Adolescent Studies at Indiana University, of 558 sixth to eighth graders offers some interesting insights on the factors ‘motivating’ such bullying behaviors (Sharma, 1996). The study compared bullying children and non-bullying children regarding their home environment and personal behaviors. The findings suggest that, a bully’s behavior can be attributed to risk factors such as, fewer positive adult role models, being allowed to watch violent television at home. At home, when they are disciplined, they face more forceful parental discipline. Bullies have limited contact with positive adult role models and consequently, they don’t get adequate opportunity to role model for ideal social skills. Bullies also have fewer positive peer influences. Perhaps, the peers with whom bullies identify are also trying to dominate others by fear and coercion.

The researchers in the study also identified children who were "high-scale bullies;" based on behaviors such as, hitting, hurting, and humiliating other children. The study showed that, “less than one third of the high-scale bullies lived with both of their natural parents. More than one third did not have both parents living under the same roof. Aside from the lack of a two parent upbringing, many children endure abuse. “Fifty percent of bullies come from an abusive environment. So in turn they hand out to others, what they personally receive”. The study claimed that some of these bullies are mean, but others are simply trying to connect with others. Thus, it can be seen that bullying behavior is not just the result of individual characteristics, but is influenced by multiple relationships with peers, families, teachers, and interactions with society including nowadays, social media and technology.

Counseling as an Intervention Measure

Bullying behavior is a sign that one has not learned to control his or her aggression. Therefore, considerable emphasis has been placed on identifying the most effective intervention measures to address bullying. One such intervention measure is counseling services.

According to the American Counseling Association, counseling is defined as, “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals." It involves assisting people make the necessary changes in the ways they think, feel, and behave, and is a goal-based collaborative process, involving a non-judgmental, supportive counselor.
who works with a client in telling his or her story, setting viable goals, and developing strategies and plans necessary to accomplish these goals. Research and literature have shown that counseling for identified or suspected bullies is a necessary component of any comprehensive programs aimed at preventing or stopping bullying behavior (Davis, 2006). In school, for example, counseling programs have significant influence on discipline problems. Several studies (Baker & Gerler, 2001) reported that students who participated in a school counseling program had significantly less inappropriate behaviors and more positive attitudes toward school than those students who did not participate in the program and significantly decreased participants' aggressive and hostile behaviors.

Hence, one way a bully can learn healthy ways to interact with people is through counseling services. A professional counselor can guide an identified or suspected bully into discovering why bullying is a negative and harmful behavior. Through counseling, a known or suspected bully can be encouraged to develop empathy, which means being sensitive to and understanding the feelings of others. Therefore, counselors can be instrumental in working with schools, parents, and communities in dealing with the widespread phenomenon of bullying.

Counseling process usually involve a 5 stages-process. The first stage involves the counselor building rapport with the client, while in stage two, requires the counselor to assess the client's feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and interpersonal dynamics. In the next stage, a counselor will have to work with the client on certain goal setting. In the fourth stage – the intervention stage – follows through the client and counselor into establishing a therapeutic plan for change, reviewing the goals set in the process, and preparing for the final stage - termination. In the final stage of the counseling process, the counselor and client assess client change, goal accomplishment, skills gained, available resources and supports, and potential obstacles. Obviously for bullies who may be known to be difficult and uncommitted clients, several follow-up counseling may be necessary for a successful intervention.

A counselor’s counseling approach may also need to be determined in dealing with bullying cases. There are many ways counselors may approach counseling based on several counseling theories. These theories provide counselors with a framework that they can use to explore the counseling process, the clients’ problems, and to measure progress. The three main ones are psychodynamic, humanistic and behavioural.

Psychodynamic counselling evolved from the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud, a medical doctor came across many patients who suffered from medical conditions which appeared to have no 'physical cause'. He believed that the origin of such illnesses lay in the unconscious mind of the patient. Freud's work investigated the unconscious mind in order to understand his patients and assist in their healing.

In the humanistic counselling process, childhood events and difficulties are not given the same importance. Humanistic counselling recognizes the uniqueness of every individual. Humanistic counselling assumes that everyone has an innate capacity to grow emotionally and psychologically towards the goals of self-actualization and personal fulfilment. Humanistic counsellors aim to help clients to explore their own thoughts and feelings and to work out their own solutions to their problems.

Behavioral counseling approach focuses on the assumption that the environment determines an individual's behaviour. How an individual responds to a given situation is due to behaviour that has been reinforced as a child. Behavioural therapies evolved from psychological research and theories of learning concerned with observable behaviour, i.e. behaviour that can be objectively viewed and measured. In contrast to the psychodynamic approach that emphasizes that behaviour is determined by instinctual drives, behaviourists believe that that behaviour is 'learned' and, therefore, it can be unlearned.

However, research indicates that regardless of what theoretical orientation a counselor is operating from, there are certain common factors that appear to be connected to client improvement, i.e. the client himself or herself, the client-counselor
relationship, the hope and expectancy from the process and the technique employed by the counselor. In other words, it would appear that clients are more likely to achieve their goals when a good and positive relationship exists between them and their counselors. In essence the counselor’s interactions with the client are a powerful tool in the relationship. While many individuals may have the attributes to become extraordinary counselors, skills have to be cultivated and nurtured if one wants to be a great counselor. A truly great counselor integrates all aspects of effective counseling practices to make sure treatment gains are maintained long after termination. The three most useful skills or attributes to possess as a counselor are flexibility, empathy and advocacy.

There now are many effective strategies for countering bullying. Increasingly, communities are exploring counseling’s role in school-based bullying intervention programs. Designing a comprehensive intervention program using counseling as part of the strategies should involve students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community personnel. Research is therefore needed to establish database for future policies and interventions designed to prevent bullying and its negative effects. This paper thus, despite its limitation, presents a case study that contributes to some form of preliminary data that may assist in the design of an intervention for bullies that has implications for practice and related policies regarding bullying.

METHODOLOGY

Context

For this case study, a qualitative approach was taken to collect information on this topic. Several daily observations were first conducted in a chosen school in order to identify students that had the characteristics of a bully. An informal interview was conducted with teachers and parents at the school during recess period or after school hours to gather information of any referred or identified students with any reports of bullying behaviours. Once identified, the target student was observed informally to determine the frequency and nature of bullying behaviors.

Because this study involved the participation of human respondent, certain ethical issues are addressed. It is necessary to consider these ethical issues for the purpose of ensuring the privacy of the informants. Among the significant ethical issues that are considered in the research process include consent and confidentiality. Verbal permission was sought from the principal and the parent to approach the student for the interview. The confidentiality of the informants will also be ensured by not disclosing their names or personal information in the research. For privacy purposes, the interview was conducted in one area of the school, away from the rest of the school’s population. For the interview session, the researcher had tried to incorporate the 5-stages counseling process and prepping for the skills needed for the first counseling interview.

The interview conducted with the target student involves note taking and the data was later analyzed for major themes. The interview was semi-structured, with the following examples of questions asked of the student shown below (the questions in brackets are prompt):

i)  What is the worst thing you ever did? (Have you ever tried to make someone cry or feel scared?) (What did you do to hurt someone or make them feel bad?) (Do you or your friends make fun of anyone at school or outside of school?)

ii) What is the worst thing that has happened to you? (Does anyone do hurtful things to you? – tease, insult, touch wrongly, exclude you from groups, send hurtful e-mails/texts) (If so, how does that make you feel?)

iii) What things get you upset or mad? Why? What do you do when angry?

iv) How does it feel when you make another person feel bad? (How does it make you feel when others are afraid or you?)

v) What do your parents do when you do things that you shouldn’t?

Informant’s Profile
The target student for the case study was Aini, 14, of Malay ethnicity student enrolled into one of the Form 2 classes of a local Secondary School in Seremban. She’s plump but tall for a 14-years-old girl, making her physical appearance to be rather burly. She has a darker complexion for a Malay and severe acne on her face. Aini’s mother (Mrs L) when approached by the researcher provided Aini’s background information. Aini lived with both her parents and ten-year-old sister and seven-year-old brother nearby the school. Aini’s father often spent time working outstation and was always away from home for a long period of time.

Aini was identified to have bullying tendencies from some of her actions which were either reported or observed during the initial stage of the study. Aini had a tendency to become physically aggressive with her peers. She used to kick the back of his classmates’ chair in class. Once, she pushed a smaller built peer of hers into the sides of the school’s notice board during recess. But mostly, she will simply resort to verbal abuses in the forms of name-calling. Her bullying actions were later self-confirmed during the interview. Aini when approached appeared to “ignore the comments of adults” and seemed unfazed by how her actions or remarks were perceived by peers and others. Aini’s mother claimed that such reports of Aini’s bullying behavior had only started sometimes last year. Mrs L had used to brush off the matter, since she was always busy trying to manage her household mostly on her own. Further, she thought Aini was simply going through a ‘phase’ in her life as a teenager.

**Findings**

The resulting themes from the analysis of the interview elucidated the perspectives of the informant on: (i) the underlying ‘motivation’ for her action and (ii) failure in recognizing the appropriateness of her action.

**The Underlying Motivation for her Action**

The study’s findings indicated that while people bully for many reasons, sometimes because they’re mirroring the aggressive behavior of their parents or sometimes because they feel abandoned coming from a household going through a divorce or financial problems, such is not the case with Aini. Instead, her bullying ‘motivation’ mostly, actually derived from her feelings of tremendous insecurity.

When asked of the worst thing that has happened to her, whether anyone had done any hurtful things to her, she stated the following:

> “Some time last year, when I was in Form One, while I was at a classmate house for a Koko (extra-curricular) group discussion, I stumbled upon some writings in which that classmate and some other friends of hers had assign ‘marks’ for every girl in our class on personality and looks. I got a six in personality — and a three for my looks.”

She further expressed her feelings when probed on how such discovery made her feel:

> “I started to constantly worry about my looks and many other things. I get so sad, mad and frustrated sometimes. I feel like no one cares about me. They all just care about themselves. I don’t want to worry my mom. I don’t think she has the time anyway.”

**Failure in Recognizing the Appropriateness of her Action**

The informant had also failed to recognize the consequences of her actions, especially when she made others feel bad through her words or when she treated them aggressively. She felt she was ‘entitled’ to such bullying actions considering the treatment she received from others, alluding to the fact when she found out that her peers find her unattractive.

In her remarks, she noted, “I don’t really think of my actions. I felt I was treated badly. In fact, I never considered their feelings or lives at all. I don’t really care. Only what I feel mattered.”
The informant also claimed that her actions seem justified because she thought she was the only person in the world who encountered such feeling (of insecurity), insisting that “I have never thought that the people I was picking on were probably thinking or having the same feeling about themselves.”

**DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Broadly, the findings suggest that there are always some underlying factors that triggered a bully’s action. In the informant’s case it was the feeling of insecurity and little positive adult attention at home and in which discipline is probably inconsistent. The study’s findings also indicated that the informant is comfortable with her own behavior and found them to be justified and therefore, failed to empathize with her victims.

According to the behavioral theory, behavior is a product of learning experiences and we, as humans are not only a product of our environment but the producer of our environment as well. “Behavior is shaped and maintained by its consequences.” (Okun, & Kantrowitz, 2008, p. 134). Overall, behavior theory stresses that a person is shaped by learning and environment. Therefore, in bullying case like the one reported in this case study, the emphasis is put on current behaviors and the treatment goals is how to change undesirable behaviors. The general goals are to increase personal choice and to create new conditions for learning. The main aim is “to eliminate mal-adaptive behaviors and to replace them with more constructive patterns.”(Corey & Corey, 2011, p. 169). Behavior theory is a good explanation of why we behave the way we do and how motivating factors throughout our lives play an important role in behavior.

In line with these findings and the most probable underlying theory explaining bullying behaviours, the following are some practical considerations that need to be considered if counseling were to be employed as an intervention measure to address the problems of bullying in this case, specifically and for the schools and communities generally.

Considering that bullies tend to show little empathy for their targets (Ditzhazy & Burton, 2003), counseling services will need to provide interventions to improve students’ level of compassion and empathy. These include activities that foster sensitivity for the feelings of others. Role reversal techniques where students role play situations in which, they place themselves in the position of others may help to increase empathic understanding. Further dialogue and communication would focus on exploring other ways of communicating that are not hurtful. Radd (2003) developed a process that integrates self-esteem activities with life skills development whereby a counselor discusses with students the value of all people and their uniqueness. The counselor then goes on to tell them that because all people are special, valuable, and unique, all people have a responsibility to help and not hurt others. The importance of this is related by choosing helpful and non-hurtful ways of behaving toward others. A discussion about the consequences of hurting others, specifically one’s self-esteem can then be initiated.

**CONCLUSION**

This case study identified a bully and investigated the factors that may lead to such behaviors. The study acknowledged that in order to successfully propose an intervention measure in dealing with bullying case there’s a need to recognize the underlying motivations behind a bully’s behavior. Literature have shown that counseling may be an effective intervention measure in countering bullying problems in schools. Therefore, counseling, if approached based on appropriate data, with the right skills and strategies will be an effective intervention measure in dealing with bullies and improving their behaviours.

**REFERENCES**


