UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

THE INCIDENCE AND IMPACT OF BULLYING ON STUDENTS IN

SECOND CYCLE SCHOOLS IN GHANA: A CASE STUDY OF

SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE BAWKU MUNICIPALITY

KAAR, TIEME FREDERICK

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BY

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature………………………………   Date……………………

Name: **Kaar, Tieme Frederick**

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature……………………..   Date……………….....

Name: **Rev. Prof. J.K Essuman**

Co-supervisor's Signature……………………   Date………....................

Name: **Dr. (Mrs.) Linda Djama Forde**

ABSTRACT

This piece of work sought to find out the incidence and impact of bullying on students in the two second cycle schools in the Bawku Municipality namely; Bawku Senior High School and Bawku Technical Institute. The researcher looked at the physical, psychological, personal-social, and academic impact of bullying on students.

A mixed study design was used. It comprises partly quantitative and partly qualitative aspects. A questionnaire was first administered on students and was followed up with an interview. Population of 1,879 made up of all first and second year students in the two schools were used. The sample frame was 300 respondents. Multistage sampling procedure was used in arriving at that figure. From the 300 respondents, 18 were purposively sampled and interviewed. A research questionnaire made up of 40 items was designed for the respondents to answer. Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) version 15.0. Simple frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data for answering the research questions.

From the analysis, it was found that the incidence of bullying in the two schools was high. Major effects found were; "victims fell sick easily and were living under constant fear". Again, students had difficulties in concentrating on their academic work. It was recommended that students be sensitized on bullying and its adverse effects on victims. Victims should be encouraged to report bullying issues to the appropriate authorities for redress. Finally, students' views should be collated and considered when designing anti-bullying programmes.

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I also acknowledge all works I cited throughout this write up; and anything fallen short, I do accept the blame.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Kaars and the whole of the "Kusieley Clan".

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

We hear in the mass media every day about epidemics of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, gang violence, armed robbery, domestic violence, poverty and death, and the human misery these problems cause. There is one social ill of equally damaging proportions that society has so far refused to acknowledge: thus "bullying in our schools".

Bullying is in the same league as harassment, discrimination, racism, violence, assault, stalking, physical abuse, sexual abuse, molestation and rape. It causes trauma and psychiatric injury and, if untreated, can cause a psychiatric injury of sufficient seriousness to blight a person for life. This can lead to a lower standard of educational achievement, poor standard of health, and can prevent a person from realizing his/her potential. These could lead to a person contributing less to society than would otherwise have been the case.

Bullying comprises direct behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing that are initiated by one or more students against a victim. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be more indirect by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion. While boys typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are more apt to utilize

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more subtle indirect strategies, such as spreading rumours and enforcing social isolation (Ahmad and Smith, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994). Researchers content that whether bullying is direct or indirect, the key component of bullying is that the physical or psychological intimidation occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and/or abuse (Batsche and Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

Bullying, a form of school violence, is a problem in schools. Bullying is used to describe a variety of acts that can be inflicted by a single person or group with the intention of causing harm physically or psychologically to another person. Olweus (1993), in his international studies of school bullying and its effects on its victims, suggests that one of the characteristics of bullying is the presence of a power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator (hereby called the bully) and repeated negative acts over time. Victims of bullying are often afraid of school, and this inhibits their ability to concentrate and may affect their academic performance (Bidewell, 1995).

Other research findings suggest that young people who bully are more likely to commit violent acts in later years (Oliver, Young, and LaSalle, 1994; Craig and Pepler, 1999). As found out by Olweus (1993) in Australia and other countries, various reports and studies have established that approximately 15% of students are either bullied regularly or are initiators of bullying behaviour. Batsche and Knoff, (1994); Nolin, Davies, and Chandler, (1995); Olweus, (1993); Whitney and Smith, (1993) studies reveal that direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years, peak in the middle or junior high school years, and

decline during the high school years. However, while direct physical assault seems to decrease with age, verbal abuse appears to remain constant. School size, racial or ethnic composition, and school setting (rural, suburban, or urban) do not seem to be distinguishing factors in predicting the occurrence of bullying. In the Ghanaian school setting, similar traits of bullying as observed by the above studies exist with boys being most of the perpetrators.

Similar studies conducted by O'Moore and Hillery (1989), and MacDougall (1993) reveal that bullying among school children is not a new phenomenon, as has been described in fictional works for centuries. They assert that most adults can still remember incidents of bullying in which they were either the bullies or the intended victims. Greenbaum, Turner, and Stephens (1989); and Wilson (1992), opine that the common perception has been that bullying is a relatively normal and harmless experience most children go through. However, of late it has become increasingly clear that bullying is, in fact, a problem needing prevention and intervention.

This silent epidemic (bullying) was broken by concerned researchers into the aftermath effects of bullying giving it a worldwide attention. A lot of interest in the problem of bullying, more especially in schools was evident in a survey of bullying and responses to bullying by Smith et al (1999) in over twenty-one countries in America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia.

Bullying among students in Second Cycle Schools knows no economic, social, cultural or geographical boundaries. A major contributor to the problem is the prevailing shroud of myths that muddy the issue and allow perpetrators to

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continue their actions unabated. Some common misconceptions include the following;

First, people are of the opinion that bullying is a rite of passage hence one just has to accept it. As observed by Marr and Field and cited by Wilson (1992) some people claim that harassment, discrimination, racism, violence, assault, stalking, physical abuse, sexual abuse, molestation, rape and domestic violence are rites of passage which every individual has to go through. This suggests that there is nothing wrong with someone being subjected to any inhuman treatment meted out by a bully.

Second, people have the mentality that everyone is capable of bullying. This makes bullies to justify their actions as it minimizes their aggression and make their behaviour appear as if normal behaviour. The claim that "everyone is capable of bullying" is as accurate as saying "everyone is capable of raping" or "everyone is capable of paedophile behaviour" and "everyone is capable of murdering". The difference is that whilst anyone is theoretically capable of any crime, the vast majority choose not to commit these crimes, whereas bullies choose to bully on a daily basis, and when held accountable, bullies deny or justify or rationalize their actions. As long as society clings to these and other beliefs, victims of bullying, their families and society as a whole, will continue to suffer.

Most behaviour of bullies it is said, have their roots in behavioural disorders as a result of bullying. Research conducted by Kauffman, Lolyd, Baker, and Riedel (1995) indicates that between 6% and 10% of children and youth have

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emotional or behavioural problems due to bullying. These problems impede students' development and ability to function satisfactorily in school and in the community. The data also suggest that majority of the students who require mental health services do not receive the appropriate care until their problems become severe. In school, many students with serious emotional or behavioural disorders remain in regular classes with little special help of any kind. For these students to function adequately in school and in the larger society, they require intensive treatment and effective programmes.

In Australia where there has been intensive research in bullying, bullying is being recognized as a major problem. Packages, strategies, programmes, and procedures are put in place to check this problem. But unfortunately there has been little thoughtful discussion on what exactly constitutes bullying. It is assumed that people know what it is and the only question is what actions should be taken. The question of what constitutes bullying is not merely a philosophical question suitable for after-dinner conversation but it is a question of pressing practical importance.

As established by studies in Scandinavian countries, a strong relationship appears to exist between bullying other students during the school years and experiencing legal or criminal troubles as adults. In one study, 60% of those characterized as bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 (Olweus, 1993). Chronic bullies seem to maintain their behaviours into adulthood, negatively influencing their ability to develop and maintain positive relationships (Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler, 1994).

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Bullying indeed scares its victims from school and eventually some of them become school dropouts. As observed by some studies, victims often fear school and consider school to be an unsafe and unhappy place. A study conducted in the United States of America indicates that as many as 7% of America's eighth-graders stay at home at least once a month because of bullies. The act of being bullied tends to increase some students' isolation because their peers do not want to lose status by associating with them or because they do not want to increase the risks of being bullied themselves. Being bullied, leads to depression and low self-esteem, problems that can be carried into adulthood (Olweus, 1993; Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Another observation made by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) in the U.S. states that students who are bullied are afraid to go to school; they have difficulty concentrating on their studies, have lower academic achievement levels, or are fearful of calling attention to themselves by speaking up in class. Ultimately, bullying creates a poor learning environment for all students. Some parents of students who are victims of bullying find it necessary to have their children transferred to other schools when bullying persists.

A study in Norway by Olweus (1993) indicates that victims of bullying typically are very unhappy children who suffer from fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem as a result of them being bullied. They may try to avoid school and social interaction in an effort to escape being bullied. Some victims of bullying are so distressed that they commit, or attempt to commit suicide. Several instances of

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suicide by boys who had been severely bullied occurred in Norway in the early 1980's. These tragic events mobilized the Norwegian country to begin a nation-wide anti-bullying program in the early 1980's.

Even when bullying does not drive victims to the extremes of suicide, victims experience significant psychological harm, which interferes with their social, academic and emotional development. The sooner bullying is stopped, the better the long-term outcome for victims. If bullying patterns are allowed to continue unchecked, there are long-term consequences for the victim. A follow-up study by Olweus (1993) found that by the time former male victims of bullying were in their early twenties, they had generally made a positive social adjustment, as they had more freedom to choose their social and work environment. However, they were more likely to be depressed, and had lower self-esteem than a comparison group who had not been bullied.

Another study by Olweus (1991) reveals that the impact of bullying is not only on their victims but also on the bullies themselves. Bullies tend to become aggressive adults who stand a much higher chance than average adults of obtaining multiple criminal convictions. Findings of Olweus, Rigby and Slee were confirmed by another study, which have found exactly the same outcome for children, especially males, who are aggressive as children (Loeber and Dishion, 1983).

Another important but often overlooked group of children who are affected by bullying are those children who are neither victims nor perpetrators of bullying, but who see bullying happen to their peers. There are also children who

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will not take the initiative to bully, but will follow a bully's lead in helping to harass or victimize a particular child in their class or school. All children, including bystanders, are negatively affected when bullying occurs. Bullying may cause anxiety or fear in bystanders as they stand and watch. Bullying poisons the learning environment, particularly when there are no effective interventions to stop it. Children who observe violent behaviour, and see that it has no negative consequences for the bully, will be more likely to use aggression in future. Further studies indicate that bystanders are seriously affected witnessing bullying. Banks (1997) supported this claim emphasizing that bullying does not just affect victims and bullies only but also it has an impact on majority of students who are often bystanders to bullying. Bullying creates a climate of fear and disrespect in schools and has a negative impact on school climate and student learning.

A question that needs urgent response is: should bullying be allowed to go on in our schools? Obviously not! Bullying should be stamped out with all the seriousness that it deserves. Pragmatic measures should be put in place to check the practice.

Statement of the Problem

According to Banks (1997), bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences for the general school climate and for the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. He asserts that bullying can also have negative lifelong consequences for students who bully and for their victims too. Although much of the formal research on bullying has taken place in the Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, and Japan, the problems

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