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## Research Article

### Bullying in the Sucs Classroom: A Hidden Epidemic?

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#### ABSTRACT

Several literatures have already pointed to the effects of bullying to the learners' journey in educational institution. Acts of bullying have even evolved from the actual or physical acts to virtual acts brought by the ever increasing ICT saturation around the world. The study explored the prevalence of bullying in SUCs by looking into the profile, the personal interpretation of bullying, the prevalence of bullying in the classroom, the effects of bullying, and the awareness on policies of bullying among tertiary students.

Using cross-sectional survey method with a questionnaire as the main instrument, 95 respondents were tapped. For the findings, majority of the respondents were females aged 18 – 24 years old, Varied definitions of bullying were presented indicating that these acts are done in multiple and in combination of ways by the perpetrators. The most dominant effects of bullying were low self-esteem, depression, shyness, perceived negative school climate and wanting to be left alone. These effects somehow diminished the motivation or desire of the learner to further seeking knowledge in school. Furthermore, learners expressed their frustration and interest in reaching their dreams and aspirations. One of the academic heads of the institution expressed during the interview that while there are existing policies in the institution against bullying, reporting cases of bullying is often problematic. This implies that responsible office could not immediately act on it unless victims come forward. Some said that bullying is part of the growing process and taking it seriously is a sign of immaturity thus it should not be considered as big deal. With respect of the EQ of the victims and non – victims there were significant differences in Self awareness, self motivation and empathy and no significant differences on managing emotions and social skills implying the victims are effective in keeping it among themselves. In conclusion, bullying is prevalent in SUCs and it is the method of reporting of cases that causes a seemingly lack of action on the part of the authorities. It is therefore recommended that inclusion of reporting mechanism and vigorous campaign against bullying must be included in the school

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academic manual. Furthermore, everyone in the institution should work hand in hand to halt this hidden epidemic.

**Keywords:** *Awareness, Bullying, Effects, Emotional quotient, Policies, State colleges and Universities*

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## Introduction

The classroom environment has a big impact on how students view learning. In order to meet the needs of the learners, school administrators must be able to provide a friendly, supportive environment that is free from risks and harm that can have an impact on them (Allen, 2010). Notably, bullying has an impact on students' conduct and academic performance in the classroom. The chance for a youngster to develop in a supportive environment could be ruined by bullying. Bullying has a broad effect on the victim, in the study of Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson (2004) they found out that in terms gender, male has the lowest incidence and tendency to report that they were bullied. This result owe sometimes to the notion that males should not be seen as emotionally soft and the incident is a simple rite of passage towards adulthood. In a different case, victims often show meekness in order not to further aggravate the situation or agitate the perpetrator (Horton, Kvist Lindholm & Nguyen, 2015) and thus some form of self-preservation while enduring the possible trauma.

In the study of Roland & Galloway (2002) they emphasized that classroom management had a direct impact on the prevalence of bullying. Bullying research in the realm of educational psychology has increased in the past 30 years; yet bullying has not decreased (Barrows, 2013). Farrington & Baldry (2010) found out that of all the individual risk factors they found from London boys, it was low impulsiveness and lack of empathy that needs to be targeted in cognitive – behavioral skills training program. This study highlights the role of experts in providing interventions not only to the victims but also the perpetrators. Interventions to the victims is also necessary since in the study of Kim, Catalano, Haggerty & Abbott (2011) childhood bullying could result to violence and substance abuse among young adults. This is a worrying scenario since the emotional stress from childhood bullying experience could be

brought to adulthood and the negative effect is obviously far – reaching.

Resilience to bullying was also emphasized in the research of Vogel (2006) and the relationship between bullying and emotional intelligence. Lomas, Stough, Hansen & Downey (2011) also looked into the relationship of a person's strengthened EQ to it. There are several instruments and experts that can be tapped to conduct and EQ Test for students. Additionally, Brackett & Rivers (2014) also emphasized the need to focus on strengthening the emotional intelligence of students in school to increase their resilience. Targeting multiple levels of bullying from individual, classroom and school is also among the best practices to reduce bullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005) and Dixon, Smith, & Jenks (2004). The school for its part can provide proactive and reactive policies against bullying but a clear understanding and definition of it must be present (Thompson & Smith, 2011) as perspectives of teachers and students on bullying often differ (La Rosa & Marie, 2013). These research results prompted the conduct this study to determine if bullying is prevalent in the academic institution, understand its effect to the victims and help formulate solutions that could decrease if not eliminate it, properly deal with the bullies and protect the well – being of the victim.

The research respondents came from the four colleges of the institution namely: College of Agriculture (CA), College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), College of Education (CE), and the College of Industrial Technology (CIT). Answers to the following specific questions were sought:

1. What is the profile of students in terms of gender and age?
2. What is the meaning of bullying?
3. What is the prevalence of bullying in the SUCs classroom in terms of: a. Personal experience; b. Actions as witness (bystander) of acts of bullying; c. Reasons for not taking actions as witness (bystander);

4. What are the effects of bullying to the victims? What is its rank in terms of frequency?
5. Are the students aware of the anti-bullying policies in the classroom?
6. What are the possible actions to prevent bullying in the classroom? a. by the school, and b. by the students
7. 7.Is there a significant difference between the Emotional Quotient (EQ) level of victims and non – victims of bullying with respect to Self Awareness, Managing Emotions, Motivating Oneself, Empathy, and Social Skill?

Understanding the situation presented in this study may serve as a call to action for educational institutions to acknowledge and prioritize the eradication of bullying in the institution's classrooms. Creation of an atmosphere where every student can flourish and reach their full potential by enacting effective anti-bullying rules, raising awareness, and fostering a culture of empathy and support.

### **Methodology**

To determine the sample size, an online calculator was used resulting to a value of  $n = 356$ . Purposive random sampling was used to select the respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

After the data collection period, there were 108 data - cleansed questionnaires only. This prompted the researcher to use power analysis techniques to see if the data of the retrieved questionnaires (108) would have enough power to produce sound results specifically on the EQ of the bullying victims and non - victims. Using the GPower Calculator, The calculation revealed a Power of 0.9895 or 98.95% which is well above the 80% acceptable power value thus the present data is already enough to produce sound results. The statistical tools frequency count and percentage distribution tables were used to facilitate data interpretation. With regard to the ethical considerations in the conduct of this research, the researcher expressed full understanding and respect on the privacy of the respondents hence, no personally identifiable questions were included in the

questionnaire. Picture taking was done after consent from selected respondents were obtained.

### **Results and Discussions**

Majority of the respondents (48%) has a female gender orientation, 9% indicated a lesbian orientation and 43% indicated a male gender orientation. In terms of age, majority of the respondents (33%) in the indicated 5 age ranges are between 18 – 19 years old while the 24 years old and above range comprise the least number (8%). There were different interpretations of the word bullying perceived by the students. Forty seven percent (47%) of the respondents indicated similar interpretation i.e. bullying is the act of insulting, discriminating and hurting the feelings of others was the most dominant definition of bullying. Others defined bullying as an aggressive act done repeatedly that can hurt the person physically and emotionally; destroying one's reputation; an act of harassment physically or verbally; seeing someone's culture as inferior; "stepping on" someone, looking for your mistakes and laughing at ones weaknesses; frightening and depriving weaker person needed respect; acts of cruelty involving threats, insults, using physical force and bad words that are untrue. These varied definitions strengthens the reality that bullying is a negative act that affects one's life physically and emotionally. Furthermore, it has a great impact on the learning process of an individual making them experience an unhealthy environment while in their academic journey.

In terms of bullying experience, 69% of the respondents identified themselves as victims. The way they were bullied is consistent with their given definition of bullying. Furthermore, they expressed that it is done to them by judging physical imperfections (big eyes, messy hair), expressions of gender bias, name calling, gossiping, embarrassing them in front of others and cyberbullying. In terms of frequency of bullying incidence, the highest percent (56%) of the responses indicated a "Once a Month" occurrence. This was followed by 30% indicating a "More than Once a Week and 14% on a "Daily Basis". This still signifies a high frequency of incidence of some form of bullying in school. In

terms of actions done by a witness (bystander) on acts of bullying, a high response of 73% pointed to the “I Ignore It” action compared to taking some form of action such as telling Parents, Teachers, Dean/ Department Chair and authorities. For the reason of not taking action, evading the perceived bad consequence of getting involved in bullying have the highest

response rate of 72%. This translates to either self – preservation against possible harm, the lack of concern to fellow students who are bullying victim(s) as expressed during the interview. The perceived harm by the witness that the bully is capable of inflicting may have resulted to fear of reporting the incidence.

*Table 1. Effects of Bullying as Perceived by the Victim and their rank based on frequency of responses*

<b>Effects of Bullying as Perceived by a Victim</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Depression	31	2
Low - self esteem	37	1
Suicidal thoughts	3	14
Poor Grades	9	9
Suicidal thoughts	3	14
Withdrawal from family and School Activities	7	10
Wanting to be Left Alone	25	5
Shyness	30	3
Panic Attacks	12	7
Not being able to Sleep	23	6
Sleeping too Much	11	8
Getting into Frequent Fights	5	12
Steal and Vandalize Property	0	17
Drink and Smoke	7	10
Perceive a Negative Climate at School	28	4
Carry Weapon	4	13
Others (Pls Specify)	2	16

Looking at Table 1, the “Low Self Esteem” effect ranked number 1 from among the 16 identified negative effects of bullying acts. It should be noted that Rank 14 “Suicidal Thoughts” need immediate identification of the person and conduct of psychological and other appropriate forms of intervention.

In terms of awareness of the anti-bullying policies in the classroom, it could be noted in Figure 1 that while more than half (57%) of the respondents are aware of the anti – bullying policies in force this awareness is rooted from their secondary level schooling under the Department of Education (DepEd) as this was explained to them accordingly. A considerable percentage indicating non – awareness of the anti – bullying policies either points to reasons of some perpetrators such as being used to the act without taking seriously its consequences to their peers, ignoring anti – bullying policies

and enjoying the act as a form of entertainment regardless of what policies is there.

For the possible actions to prevent bullying in the classroom and what the schools could do to stop it, fifty percent (50%) of the respondents suggested that the concerned school officials should conduct seminar about bullying to inform students and teacher the negative effects of it in learning. they stressed that existing anti-bullying policy must be revisited to update it and should be presented during general assembly with the presence of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Other suggestions are the following: 1) remind the students of showing respect to others; 2) strictly implement the anti-bullying policy in higher education institution; 3) conduct anti-bullying campaign and distribute flyers about bullying and the negative effects on learning; 4) be firm and consistent in imposing disciplinary actions; 5) conduct symposium or share inspirational

movies that would relate and motivate the bully victims because these victims might bully also other students; 6) punish the bully

students through community service; and 7) make a professional strategy and act to stop bullying in the school.

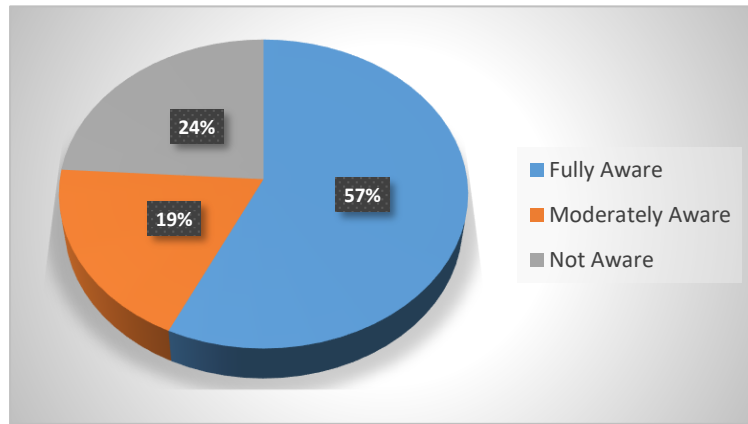


Figure 1. *Percent Distribution of Responses on Level of Awareness on Policies Against Bullying among the Tertiary Students*

On the suggestion on what the students could do to prevent bullying, the responses are as follows: 1) be respectful to each other regardless of status and ethnicity of a person; 2) Self-discipline is necessary as it controls own action. Don't mind other business because it affects others; 3) Be friendly, develop self-esteem and know when and who are the right persons to call if you are a bully victim; 4) students should be aware of their rights and should report the bullying cases to the concerned office for appropriate actions; 5) engage in spiritual activities; 6) create a student anti-bullying organization; 6) Avoidance to a bully person; and 7) fight for your right, do not allow anyone to bully you.

Ask for some other remarks on bullying, the respondents expressed that bullying is an act done by an insecure person who does not know what to do and where to associate themselves. They also stressed that these persons has a trouble life and ruining others is there act of getting even. Others focused on the negative effect of bullying on the academic performance of the students and its associated trauma to a victim and even to a bystander or witness. Others call for disciplinary action and some form of punishment for the perpetrators.

In this research, the 5 EQ composed of Self Awareness, Managing Emotions, Motivating

Oneself, Empathy, and Social Skill was examined in an attempt to determine if there is significant difference between the EQ level of the victims and the non - victims of bullying through t - test performed on each of the 5 EQ components. The following are the results of the t - test.

In the Self - Awareness component, it was found out that there was a significant difference in the scores of the Victims ( $M = 31.44$ ,  $SD = 4.83$ ) and the Non - Victims ( $M = 36.39$ ,  $SD = 5.63$ ) of bullying;  $t(35) = -3.84$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

In Managing Emotions component, it was found out that there was no significant difference in the scores of the Victims ( $M = 32.25$ ,  $SD = 5.02$ ) and the Non - Victims ( $M = 32.42$ ,  $SD = 4.35$ ) of bullying;  $t(35) = -0.135$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

In the Motivating Oneself component it was found out that there was a significant difference in the scores of the Victims ( $M = 30.53$ ,  $SD = 3.83$ ) and the Non - Victims ( $M = 33.97$ ,  $SD = 5.32$ ) of bullying;  $t(35) = -3.111$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

In the Empathy component it was found out that there was a significant difference in the scores of the Victims ( $M = 30.22$ ,  $SD = 4.11$ ) and the Non - Victims ( $M = 33.97$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ) of bullying;  $t(35) = -3.609$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

In the Social Skills component it was found out that there was no significant difference in the scores of the Victims ( $M = 32.61$ ,  $SD = 5.50$ )

and the Non – Victims ( $M = 35.64$ ,  $SD = 4.34$ ) of bullying;  $t(35) = -2.905$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

These EQ level results imply that Self Awareness, Motivating Oneself and Empathy are what differentiates between victims and non – victims.

## Conclusion

The age bracket of the respondents not only placed them at the crossroads of possible bullying since tertiary level of education exposes the victims and the perpetrators to various avenues of bullying. The slightly greater number of female respondents in this study makes it somehow highly representative of female experiences although this is closely followed by male responses. Noteworthy in this research is the fact that no male respondent indicated a sexual orientation as gay thus the experiences here may denote those of males only.

The varied descriptions and reasons expressed by the respondents on bullying signifies the broad individual perspective of the issue thus it may require interventions such as awareness campaign against bullying and methods that would characterize individual cases to deliver proper interventions to the victims, the perpetrators and even the witnesses since it was found in this study that bullying has a negative impact on the academic journey of the victims.

While there was some level of awareness on the victim and the perpetrators of bullying, cases may have gone cold due to weak reporting mechanisms and protocols. The prevalence of bullying in the SUC classrooms that was the subject of this study exemplified that bullying could be construed as a hidden epidemic that needs to be addressed by the administration, the faculty, the non – teaching personnel, the students. It may even have roots from the environment of both the victims and the perpetrators as presented in some literatures.

The notable differences in the level of EQ of the Victims and the Non – Victims signifies that self-awareness, motivating oneself and empathy are the components that needs to be strengthened to help bullying victims become more resilient to future incidents. Extreme cases such as victims who thought about suicide should be handled by counseling experts.

The school being the second home of the students has a very significant role to sustain anti – bullying programs and enforce rules fairly.

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