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THE GLIDES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL BULLIES TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the transformation experiences of junior high school students in the Surallah Central District, Division of South Cotabato, who were formerly involved in bullying. The purpose of the study was to explore the underlying reasons for their bullying behaviors and the lessons they learned throughout their journey of change. Eight (8) junior high school students who had transformed participated in the study. Data were collected using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Findings revealed that the participants initially engaged in bullying as a way to seek attention and validation through intimidation. With the help of guidance, mentorship, and opportunities for positive involvement, they eventually developed a sense of accountability and changed their behaviors. Their transformation was greatly influenced by empathy, counseling, and the support of their social environment. The results highlight the need to address the root causes of bullying, nurture empathy, and create a supportive school atmosphere that encourages personal growth. These insights can aid in crafting more effective intervention programs and in promoting a school culture built on compassion and understanding.

KEYWORDS: *Bullying, Transformation, Empathy, Counseling, Social Support*

INTRODUCTION

In modern society, schools play a dual role as places of academic instruction and as environments where students develop crucial social and emotional abilities that influence their futures. Bullying remains a widespread and complex issue that impacts everyone involved, whether as victims, aggressors, or witnesses, and can occur in numerous school settings such as classrooms, cafeterias, and hallways. It appears in various forms, including verbal abuse, physical aggression, threats, ridicule, and harsh criticism. Despite efforts from educators, policymakers, and the implementation of anti-bullying laws worldwide, it continues to be a significant problem. Junior high school is especially important, as students undergo major emotional and social development during this time. When addressed effectively through education, supportive networks, and firm policies, bullying can lead to meaningful growth. Both those who are bullied and those who bully can learn important lessons in empathy, strength, and community. By encouraging emotional awareness and a focus on personal development, schools can transform bullying into a powerful opportunity for positive change and foster safer, more inclusive environments.

School bullying remains a critical concern throughout the Asia-Pacific region, with multiple cases reported in countries such as South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia. A particularly alarming development has been the increase in cyberbullying, driven by the widespread use of digital technologies among youth. Social media and messaging apps have enabled bullies to target their victims anonymously, leading to more severe emotional consequences (Griffiths et al., 2021). In response, many nations in the region have launched national campaigns aimed at reducing bullying and promoting safer school environments.

In Japan, specific anti-bullying legislation was introduced to ensure that schools actively worked to prevent and address bullying incidents. However, the problem persists, especially in junior high schools in urban areas like Osaka, where bullying continues to hinder students' social engagement and enthusiasm for learning. These negative experiences have been shown to have long-term effects on both emotional health and academic outcomes. Experts emphasized the importance of creating a safe, supportive school atmosphere to foster positive peer relationships. They also highlighted that student interactions are shaped by cultural and community influences, making it crucial to develop school settings where both victims and bullies can experience personal growth (Sedanza & Purog, 2021).

In Australia, the National Safe Schools Framework has played a key role in transforming school culture by promoting targeted approaches to reduce bullying and create inclusive, secure learning environments. This initiative focuses on prevention, resilience-building among students and peer-led support systems to combat bullying effectively. According to data cited by The Sydney Morning Herald, among 117,000 nine-year-olds surveyed across 25 countries, Filipino students were among the most impacted by school bullying, highlighting the global scope and urgency of addressing the issue (Sedanza & Purog, 2021).

In Manila, a study by Pajarillo (2021) revealed that half of Filipino students had experienced some form of bullying or abuse. Such experiences significantly undermined their self-worth and negatively impacted their social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development. To mitigate these adverse effects, it was essential for schools to understand how students managed these situations. Exploring this topic was vital because it directly affected the

quality of teaching and learning. The research provided valuable knowledge to help educators better support students coping with bullying.

Meanwhile, in Baguio City, the Department of Education (DepEd) reported a 21% increase in bullying incidents in 2014 across public and private elementary and high schools, rising to 6,363 cases from 5,236 the previous year. This equated to an average of 31 bullying cases per day over the 201-day academic calendar. The data was shared by Representative Gerald Anthony Gullas Jr., a member of the basic education committee.

In response to Republic Act 10627, or the Anti-Bullying Law of 2013, schools in Iloilo City were required to adopt anti-bullying measures. These included establishing child protection committees, launching awareness initiatives, and providing counseling for both victims and perpetrators (Gonzales & Cruz, 2021). Rep. Gullas Jr. (2021) also noted that while considerable research focused on classroom strategies and institutional responses, there was still a lack of understanding regarding the personal backgrounds and motives of student bullies—an area this study sought to explore.

As one of the secondary teachers in Surallah Central District, South Cotabato Division, I have experienced and encountered learners who are engaged in bullying. I have witnessed how they interact with peers and have observed how they behave when they are in my class. These scenarios led me to ponder taking a closer look at them through the guidance office. In our school, learners who engage and are caught in the act of bullying are brought to the guidance office for a counseling program. Upon reflection, I have recognized that these learners likely have underlying reasons why they engaged in bullying, suggesting the need for tailored counseling initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullies may feel a sense of power or superiority within their peer group, which could boost their self-esteem and social standing in certain contexts.

Social status is defined in a variety of ways, including perceived popularity, peer acceptance and rejection, and social preference. Perceived popularity, or "popularity" in the following, refers to being perceived as popular and influential, and is typically measured by asking peers who they consider most and least popular. As such, it measures impact, visibility, and reputation within the peer group (van den Berg et al., 2020).

Bullying can increase attention and adoration, and bullies are typically regarded as cool. However, the scientific evidence regarding bullying's positive influence on popularity is mixed. Some research concluded that bullying peers was an effective method for achieving popularity (e.g., van der Ploeg et al., 2020), while others found no link or reached the opposite conclusion - the latter only for guys.

According to resource control theories, some violence can be useful and lead to potentially adaptive consequences; for some adolescents, bullying may be an effective form of aggression used to gain or retain social dominance. Other bullies, however, have been found to be socially isolated and shunned by their peers. This has resulted in the identification of two types of perpetrators: bullies and bully victims (those who bully others while also being victimized). Bully victims are frequently impulsive, exhibit reactive violence, and have been found to have poor social skills, including biases in social information processing (Guy et al., 2021).

Bullies, on the other hand, are thought to be proactive and strategic in their use of aggression, as well as having competent social cognitive abilities. Bullies and bully-victims differ in their social and behavioral qualities, which may influence their status among peers in various ways. Exploring the status profiles of these perpetrator groups in comparison to simply victimized or uninvolved teenagers may reveal potential social incentives for bullying conduct (Guy et al., 2021).

Perceived popularity, on the other hand, indicates an individual's social status and power within the peer group and is most typically measured by peer nominations of the most and least popular members of the classroom. Although these two dimensions of peer status are frequently modestly connected, they are separate conceptions; those who are popular are not always accepted by their peers. Positive social attributes, such as cooperativeness, are typically connected with social preference, but appearance, athleticism, or having desirable possessions might influence perceived popularity (Garandeau et al., 2021).

The third part of peer status is social effect, which relates to an individual's prominence or visibility within a peer group and has been used to identify status hierarchies in schools. Thus, social impact is a measure of how visible or known a student is within the social group (e.g., classroom); however, while a student with high social impact may have a high social presence, their overall status profiles can be positive, negative, or both (Garandeau et al., 2021).

Bullying behavior might attract attention and recognition from peers or authority figures, fulfilling the bully's need for validation or acknowledgment, even if it's negative attention. Adolescents engage in bullying behavior in order to receive rewards from peers and be accepted by the group. Peer effect on bullying behavior: If peer influence is positive, bullying behavior is low; if peer influence is negative, bullying conduct is high. Unhealthy peer interactions and a lack of social support increase the probability of bullying (Ulfah and Gustina, 2020).

Hawley (2021) titled "Prosocial and Coercive Configurations of Resource Control in Early Adolescence: A Case for the Well-adapted Machiavellian," investigated how some individuals, including bullies, may strategically use aggression to gain social status and control resources within their peer group. This study suggests that bullies may receive attention and recognition from their peers by demonstrating dominance and assertiveness, which can elevate their social standing.

Salmivalli et. al., (2020) examined the social goals of bullying behavior and found that some bullies engage in aggression to enhance their social reputation or to establish dominance within their peer group. This study highlights how bullies may receive attention and recognition from their peers for their aggressive behavior, reinforcing their status within the social hierarchy.

Dieter Wolke and Suzet Tanya Lereya (2021) explore various aspects of bullying, including the attention bullies may receive. They discuss how some bullies gain social status and recognition within their peer group through their aggressive behavior. This recognition can manifest as attention and admiration from other students, contributing to the bully's social standing. Through their review, Wolke and Lereya shed light on the complex social dynamics involved in bullying situations, highlighting the role of attention as a potential reinforcement for bullying behavior.

Over the past ten years, research on school bullying has increased, predominantly led by European and American scholars, while China and other Asian regions have exhibited a relative lack of focus in this domain (Li, et al., 2021). Notably, investigations into the impact of school bullying on students' subjective well-being within the Chinese context remain exceedingly scarce (Guo, 2021). This condition may arise from various causes.

Conversely, the school serves as the primary institution through which the nation exerts educational influence, and the positive emotional experiences in students' daily lives, such as a sense of belonging, directly contribute to their subjective well-being, thereby overlooking the indirect role of school belonging in mitigating the effects of school bullying on subjective well-being (Guo, 2021).

Consequently, when students encounter bullying on campus, those who are acknowledged by their peers and feel a sense of belonging to the group typically receive prompt psychological support, while the other segment of students, who have lost trust in their classes and schools, tend to become increasingly isolated and disengaged, resulting in a decline in their overall satisfaction with school life. School affiliation may mitigate the adverse effects of bullying on subjective well-being (Guo, 2021).

Research Questions

The present study will aim to document the life experiences of bullies from the schools in Surallah Central District and the insights that will be gained from these experiences as perceived by the perpetrators.

1. What are the glides of the junior high school bullies towards transformation?
2. How do the junior high school bullies cope with the challenges gliding towards transformation?
3. What educational insights can be derived from the experiences of junior high school bullies on their glides towards transformation?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used qualitative research employing phenomenology. When researching a topic that required delving deeply into the ideas, emotions, and experiences of individuals, the phenomenological research design proved to be very helpful. It served as a useful technique for developing new theories regarding individual experiences in a particular, controlled setting, raising awareness of the subject under study, and gaining insights from participants (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). Through this process, I constructed the universal meaning of an event, situation, or experience and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon. According to Tenny et al. (2022), the study of the meaning of phenomena, or the study of the particular, was the precise essence of phenomenology. Its primary goal was to depict, as accurately as possible, the experiences of individuals involved in a phenomenon.

This qualitative research drew from interpretivism and constructivist paradigms, seeking to deeply understand a research subject rather than predict outcomes, as in the positivist paradigm. Interpretivism aimed to build knowledge by understanding individuals' unique viewpoints and the meanings they attached to those viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2021). Constructivism views knowledge as constructed as people work to make sense of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

Overall, qualitative research valued people's lived experiences and remained inherently subjective and sensitive to the biases of both researchers and participants. This methodology enabled researchers to learn firsthand about the social world they investigated by participating in that world and focusing on what individual actors said or did (Tomaszewski, 2020). A more targeted method within qualitative research was a phenomenological investigation. As outlined by Creswell (2020), a phenomenological inquiry aimed to elucidate the significance of lived experiences related to a particular concept or phenomenon for multiple individuals. At its core, phenomenology sought to distill individual encounters with a phenomenon into a portrayal of its fundamental essence that held universal meaning.

Given the nature of this study on the life experiences of bullies, I, the researcher, found qualitative research through the phenomenological method to be the most appropriate research design to provide answers to the research questions raised in this study.

Research Participants

The adolescent years were a critical phase in anyone's life, and bullying experiences were part of it. In the quest for desired autonomy and self-sufficiency, many learners often turned out to be bullies. Thus, learners undergoing counseling were the focus of this study. From them, I gathered data on their experiences, and insights were derived to support their transformation journey. The participants were identified through purposive sampling, which was a form of convenience sampling.

Obilor (2023) described convenience sampling, also known as grab, accidental, or opportunity sampling, as a strategy in which a sample was drawn from a population segment that was nearby, easily accessible, or handy. Researchers used convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy, to obtain data from a readily available pool of individuals.

Thus, the data necessary for this study was generated from the junior high school of Surallah Central District, Division of South Cotabato. The participants included eight (8) transformed bullies who met specific inclusion criteria. To be eligible, participants must have been junior high school students currently enrolled during the academic year when the study was conducted. They must have undergone counseling sessions as identified by the guidance counselor. Additionally, participants must have demonstrated a willingness to participate by providing informed consent and must have been available during the scheduled interview sessions. These criteria were designed to ensure the selection of participants who could provide relevant and meaningful contributions to the study.

With these criteria set, this study adhered to the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling was a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher selected only those subjects that satisfied the objectives of the study based on their conviction. It was a sampling technique where the researcher relied on their discretion to choose participants from the study population (Obilor, 2023).

Data Analysis

To establish the reliability of the results in this phenomenological study, I implemented a systematic approach throughout the entire research process. I carefully examined and analyzed the data collected with close attention to consistency, thoroughness, and accuracy. The first step involved documenting a full description of my personal experiences with the phenomenon to clearly distinguish my perspective from those of the participants. By developing a list of significant statements that reflected how participants experienced the phenomenon, I ensured that all statements held equal weight and minimized redundancy. I then grouped these significant statements into "meaning units" or themes to allow for a clearer understanding of what the participants experienced. To further establish reliability, I reviewed all statements for non-overlapping and non-repetitive themes.

Moreover, I described both the "what" and the "how" of the participants' experiences with transparency, providing a textural description (what the participants experienced) and a structural description (how the experience occurred in context). The composite description, combining both elements, presented the essence of the phenomenon and provided a clear and reliable summary of the participants' lived experiences. To enhance the trustworthiness of the results, I employed member checking to verify the accuracy of the identified themes and ensure that the participants' experiences were authentically represented. I also used peer review and triangulation of data sources to strengthen the study's reliability, ensuring that the findings were consistent, valid, and comprehensive. Through these methods, I firmly established the reliability of the study results.

Thematic Content Analysis. Thematic content analysis was a widely used method in qualitative research, especially for analyzing data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). I used this approach to identify patterns or themes within qualitative data, helping to understand underlying meanings and experiences. A key advantage of thematic analysis was its flexibility—it could be applied inductively, where themes emerged from the data, or deductively, guided by pre-defined themes. Regardless of the approach, the most crucial aspect was to ensure that data was represented accurately and honestly, as emphasized by Mortensen (2020).

The process involved familiarizing myself with the data, coding relevant pieces of information, searching for broader themes, reviewing and refining these themes, and ultimately defining and naming them. Using this method, I presented a rich, detailed, and reliable interpretation of the interview or discussion data, ensuring that participants' perspectives were honored and truthfully reflected.

Document analysis. Document analysis was a qualitative research method that systematically examined documentary evidence to answer specific research questions. It required repeated review and interpretation to extract meaning and empirical knowledge. I used document analysis as part of a larger qualitative study to triangulate findings from other sources, such as interviews and observations. In this context, I strengthened document analysis

by incorporating observation, which allowed me to capture real-time behaviors and interactions that were reflected in the documents being analyzed.

Observational data provided additional insight into context and helped validate the document content, offering a more nuanced understanding of the subject. The combination of document analysis and observation enhanced methodological rigor and ensured that findings were supported by multiple, complementary data sources, thereby increasing both the reliability and validity of the research (Frey, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implications

The findings highlight the complex journey of junior high school bullies toward transformation, emphasizing the crucial role of self-awareness, empathy, and structured interventions. Many former bullies struggled with emotional regulation, peer influence, and personal difficulties, which initially contributed to their aggressive behaviors. However, their transformation was largely driven by school-based initiatives such as counseling programs, mentorship, and restorative justice practices. These support systems provided them with the necessary tools to recognize the impact of their actions and take responsibility for personal growth.

Developing a culture of respect and inclusion within the school setting played a significant role in encouraging behavioral change. Educators, peers, and school administrators who actively promoted kindness and understanding created a supportive environment that facilitated positive transformation. Through guided reflection and interactions with those they had harmed, former bullies gained a deeper understanding of the consequences of their actions, fostering a sense of accountability and remorse.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills in behavior modification. Former bullies who engaged in structured self-reflection exercises, social-emotional learning programs, and peer mediation sessions demonstrated greater improvement in emotional regulation and conflict resolution. These interventions not only helped them transition away from aggressive behaviors but also equipped them with valuable skills in communication, empathy, and cooperation.

From an educational management perspective, the research highlights the necessity of sustained institutional support for at-risk students. Schools that implemented targeted anti-bullying policies, student-led support groups, and teacher training programs observed a significant reduction in bullying incidents and a more positive school culture. Providing educators with professional development on trauma-informed practices and behavioral interventions ensures that they can effectively guide students through their journey of transformation.

Beyond school interventions, personal experiences and social relationships played a pivotal role in reshaping the perspectives of former bullies. Many participants in the study reported that forming genuine friendships based on trust and mutual respect influenced their behavioral shift. Experiencing inclusion rather than isolation helped them realize the value of respect and compassion over intimidation and dominance.

Moreover, hearing the testimonies of bullying victims served as a powerful catalyst for change. Direct exposure to the emotional and psychological impact of bullying prompted former bullies to reassess their actions and make a conscious effort to adopt more positive behaviors. This highlights the potential of restorative justice approaches in school settings, where mediated conversations between aggressors and victims lead to increased awareness and personal accountability.

Ultimately, the transformation of junior high school bullies is a gradual process that requires continuous guidance, reflection, and reinforcement. Schools must foster an environment that prioritizes emotional well-being, character development, and conflict resolution skills to ensure that behavioral changes are sustained. By investing in holistic intervention strategies, educational institutions can help former bullies reintegrate as responsible, empathetic individuals who contribute positively to their school communities.

Future Directions

The transformation of former junior high school bullies highlights the importance of structured support systems in fostering positive behavioral change. While the process of transformation is often challenging, the findings indicate that a combination of self-reflection, mentorship, and school interventions plays a crucial role in guiding students toward empathy and accountability. Moving forward, schools should strengthen their efforts in implementing evidence-based programs that promote social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and character development.

A key area for future focus is the integration of long-term mentorship initiatives. Former bullies who successfully transformed into advocates for kindness benefited greatly from having role models who guided them through their journey. Establishing peer mentorship programs can provide at-risk students with a support system that encourages personal growth and positive behavioral reinforcement. Additionally, involving parents in these initiatives can help create a consistent and nurturing environment both at home and in school.

Moreover, schools should continue to explore innovative strategies that encourage students to engage in self-reflection and develop emotional intelligence. Structured activities such as guided journaling, peer dialogues, and

empathy-building exercises can help students recognize the impact of their actions and foster a sense of responsibility. Digital tools, such as interactive learning platforms and storytelling applications, may also serve as valuable resources for reinforcing these lessons in an engaging and relatable manner.

In addition, strengthening teacher training programs on behavioral intervention and inclusive classroom management is essential. Educators play a pivotal role in shaping students' social behaviors and attitudes, and equipping them with the necessary skills to address bullying effectively will contribute to a more supportive learning environment. Professional development programs should focus on conflict resolution strategies, trauma-informed teaching practices, and culturally responsive pedagogy to ensure that interventions are both effective and inclusive.

Finally, future research could explore the long-term impact of these interventions on former bullies as they transition into adulthood. Understanding how their experiences shape their future relationships, decision-making, and overall character development can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of school-based transformation programs. By continuously refining and adapting intervention strategies, schools can create a lasting culture of respect, inclusion, and emotional growth among students.

Through sustained efforts in fostering empathy and accountability, educational institutions can play a transformative role in ensuring that all learners—regardless of their past experiences—are allowed to grow into responsible and compassionate individuals.

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