PARENTING STYLES ASSOCIATION WITH BULLYING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KUCHING DISTRICT, SARAWAK, 2009.

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PARENTING STYLES ASSOCIATION WITH BULLYING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KUCHING DISTRICT, SARAWAK, 2009.

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Public Health (Health Promotion).

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ABSTRACT

PARENTING STYLES ASSOCIATION WITH BULLYING
AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KUCHING DISTRICT, SARAWAK, 2009.
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School bullying can create a barrier for many young people to develop into well-adjusted adults. Information on bullying in Malaysia are still scarce especially in the East Malaysian region. This study aims to determine the prevalence of bullying among secondary school students in Kuching and to examine the predictors of bullying. Specifically, the study was interested to know if parenting styles were predictors of bullying.

A cross-sectional survey among 203 randomly selected Form 1 to Form 4 students was carried out in 4 schools in Kuching district, Sarawak. Self-completed bullying questionnaire was used for the students while both their parents responded to a Parenting Style Dimension Questionnaire.

In terms of participants’ ethnicity, 45.3% (n=92) were Chinese, 43.3% (n=88) were Malay, 4.4% (n=9) were Bidayuh, 3.4% (n=7) were Iban and the remaining 3.4% (n=7) were of other races. Males accounted for 46.3% while 53.7% were females.

82% (n=167) of the student respondents were found to be bullies. The distribution of the bullies followed the gender and ethnic distribution among the respondents. 53% (n=88) of the bullies were females and 47% (n=79) were males. The ethnic distribution of the bullies were: Chinese, 46.3% (n=78); Malays, 44.3% (n=74); other ethnic groups, 9% (n=15).

Authoritative parenting styles, was found to be the most common parenting style among the parents with 93.6% of mothers and 90.6% of fathers practicing it. None of the parenting styles was seen as a predictor to bullying behaviour. However age 15 years old, Malay and Chinese ethnic group as well as having mothers of medium level of education were seen as significant predictors to bullying behaviour among the respondents.

There is a high prevalence of bullying among the participants of the study. There is a need for studies in more schools to know the actual prevalence and the associated factors of bullying among secondary schools in Kuching. Other parenting factors should also be examined as the findings may be useful in planning of interventions and prevention programme against bullying behaviour among secondary school students.
ABSTRAK


Hasrina Hassan

Kejadian buli di sekolah boleh menghalang perkembangan remaja menjadi seorang dewasa yang sihat dari segi emosi dan jasmani. Data tentang kejadian buli di Malaysia sangat diperlukan terutamanya di Sabah dan Sarawak. Kajian ini mengkaji kekerapan kejadian buli di sekolah-sekolah menengah di Kuching, Sarawak dan cuba mengenalpasti punca kepada kejadian buli. Satu kajian irisan lintang telah dijalankan terhadap 203 pelajar tingkatan 1 ke tingkatan 4 dari empat buah sekolah menengah yang dipilih secara rawak di daerah Kuching, Sarawak. Pelajar-pelajar telah mengisi borang Kajian Tentang Buli manakala ibubapa mereka mengisi soal-jawab tentang Gaya Keibubapaan. Pelajar-pelajar terdiri dari bangsa Cina, 45.3% (n=92), Melayu, 43.3% (n=88), Bidayuh, 4.4% (n=9), Iban, 3.4% (n=7) dan lain-lain bangsa, 3.4% (n=7). 46.3% adalah pelajar lelaki manakala 53.7% adalah pelajar perempuan.

Kajian mendapati 82% (n=167) pelajar tergolong sebagai pembuli. Peratusan pelajar perempuan 53% (n=88) yang membuli melebihi peratusan pelajar lelaki 47% (n=79). Selain itu, peratusan pelajar Cina (46.3%) yang membuli didapati melebihi pelajar Melayu (44.3%) dan bangsa lain (9%).

Kajian turut mendapati gaya keibu-bapaan yang paling kerap diamalkan oleh ibubapa dalam kajian ini adalah gaya ‘authoritative’. Ini diamalkan oleh 93.6% kaum ibu dan 90.6% kaum bapa. Tiada sebarang gaya keibu-bapaan dapat dikenalpasti sebagai punca kepada membuli. Walaubagaimanapun, pelajar berumur 15 tahun, bangsa Melayu dan Cina serta mempunyai ibu yang berpendidikan sederhana didapati sebagai ‘predictor’ yang paling signifikan dari model yang terhasil.

Kesimpulannya, kadar kejadian buli di kalangan pelajar di 4 buah sekolah yang dikaji adalah tinggi. Ini memerlukan kajian yang lebih meluas dan mendalam di sekolah-sekolah di Kuching bagi mengenalpasti prevalens sebenar dan faktor-faktor penyumbang kepada kejadian ini. Faktor-faktor keibu-bapaan yang lain turut perlu dikaji kerana dapatan kajian boleh memantu dalam perancangan intervensi dan pencegahan buli di sekolah.
DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree of qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher learning.

Signature:

Name: HASRINA HASSAN

Date: April 5th, 2010.
DEDICATION

To mom and dad, for their endless love, support and their
guidance towards my achievements in education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Warm thanks to many individuals, both directly and indirectly, influenced me and helped me to complete this project. Of course, in particular I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Mohd Raili Suhaili for his guidance, patience, advice and encouragement throughout the project.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. Preamble

School bullying is not a new phenomenon and has been a subject of a research since the early 1970s. Bullying is generally defined as an action where a student is subjected to repeated negative actions by one or more students. These negative actions can be in the form of physical contact, verbal abuse, or making faces and rude gestures. Among the common forms of bullying are spreading rumours and excluding the victim from a group. Bullying also entails an imbalance in strength between the bullies and the victim, what experts call an asymmetric power relationship (Olweus, 2001).

The act of bullying should be seen as a component of more generally antisocial and rule-breaking behaviour. It can cause devastating effects on the lives of the victims such as decreased self-esteem, depression, anxiety, lower social competence and other psychosocial problems in the long run (Olweus, 1993; Salmon, 1998; Bond, 2001; Nansel et al., 2001). They may resort to absenteeism to escape from torment at school and may end up with lower academic achievements and social isolation. In some severe cases, victims have been known to take their own lives. Furthermore, it has been reported that children who bullies are associated with the increased incidence of problems of alcohol abuse, domestic violence and violent crime in their later life (Olweus, 1993). Therefore, the effects of being bullies or bullied at school can hamper many young people to grow into well-adjusted adults.
1.1.2. Background

A child has the right to feel safe in school and to be spared from the oppression and repeated intentional humiliation of bullying. Governments and school authorities have an important role to play in assuring these rights are honoured. In relation to a child’s right, a number of studies on bullying has been initiated in many countries aiming to understand bullying in schools. Studies conducted by many researchers worldwide (Olweus, 1993; Whitney and Smith, 1993; Geffner, 2001; Rigby, 2004; and Sapouna, 2008) has revealed that the prevalence of school bullying varied from 5 to 41.6 %, and it varies according to the types of instrument used; method employed and who is the target or victim of bullying.

In Malaysia, the mass media occasionally reports incidence of violent cases of bullying among school students. This scenario has triggered concern among ministers, school administrators, parents and the public, but the actions taken so far has failed to stamp bullying in school. Yaakub (2004) has reported a high prevalence of bullying where there were only 14.5 % of students in 29 schools in Perak who never bullied others. Sumit (2005) who studied four primary schools in Sarikei revealed that 46.3 % of the respondents were bullies.

To date, school bullying has been viewed as a major social problem in most countries especially by the school administrators and teachers. It is also a public health concern due to its effects on mental health. However, despite concerted efforts to prevent this problem, bullying continues to plague most schools worldwide (Dussich, 2007). The reasons why this is so are not fully understood. This has thus led to continuous efforts among researchers to search for the predictors of bullying and formulate effective bullying interventions.

The role of the parent which may contribute to the development of bullying behaviour among adolescents is also not studied widely. Many studies have shown that parenting is a
known risk factor to other juvenile behaviour problems such as delinquency, vandalism, gangsterism, fights and many more. Research by Dussich (2007) and Tortura (2009) have demonstrated that the aetiology of bullying is associated with the family conditions at home rather than conditions at school. Therefore, it is worth studying family context for example, to understand the effects of parenting on adolescent bullying.

Understanding the relationship between parenting and adolescent bullying, would benefit not only the Ministry of Education, the Education Department and school administrators but also to Family Health Planning Units, parents of adolescents and the community at large. It is likely to contribute to further planning of bullying prevention policies, intervention programmes as well as development of healthy parenting policies. This, in the long run, is thus hoped to be able to reverse the increasing trend of mental health problems and reduce the years lived with disability or death.

1.1.3. Research Questions

In an attempt to understand bullying behaviour and the parental factors associated with bullying among adolescents in Kuching, Sarawak, an exploratory study was conducted and it was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is bullying prevalent among secondary school students in Kuching?
2. Are socio-demographic background associated with bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Kuching?
3. What are the common types of bullying that takes place among secondary school students in Kuching?
4. Are the parenting styles significantly associated with bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Kuching?

5. Does the socio-demographic background and parenting styles significantly predict bullying among secondary school students in Kuching?

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Adolescent Bullying: An Overview

Adolescents are important assets of the country. Factors such as upbringing patterns, education and environment play a role in shaping them into the type of individuals they will develop in the future. The negative experiences during childhood however, may distort their development towards becoming positive adults.

Bullying is one of the negative experiences a child may undergo during the process of growing up. In terms of severity, it ranges from the more frequent, occasional unpleasant teasing to the less frequent, but more extreme form such as in continual physical assaults or total exclusion from others over an extended period (Rigby, 2004).

Occurrence of school bullying varied dramatically across countries. In Norway, Olweus (1993) found that 7% of students aged between 8–16 were bullies, 9% were victims and 1.6% were both bully/victims. In Britain, bullying seems to be more widespread with 27% of primary school children and 10% of secondary school students were victims (Whitney and Smith, 1993). In the USA, 29.9% of school samples reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, 13% as a bully, 10.6% as a victim and 6.3% who were both bully/victims (Geffner, 2001). About half of Australian students have experienced some bullying at school and approximately one in six students reported that they have been bullied on a weekly basis (Rigby, 2004).
In Malaysia, a study was conducted among 2,528 primary students aged between 10 to 12 years old in 29 schools in Perak. The finding showed that 8.6% have never been bullied while only 14.5% never bullied others. This could mean that 91.4% of students were victims of bullying while 85.5% have experienced bullying others. The finding presented that 53% students experiencing physical types of bullying while 49.4% involving psychological types of bullying (Yaakub, 2004). In East Malaysia, Khalid (2007) revealed that 73% of students were both bully/victims and 2% were bullies. Meanwhile, another survey conducted by Sumit, (2005) among students aged 9 to 11 in four primary schools revealed that 46.3% were bullies and 65.4% reported being bullied.

There has also been a growing number of reported severe cases of bullying that resulted in massive physical impairments to the victims. Although, the Malaysian Ministry of Education statistics indicated that the incidences of bullying and gangsterism in schools are decreasing, it was alleged that the reported cases have become increasingly extreme and violent (Goh, 2006). One of the more appalling incidents of bullying that stunned the nation was the brutal assault of a 16-year-old student by his school seniors in Seremban, which led to his death in 2005 (Yaakub & Goh, 2007).

A study by Azizi (2008) showed that physical and verbal bullying is the commonest type of bullying among school students in Selangor, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan and Johor. Teasing, taking one possessions and shoving are the main types of physical bullying while name calling, lying or gossiping are the common types of verbal bullying.

Bullying can have negative influence on the academic performance of a child as well as his or her physical and mental health. Children who are bullied may retreat from attending school
or classes (Reid, 1983). Studies by Olweus (1993), and Hazemba & Siziya (2008) shown that victims were more likely to be depressed and have low self-esteem as a result of being bullied. They can often present to physicians with physical and psychosomatic complaints (Williams, Chambers, Logan & Robinson, 1996). Some may resort to substance abuse (Hazemba & Siziya, 2008) or even develop suicidal ideation (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999). Those who bully on the other hand have a higher chance of becoming or involving in a delinquent acts and later criminal conviction (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is without doubt an important factor in the genesis of mental health problems and can be highlighted as a public health issue (Salmon, 2000).

Unfortunately, bullying have often been overlooked, under reported and frequently dismissed by people particularly parents and teachers because they are unaware of the extent of the problem and rarely discuss it with children (Olweus, 1993). Some people may even view bullying as part of normal development (Harris, 2006). In general, victims also tend to avoid or neglect reporting their case because they think the school administrators or teachers will not make any attempt or effort to put a stop to bullying or worry that things may become even worse (Harris, 2002).

Many studies (Bosworth, 1999; Yaakub, 2004; Sapouna, 2008; Tortura, 2009; and Wan Ismail, 2009) have been conducted to examine the association between bullying with personality characteristics, socio-cultural background, family background, health effects of bullying, academic achievement and many more. As a result of studies that addressed bullying from different perspectives, various school-based interventions to curb bullying have been implemented in the schools worldwide and evaluations were carried out to measure its effectiveness. In relation to that, the Malaysian Ministry of Education had also launched a bullying intervention programme in schools since 2007. This programme focuses mainly the
disciplinary action and counselling for bullies and victims. However, despite concerted efforts to prevent this problem, bullying continues to plague most schools. In addition to that, a meta-analytic review by Ferguson (2007) came to a rather disappointing conclusion where school-based anti-bullying programs are not practically effective in reducing bullying or violent behaviours in the schools.

A number of researches have demonstrated the effects of parenting on children’s aggression many of which have suggested that the aetiology of bullying is more directly related to conditions at home rather than school (Dussich, 2007; Tortura, 2009). The finding from a study by Olweus, (1993) has shown that children who are bullies come from families who are lacking warmth and indiscipline. Therefore, studying the family context is probably worthwhile in understanding adolescent bullying.

Smith and Myron-Wilson (1998) stated that, in general parents whose children involved in bullying are more likely to have poor family functioning, an insecure attachment relationship with their child and perceived more negatively by their child. Parents of bullies are more likely to use a harsh discipline style and the family as a whole may be distant or ‘disengaged’ in structure.

Flouri and Buchanan (2003) found that “low father involvement” and “low mother involvement” contributed significantly and independently to bullying behaviour in adolescents. Interestingly, studies by Simons & Conger (2007), showed that authoritative parenting compared to authoritarian, indulgent or uninvolved parenting is the optimal manner in which to parent adolescents (Simons & Conger, 2007). Such a home, consisting of two authoritative parents, provides the most beneficial setting with regard to developmental outcomes. This information is useful to practitioners, researchers, and parents who want to know if parenting practices continue
to influence developmental outcomes after childhood. It is thus possible that the development of prevention programmes that focuses on parenting may be able to complement the existing school-based intervention programmes.

It is important to realize that early childhood period is an important formative time for the subsequent behaviour of children. In order to reduce the increasing burden of mental health problems and avoid years lived with disability or death, one of the public health planner’s priority should be given to prevention and health promotion in preventing adolescent aggression. Preventive strategies targeting parents may be one of the solutions to be considered.

1.2.2. Definition of Bullying

It is difficult to define bullying because of the complex dynamics of bullying scenarios and the developmental context for social development in which bullying plays a role. Furthermore, aggression among youth often serves varied purposes and initiated at different stages of development. Problems were also encountered in interpreting findings across research studies on bullying. In earlier studies, participants were asked to report how often they bullied others following the given definition by the researcher themselves. But, most students would not feel comfortable describing their behaviours toward others as bullying. Thus, Salmivalli et al. (1996) suggested that it might be more appropriate to ask students how often they perform specific behaviours such as teasing and hitting.

Bullying was initially defined by Olweus (1978) as “the systematic use of physical or mental violence by one boy or several boys against another boy”. Later, he redefined bullying as an act which a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending him or herself (Olweus, 1993). This
definition was based on three essential elements of bullying behaviour: (1) the behaviour is aggressive and negative; (2) the behaviour is carried out repeatedly; and (3) the behaviour occurs in a relationship where there is an imbalance of power between the parties involved.

Arora (1987) defined bullying as an act of achieving or maintaining social dominance through overtly aggressive; which means that the victims have no sufficient skills or capacity to integrate with their peer group.

Bullying has been then been further characterized based on a variety of hurtful actions such as name-calling, social exclusion, and having money taken or belongings damaged, as well as the more obvious forms of hitting and kicking (Crick, 1997; Crick et al., 1997; Rigby et al., 1997). These behaviours were classified further as direct and indirect bullying. Direct bullying involves open attacks on a victim, while indirect bullying is distinguished by social isolation, exclusion from a group, or non-selection for activities (Olweus, 1991).

Next, the majority of the studies have focused on physical bullying as a subset of aggression. However, students took teasing and practical jokes as a part of bullying (Hoover & Oliver, 1996), and perhaps bullying behaviours are more widely distributed than documented in studies that focus only on physical aggression. Bosworth (1999) conducted a study among 558 middle school students examining bullying as a continuum of mild-to-extreme behaviours. The results were inconsistent with the perspective that early adolescents were either bullies or non-bullies.

As a result of the myriads of definition of bullying, strategies and operationalizations of bullying prevention plan in the literature, policy makers and educators have a tough time in setting the direction in addressing bullying problems in school. In addition, the findings of work done in different settings may not be applicable in our local schools. Against this backdrop a
study on bullying in local schools is imperative. For this purpose, bullying would be operationally defined as any hurtful actions; either physical, verbal or psychological, by a child against another child as was used by Yaakub (2004) and Wan Ismail (2009).

1.2.3. Types of Bullying

In the earlier part of this review, Olweus has classified bullying as direct bullying which often takes the form of overt, physical contact in which the victim is openly attacked. While, indirect bullying often takes the form of social isolation and intentional exclusion from activities.

Other researchers stress the importance of the distinction between its physical and social forms. Underwood and Paquette (2001) coined the term “social aggression” encompassing the less physical and indirect forms of hurtful behaviour. They discouraged the usage of the term “indirect” because the term implies that the behaviour does not involve direct or overt interaction with the victim. They also favour the term “social aggression” as it more aptly targets the purpose of the behaviour as harmful. Finally, they believe that this type of aggression can be conveyed through nonverbal means, such as social exclusion and the term “social aggression” is more accurate.

In most countries, the act of bullying among primary and secondary school children takes the form of ‘general name calling’ (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Fonzi et al., 1999). Other common types are relational and physical bullying. Boys tend to be more physical such as hitting or threatening (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Harris, 2002) while girls tend to be more indirect (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Sapouna, 2004) such as using social exclusion or spreading rumours (Whitney & Smith, 1993). However, this finding has not been replicated in other studies.
factors (Olweus, 1993; Lösel & Bliesener, 1999). Research on the gender of school bullies suggests that there is little consensus regarding the gender of perpetrators of indirect bullying such as social exclusion and spreading rumours (Nansel et al., 2001).

There is also some evidence that the types of bullying behaviour, in which children indulge, change with age. Physical bullying was found to be more common among younger children (Olweus, 1993), whereas verbal and relational bullying seemed to be more prevalent among older children (Lösel & Bliesener, 1999; Pateraki & Houndoumadi, 2001).

1.2.4. The Relationship between Parenting Style and Bullying among Adolescent

Studies that involve only school-based intervention have shown that levels of bullying can be reduced, but not eradicated. This may be because bullying or aggressive behaviour in general has its origins in parenting (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998). Past studies have demonstrated the effects of parenting on children’s aggression. Evidence indicates that family factors are associated with adolescents’ social outcomes and, thus, must be considered in developing bullying intervention programmes (Totura, 2009).

Researchers have long accepted that aggression can be learned through observation of aggressive behaviour, modelled by parents (Bandura, 1973). Such harsh, coercive, neglectful or rejecting types of parenting style appears to model negative behaviour in addition to the detrimental effects it has on the child’s self-concept, and then related with antisocial behaviour generally (Aquilino & Supple, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2006). Such early experiences at home may form the basis for a child’s behaviour in school and later in life.

Less cohesive family relationships, harsh discipline practices, violence at home, marital conflict and physical abuse are more likely to be associated with bullies than non-bullies.