



E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
www.allstudyjournal.com
IJAAS 2024; 6(12): 01-05
Received: 14-09-2024
Accepted: 20-10-2024

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Guidance and counselling: A tool in combating bullying in senior high schools in Ghana

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2024.v6.i12a.1305>

Abstract

This study, Combating Bullying Using Guidance and Counselling in Senior High Schools in Ghana, investigated the prevalence, strategies, and causes of bullying in senior high schools in Ghana, as well as the role of guidance and counselling services in combating the issue. Based on case studies and literature reviews, the study findings reveal that socioeconomic imbalance, cultural norms, family backgrounds, media influence, peer pressure and ineffective school policies are causes of bullying in school. Students were subjected to various forms of bullying, and the efficacy of various intervention strategies such as peer mediation, comprehensive anti-bullying programmes, individual and group counselling, Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), regular monitoring, workshops and seminars, and parental involvement, among others were identified. Recommendations were made to improve both the execution and efficiency of these services, including training, increased funding, and collaboration with other stakeholders.

Keywords: Bullying, guidance and counselling, senior high schools, intervention strategies

Introductions

Bullying is a global concern in educational settings, and Ghana senior high schools are no exception. It can have profound implications for victims, including low self-esteem, depression, and thoughts of suicide. Guidance and counselling services are viable methods to combat bullying and create a safer, more supportive learning environment for all students. According to Olweus & Limber (2010) ^[21], bullying behaviour is the repetitive and long-term exposure to unfavourable activities by one or more students. Such undesirable activities may include attempting or purposely causing hurt or discomfort to others. Ugboha & Rotshak (2022) ^[25] defined bullying as unwelcome, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or imagined power disparity. The behaviour is repeatable over time. Bullying occurs in social relationships when recurrent and cruel behaviours result from a misuse of authority.

Bullying can take many forms, such as emotional, verbal, physical, and cyberbullying. Cultural expectations, Peer pressure, and a lack of awareness about healthy relationships are frequently motivating factors in senior high schools in Ghana. Bullying must have all three characteristics: intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance. Intentional means that the behaviour will be hostile and deliberately attempting to harm another person. These violent actions towards others are typically repeated over time. Bullies usually have more significant social or physical power than their victims (Olweus, 2010) ^[21].

The Prevalence of Bullying in Senior High Schools in Ghana.

Bullying is a widespread problem in senior high schools in Ghana, with students commonly claiming verbal, physical, and psychological abuse from their classmates. As described by Olweus & Limber (2010) ^[21], bullying is a hostile activity that involves an imbalance of power and is repeated over time. Bullying is common in Ghana, with a considerable number of students experiencing victimisation during their school years (Adeoye, 2016) ^[4]. Bullying in Ghana schools takes several forms, including verbal harassment, physical aggression, social isolation, and cyberbullying. Physical bullying includes behaviours like pushing, hitting, and other sorts of physical abuse.

Insults, name-calling, and threats are all forms of verbal bullying. Social bullying, also known as relational bullying, is the practice of excluding someone from peer groups or spreading rumours in order to undermine someone's social position. Cyberbullying, a relatively new phenomenon, involves utilising internet channels to harass or threaten peers (Smith, 2008) ^[23]. Several studies have produced statistical evidence demonstrating the prevalence of bullying in senior high schools in Ghana. For example, Omoteso (2010) ^[22] conducted a study of 500 students from five regions in Ghana and discovered that 78% had witnessed bullying, while 65% had been personally involved, either as victims or offenders. These statistics indicate that bullying is not only widespread but also deeply embedded in the social fabric of Ghana schools. Another study by Egbochuku (2007) ^[10] discovered that bullying is more common in urban schools than in rural schools, probably due to the large number of students and higher anonymity in urban environments. According to the study report, up to 70% of students in some urban schools had been bullied, compared to only 45% in rural schools. This gap between urban and rural areas emphasises the importance of customised interventions that consider the various problems that different types of schools confront.

Causes of Bullying in Senior High Schools in Ghana

Bullying in senior high schools in Ghana is a serious problem that has long-term effects on the victims' emotional, physical, and psychological well-being. Understanding the causes of bullying is vital for designing effective prevention tactics. The following are some of the leading causes of bullying in Ghana senior high schools:

- 1. Socioeconomic Imbalance:** One of the most common reasons for bullying in senior high schools in Ghana is socioeconomic imbalance among students. Students from wealthy backgrounds frequently abuse those from less affluent backgrounds, creating a power imbalance. This can be physical hostility, verbal abuse, or social rejection. Socioeconomic gaps foster a sense of superiority among students from wealthy homes, who may use bullying to establish authority over their peers (Adeoye, 2016) ^[4].
- 2. Social Norms and Culture:** Social norms and culture in Ghana may also contribute to bullying in schools. In some groups, aggressive behaviour is normative, and children may learn at a young age that bullying is an acceptable approach to resolving disagreements or asserting dominance. Also, certain cultural traditions that emphasise hierarchical connections and respect for authority individuals might result in circumstances in which older students or those in higher courses bully younger or less powerful students (Eze, 2020) ^[11].
- 3. Family Backgrounds and Parenting Styles:** Family backgrounds and parenting styles influence children's behaviour, especially their propensity to bully others. Children who grow up in harsh or negligent households may mimic such behaviours at school by bullying their peers. Also, permissive parenting, in which parents fail to establish clear limits or adequately discipline their children, might lead to aggressive behaviour at school (Adu *et al.*, 2024; Oguneye & Oladeji, 2019) ^[8, 18]. Authoritarian parenting, defined by strong and harsh discipline, can lead to bullying since children may vent their frustrations on others (Nwankwo, 2021) ^[16].

- 4. Media Influence:** When investigating the reasons for bullying, it is impossible to ignore the influence of media, especially social media and entertainment. Students who have been exposed to aggressive or violent content in movies, online platforms and television shows may become desensitised to violence and more prone to engage in bullying. Social media, in particular, has become a venue for cyberbullying, allowing students to harass or intimidate others anonymously without fear of imminent repercussions (Umar, 2021) ^[26].
- 5. Peer Pressure:** Peer pressure is another important aspect contributing to bullying in senior high schools in Ghana. Adolescents are heavily impacted by their classmates, and the desire to fit in or be accepted by a specific group can drive adolescents to engage in bullying behaviour. Group dynamics frequently drive compliance, and students may harass others to win approval from their peers or avoid being excluded (Kobina *et al.*, 2024; Okeke, 2021) ^[13, 20].
- 6. Lack of Effective School Policies:** Bullying persists in senior high schools in Ghana primarily due to the absence or ineffectiveness of school regulations against it. Schools that lack clear anti-bullying policies or fail to enforce them provide a climate conducive to bullying. The absence of penalties for bullying behaviour empowers bullies while making victims feel powerless (Adamu, 2022) ^[1]. Also, inadequate training for teachers and school workers on how to deal with bullying exacerbates the situation. Bullying in senior high schools in Ghana is a multifaceted problem for numerous reasons, including socioeconomic imbalance, cultural norms, family backgrounds, media influence, peer pressure and ineffective school policies. Combating these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes parents, policymakers, educators, and the community as a whole.

The Role of Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counsellors in senior high schools in Ghana are essential in preventing bullying. Bullying remains a significant issue in senior high schools in Ghana, negatively impacting students' academic achievement, emotional well-being, and general school climate. Guidance and counselling in handling bullying are critical in reducing its impact and creating a secure and conducive learning environment.

- 1. Identification and Early Intervention:** Guidance counsellors play an important role in the early detection of bullying behaviours. They are trained to watch student behaviour, listen to teacher and student concerns, and recognise symptoms of bullying, whether verbal, physical, or psychological. Early intervention by guidance counsellors is crucial in preventing bullying from progressing into more severe forms of victimisation. According to Fawol (2017) ^[12], early detection and intervention by school counsellors can considerably reduce bullying in schools.
- 2. Developing Anti-Bullying Programmes and Policies:** Guidance counsellors work with school administrators to create and administer anti-bullying programs and regulations. These programs often include awareness campaigns, conferences, and seminars to educate teachers, students, and parents about the

negative impacts of bullying and the significance of creating a pleasant school environment. Counsellors also help to develop school rules that define bullying, detail punishments, and set clear procedures for reporting and dealing with bullying events (Ojo & Akintunde, 2016) ^[27]. These preventive approaches are critical in fostering a school culture against bullying.

3. **Providing Emotional Assistance and Counselling:** Victims of bullying frequently experience depression, anxiety, and a drop in self-esteem. Guidance counsellors provide vital emotional assistance to these adolescents, assisting them in dealing with the psychological impacts of bullying. They provide a secure environment for students to express their emotions and worries, and via counselling, they assist bullied adolescents in rebuilding their confidence and resilience (Adeyemo, 2014) ^[6]. Counsellors' emotional assistance is critical in minimising long-term psychological damage and restoring victims' sense of security in the school setting.
4. **Mediation and Conflict Resolution:** Guidance counsellors frequently act as intermediaries between the bully and the victim, fostering discussion and promoting understanding among the parties involved. They help students acquire conflict-resolution skills and promote peaceful dispute resolution (Ogunleye, 2019) ^[18]. This strategy solves the immediate issue and prepares students to deal with future conflicts constructively, lowering the probability of recurring bullying episodes.
5. **Training and Supporting Teacher:** Teachers are generally the first to notice bullying situations, therefore, their involvement in resolving bullying is crucial. Guidance counsellors train and support teachers in recognising the indications of bullying and responding appropriately. This training frequently covers tactics for regulating classroom behaviour, creating inclusive environments, and responding to bullying when it arises (Adu, 2022; Akinboye, 2018) ^[7]. Counsellors contribute to a more alert and supportive school community by providing teachers with the expertise and abilities necessary to deal with bullying.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Effective monitoring and assessment of anti-bullying methods are required to ensure their effectiveness. Guidance counsellors are in charge of evaluating the success of programs and making any required adjustments. They collect information about bullying incidences, analyse patterns, and use the results to improve the school's bullying policy (Onyeji, 2020) ^[28]. Continuous monitoring and assessment contribute to the long-term success of initiatives to decrease bullying and maintain a secure learning atmosphere.
7. **Involving Parents and the Community:** Guidance counsellors' roles extend beyond the school, engaging parents and community members in efforts to combat bullying. Counsellors communicate with parents, telling them about the indications of bullying and urging them to watch their children's behaviour and well-being. They also work with neighbourhood organisations to give services and support to bullied students (Nwoye 2017) ^[29]. Engaging parents and community members ensures a comprehensive strategy for bullying, addressing it on several fronts. The role of guidance and counselling in tackling bullying in senior high schools

in Ghana is varied, identification and early intervention, development of anti-bullying programmes, emotional assistance, mediation and conflict resolution, teacher training, monitoring evaluation and parents and the community involvement. Guidance counsellors play an important role in fostering a safe, assisted, and inclusive setting for all students, minimising the occurrence and impact of bullying in schools.

Effective Guidance and Counselling Strategies

Effective guidance and counselling strategies are essential for tackling this widespread issue. These initiatives seek not only to prevent bullying instances but also to establish a supportive learning atmosphere that encourages positive student relationships. The following are some of the main strategies:

1. **Peer Mediation Programmes:** Peer mediation entails educating students to mediate disputes among their peers. This method encourages students to resolve conflicts peacefully and can successfully combat bullying. According to Adewale (2020) ^[5], peer mediation minimises bullying and encourages students to develop conflict resolution and leadership abilities.
2. **Implementation of Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programmes:** Schools should implement comprehensive anti-bullying programmes that involve education, policies, and intervention strategies. These courses should aim to teach students about the effects of bullying while also promoting a culture of compassion and respect. According to Adekoya & Ayodele (2019) ^[3], effective anti-bullying programmes include both preventive and reactive policies, ensuring students have the information and abilities to battle and report bullying.
3. **Individual and Group Counselling:** Counsellors should offer individual and group counselling sessions to both perpetrators and victims of bullying. These sessions aid in treating the psychological impact of bullying on victims as well as changing the behaviour of bullies. According to Adu & Nimo (2023) ^[9], customised counselling provides for a more in-depth knowledge of the underlying problems that contribute to bullying behaviour, whereas group counselling promotes collective responsibility and peer support.
4. **Incorporation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into the school curriculum can help to minimise bullying by providing children with empathy, regulation, emotional and effective communication. SEL programmes assist students in forming trustworthy connections and making responsible choices. According to Uche & Adeyemi (2020) ^[24], schools that adopt SEL experience a significant improvement in student behaviour and a decrease in instances of bullying.
5. **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** Schools must periodically monitor and evaluate the efficacy of their anti-bullying policies. This includes gathering information on bullying events, student input, and the overall atmosphere in the school. Nwankwo (2019) ^[15] underlines the need for continual assessment to find growth areas and ensure that anti-bullying strategies are successful and relevant to students' needs.
6. **Counsellor-Led Workshops and Seminars:** Workshops and seminars conducted by school

counsellors significantly impact students' views toward bullying. These lessons should focus on teaching students about the types of bullying, such as physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, as well as how to deal with them. According to Nwosu & Nwokolo (2018) ^[17], such programmes should include teachers and parents in order to guarantee a coordinated approach to bullying prevention.

7. **Parental Involvement:** Involving parents in anti-bullying activities is critical. Schools should offer parents training and resources on how to spot and address bullying. Collaboration between school counsellors and parents guarantees that students hear consistent anti-bullying messages at school and at home. Adebayo & Omisore (2021) ^[2] contend that when parents take an active role, students are prone to report bullying and follow school anti-bullying rules. Combating bullying in senior high schools in Ghana necessitates a multifaceted approach involving the entire school community. Effective guidance and counselling measures, which include peer mediation, comprehensive anti-bullying programmes, individual and group counselling, Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), regular monitoring, workshops and seminars, and parental involvement, are critical to establishing a safe and supportive educational setting. These measures eliminate bullying and improve students' overall well-being and academic performance.

Challenges in Combating Bullying Using Guidance and Counselling in Senior High Schools in Ghana

While the problems of combating bullying using guidance and counselling in senior high schools in Ghana are essential, they also highlight the difficulty of developing a supportive and effective anti-bullying strategy. These concerns illustrate systemic issues and areas where focused initiatives can have a significant impact. Understanding and tackling these challenges is critical for designing comprehensive measures to promote a safer and more inclusive learning setting.

1. **Lack of Awareness about Bullying:** Many teachers, students, and parents are not completely aware of the various types of bullying and their consequences. This lack of understanding might result in underreporting and ineffective interventions (Adewale, 2020) ^[5].
2. **Inadequate Training for Counsellors:** Counsellors may not receive adequate bullying training, limiting their ability to address and manage bullying instances (Okafor & Chukwu, 2021) ^[19].
3. **Cultural Stigma:** In some Ghanaian communities, combating mental health and counselling may be stigmatised, rendering it challenging for students to seek assistance (Uche & Adeyemi, 2020) ^[24].
4. **Limited Resources:** A lot of schools lack the resources required to effectively conduct anti-bullying programs, such as counselling tools and qualified staff (Adekoya & Ayodele, 2019) ^[3].
5. **Resistance from Stakeholders:** Parents, Teachers, and students may be hostile to anti-bullying programmes due to customary assumptions or a misunderstanding of the programmes' benefits (Nwosu & Nwokolo, 2018) ^[17].
6. **Inconsistent Policy Implementation:** Anti-bullying policies may not be uniformly enforced throughout

schools, resulting in different levels of effectiveness (Nwankwo, 2019) ^[15].

7. **High Student-to-Counsellor Ratio:** The high student-to-counsellor ratio in many schools might overwhelm counsellors, limiting their ability to manage bullying incidents properly (Adebayo & Omisore, 2021) ^[2].
8. **Lack of Student Involvement:** Students may not be fully engaged in anti-bullying measures, reducing the effectiveness of such programmes (Adewale, 2020) ^[5].
9. **Limited Parental Involvement:** Parents may not be fully engaged in anti-bullying activities, reducing the overall performance of these programmes (Nwosu & Nwokolo, 2018) ^[17].
10. **Short-Term Focus:** Many anti-bullying programmes may prioritise short-term fixes over long-term modifications (Uche & Adeyemi, 2020) ^[24].

Recommendations to the Challenges in Combating Bullying Using Guidance and Counselling in Senior High Schools in Ghana

1. **Increase Awareness and Education:** Execute comprehensive education awareness to educate teachers, students, and parents about the various types of bullying and their consequences. Regular workshops and educational sessions can be beneficial.
2. **Enhance Counsellor Training:** Train counsellors on handling bullying situations, including support and intervention measures.
3. **Address Cultural Stigma:** Encourage open talks about mental health and counselling in schools and communities to minimise stigma while inspiring students to seek assistance.
4. **Allocate Resources:** Invest in counselling resources, professional development, and materials to help effective anti-bullying campaigns.
5. **Engage Stakeholders:** Include parents, teachers, and community leaders in the planning and execution of anti-bullying initiatives to guarantee their buy-in and participation.
6. **Standardise Policy Implementation:** Create and enforce comprehensive anti-bullying policies across all schools to guarantee consistent implementation and effectiveness.
7. **Reduce Student-to-Counsellor Ratio:** Increase the number of counsellors or offer assistance to handle the high student-to-counsellor ratio properly.
8. **Foster Student Involvement:** Encourage student involvement in anti-bullying measures by implementing peer-led programmes and participating in policy development.
9. **Increase Parental Engagement:** Provide parents with training and resources to help them combat bullying and promote active involvement in school programmes.
10. **Focus on Long-Term Solutions:** Create and implement anti-bullying programmes with a long-term emphasis, including frequent review and adjustments depending on input and results.

Conclusion

This study on combating bullying using guidance and counselling in senior high schools in Ghana highlights the complex nature of bullying, its underlying causes, and the role of guidance and counselling services in combating the issue. The findings reveal that factors such as ineffective

school policies, socioeconomic imbalance, peer pressure, family backgrounds, and societal influences contribute significantly to the prevalence of bullying. The study also identifies a range of intervention strategies, including anti-bullying programmes, peer mediation, social-emotional learning (SEL) integration, and greater parental involvement, as effective in mitigating bullying.

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