

BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OGUN STATE: COUNSELLING INTERVENTION APPROACH

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Abstract

Bullying behaviour among secondary school students is a pervasive issue with profound implications for academic performance, emotional well-being, and school climate. This problem often occurs within social contexts where the extent of the issue is under-recognized by teachers and parents, and where bystanders may feel reluctant or uncertain about how to intervene. counselling interventions have emerged as a crucial strategy in addressing and mitigating bullying behaviour. This paper through adoption of systemic review of position style reflects on the essential role of counselling in combating bullying, reviews evidence-based practices, and offers actionable recommendations for integrating these interventions within secondary schools. Emphasizing a holistic approach, the discussion highlights the effectiveness of individual, group, and family counselling, as well as the importance of school-wide initiatives and continuous evaluation. The proposed strategies aim to create a safer, more supportive environment conducive to the overall development and well-being of students.

Keywords: Bullying behaviour, secondary schools, counselling interventions, evidence-based practices, school climate

Introduction

Bullying can be defined as repeated negative actions directed at specific individuals by one or more people who possess greater strength than the victim. These actions may include physical aggression (e.g., hitting and shoving), verbal threats, mockery, or cruel gestures. Essentially, bullying involves hostile behaviour aimed at harming others or a group of people. Bullies engage in such behaviour to assert power and control over those they perceive as weaker. As a subtype of aggressive behaviour, bullying is a common issue among children and adolescents in schools worldwide (Abd El-Fatah *et al.*, 2022; Cross *et al.*, 2019; Farahat, 2019).

The type of learning provided to students is crucial, particularly for those with limited exposure and understanding of their environment. Parents, teachers, and society have noted a decline in discipline and positive behaviour among secondary school students. Many students exhibit a lack of respect, courtesy, self-control, and social protocol, manifesting in behaviours such as disrespect towards authority, promiscuity, drug abuse, and a carefree lifestyle (Ugboha & Rotshak, 2022). Guidance plays a vital role in helping students adapt to new educational environments and develop a better understanding of their identity and background. It aids them in recognizing self-awareness, peer pressure, interpersonal relationships, social decorum, responsibility, and conflict resolution skills (Esere & Ladi, 2020; Fareo, 2015).

Despite being a widespread experience, bullying remains a complex social issue with severe consequences for both bullies and victims. There is growing global concern about bullying in schools due to its detrimental effects on the overall school climate and students' right to a safe, fear-free learning environment (Hellström *et al.*, 2015; Rette & Pawlowski, 2016). Bullying can cause significant physical or psychological harm to the victim. The most widely accepted definition describes bullying as the repeated exposure of an individual to negative actions by one or more people.

These actions can be verbal (e.g., threats, insults, teasing) or non-verbal (e.g., hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing, vandalizing property, rude gestures) (Gordon, 2018; Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017).

Historically, schools have been regarded as safe environments, second only to the home, where children can develop, learn, and socialize in a secure setting. However, this perception is increasingly challenged by the rising incidence of violence and bullying within educational institutions. Bullying in secondary schools, characterized by repeated physical, verbal, and relational aggression, threatens the fundamental safety and inclusivity of the school environment (Magaji-Yusuf *et al.*, 2020). The pervasive nature of bullying undermines student well-being and disrupts the positive atmosphere that schools aim to provide. The core element of bullying is the power imbalance that allows for the mistreatment of the victim (Subedi, 2020; Antonopoulos, 2015).

In recent years, the issue of violence in schools has gained prominence, with a noticeable increase in media reports about violent incidents in educational settings (Diliberti *et al.*, 2017). Despite this rising frequency, society continues to expect schools to be safe havens for students. To maintain a peaceful and secure environment, educational stakeholders are increasingly focused on addressing violence within schools. Violence involves the deliberate use of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a community. It results in, or is likely to result in, injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation. Broadly, violence includes any act that fosters fear or intimidation, such as assaults, theft, or vandalism (Education Review Office, 2019; Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024; National Center for Education Statistics NCES, 2018).

Bullying is a widespread issue with significant consequences. It is not a trivial matter but a distressing experience faced by many schoolchildren daily (Abd El-Fatah *et al.*, 2022). While violence is often considered a subset of aggression, educational research frequently views aggression as a form of violence (Subedi, 2020). Studies indicate that approximately 15% of students either experience regular bullying or engage in bullying behaviour. In the U.S., 15–30% of students are involved in bullying, while in Australia, the prevalence is 15–20% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). Boys are more frequently involved in bullying, both as perpetrators and victims, compared to girls. However, this difference decreases with indirect aggression, where girls tend to use methods like spreading rumors and social isolation (Cross *et al.*, 2019; Hellström *et al.*, 2015).

Guidance and counselling should be delivered holistically within secondary schools. Vocational guidance offers information about job opportunities and factors affecting the job market, such as unemployment and technological advancements (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024). Bullying may involve an individual targeting another person or group. To qualify as bullying, the negative actions must be intentional, repetitive, and involve a perceived or actual power imbalance, making it difficult for the victim to defend themselves (Antonopoulos, 2015; Farahat, 2019).

Bullying can be categorized into direct bullying (overt attacks) and indirect bullying (social exclusion) (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). Studies over the years on school bullying have added to the understanding of the problems as well as the encounters faced in addressing this complex social problem that can have severe negative consequences for both bullies and victims (Goncy *et al.*, 2015; Wafaa *et al.*, 2022). This paper explores how counselling interventions can be effectively used to address and alleviate bullying, thereby supporting a positive and respectful school culture.

Concept of in-school Bullying

Bullying is defined as a repeated aggressive behaviour that can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing), verbal (e.g., name-calling, threats), or relational (e.g., exclusion, spreading rumors) (Abd El-Fatah *et al.*, 2022). It involves an imbalance of power where the aggressor exerts control or intimidation over the victim (Cross *et al.*, 2019; Farahat, 2019).

Bullying is a troubling behaviour marked by repeated aggression aimed at an individual. This aggression can take various forms. Bullying manifests in several distinct forms, each with its own method of harm. Physical bullying includes actions like hitting or pushing, where physical force is directly used to inflict pain or discomfort on someone (Gordon, 2018). Verbal bullying involves using hurtful words to damage another person, such as name-calling, making threats, or delivering derogatory remarks (Rette & Pawlowski, 2016). Relational bullying focuses on undermining someone's social connections or reputation, achieved through actions like excluding them from groups or spreading harmful rumors (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017). Each type of bullying targets individuals

in different ways, yet all contribute to a harmful environment. At its core, bullying is characterized by an imbalance of power. The aggressor uses their perceived superiority to control or intimidate the victim (Hellström *et al.*, 2015).

The effects of bullying are profound and affect everyone involved—victims, perpetrators, and bystanders (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). For Victims: The impact can be severe. Victims often suffer from psychological trauma, experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues as a result of being bullied (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024). Their self-esteem may plummet, leaving them feeling unworthy or defective. Academically, bullying can disrupt their performance, making it difficult for them to focus, attend school, or succeed in their studies (Magaji-Yusuf *et al.*, 2020). In extreme cases, the psychological strain can lead to suicidal thoughts or actions (Abd El-Fatah *et al.*, 2022).

For Perpetrators: Those who engage in bullying may face ongoing behavioural issues. Their aggressive behaviour can lead to difficulties in managing their emotions and maintaining healthy relationships (Fareo, 2015). Additionally, there may be legal consequences if their actions involve physical violence or harassment that breaches laws or school policies (Farehat, 2018).

For Bystanders: Witnesses to bullying often experience feelings of helplessness and anxiety, as they may feel unable to intervene or stop the aggression (Antonopoulos, 2015). This can lead to a sense of guilt or stress about the situation. Furthermore, bystanders may be influenced by what they observe, potentially becoming desensitized to violence or even participating in similar behaviour, thus perpetuating the cycle of bullying (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017).

Recognizing these impacts highlights the critical need for effective measures to address bullying. It is essential for schools and communities to implement strategies that not only support victims and correct the behaviour of perpetrators but also educate bystanders (Ugboha & Rotshak, 2022). Such comprehensive efforts are vital in creating a safer and more inclusive environment for all (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

Forms of Bullying

The most common forms of bullying are verbal harassment, such as teasing and name-calling (Cross *et al.*, 2019). In Nigeria, forms of bullying include kicking and hitting, extortion of money from victims, locking individuals inside a room, sending nasty notes, isolation, teasing, and threats to beat others (Farehat, 2018). Five major forms of bullying are identified as physical violence and attacks, verbal taunts, name-calling and put-downs, threats and intimidation, extortion or stealing of money or possessions, and exclusion from peer groups (Magaji-Yusuf *et al.*, 2020).

Characteristics of Students Who Are Bullies

There are many common characteristics found in most bullies. Most bullies are males, popular, and often athletes. They have excellent social skills, with the ability to attract many followers and easily manipulate others (Fareo, 2015). Bullies are psychologically strong and very popular among their peers, which is important for boosting their well-being. Bullying behaviour is self-reinforcing. When students find that putting others down gains them approval from their peers, they are likely to continue such behaviour (Antonopoulos, 2015).

The Impact of Bullying

Bullying in secondary schools manifests in various forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). Its effects are profound, leading to increased instances of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among victims (Rette & Pawlowski, 2016). Additionally, perpetrators of bullying often exhibit behavioural issues that can persist into adulthood (Gordon, 2018). Addressing bullying through counselling not only aids in the immediate resolution of conflicts but also contributes to long-term emotional and social development (Ugboha & Rotshak, 2022).

The impact of bullying extends far beyond the immediate emotional and psychological effects, influencing various aspects of both the victims and perpetrators. The short-term and long-term consequences of bullying can be profound, affecting individuals' mental health, academic performance, and social relationships.

Theoretical Framework

i. Social Cognition Theory

Bullying does not typically arise spontaneously; rather, it usually stems from underlying causes or risk factors in a person's life. Children often learn behaviours through observation and imitation of others.

Albert Bandura suggested that violent and unpunished aggressive actions are more likely to be imitated. Conversely, aggression that is punished is less likely to be replicated. Human behaviour, including bullying, is shaped by the interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants. The core of social cognitive theory is the principle that learning through observation is fundamental to understanding bullying.

ii. Dominance Theory of Bullying

Dominance Theory, developed by Sidanius and Pratto in 1999 and later refined by Pellegrini *et al.* in 2007, posits that individuals engage in bullying to gain social status, resources, and popularity (Evans *et al.*, 2014). For example, in a classroom setting, some students may exhibit dominant behaviour to gain admiration from peers. These students often form alliances with other bullies, becoming leaders of such groups. These groups may then target less powerful students. Additionally, individuals with leadership traits may use their charisma to assert dominance and gain social prestige.

iii. Humiliation Theory

Humiliation involves actions that embarrass or belittle others, often performed by someone in a position of power who publicly reveals the shortcomings of a weaker individual (Olweus, 1994). This form of bullying has severe effects, including depression and reduced social cohesion. It creates a toxic school environment and undermines the basic human rights of respect and dignity.

iv. Organizational Cultural Theory

Bullying behaviours are often learned from the community, society, or school rather than being inherited. A school's culture significantly influences bullying behaviour, either promoting or deterring it. Efforts to reduce bullying must address and potentially alter the school culture. Schools must foster a safe, collaborative environment, as children spend significant time at school, which impacts their behaviour.

Consequences for Victims

The consequences for bullied victims are stated as follows:

1. Mental Health Issues

Depression: Victims of bullying are significantly more likely to suffer from depression. Studies indicate that 26% of girls and 16% of boys who are frequently bullied experience depression, compared to 8% and 3% of non-bullied peers, respectively (Rigby, 2018). Even into adulthood, these individuals may face increased risks of depression, poor self-esteem, and other mental health issues, including schizophrenia (Ekemoruah, Enakpoya, & Okorodudu, 2024).

Suicidal Thoughts: Bullying increases the likelihood of suicidal ideation, with 8% of girls and 4% of boys considering suicide, compared to just 1% among non-victims (Farahat, 2018).

2. Academic Challenges

Concentration and Performance: Victims often have difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork, leading to a decline in academic performance from marginal to poor levels (Gordon, 2018). The anxiety resulting from bullying can cause various physical and emotional ailments that further disrupt their education.

3. Absenteeism and Drop-Out Rates

Increased Absenteeism: Victimized students are more likely to be absent from school to avoid bullying, with 16% of boys and 31% of girls reporting absences for this reason (Rigby, 2018). This increased absenteeism can contribute to higher drop-out rates among bullied students.

4. Long-Term Psychological Impact

Enduring Psychological Scars: The psychological scars from bullying can last into adulthood, manifesting as ongoing feelings of isolation and diminished self-esteem (Farahat, 2018).

5. Social Impact

Popularity and Social Integration: Victims of bullying tend to be less popular and socially isolated compared to their peers (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017). Verbal and indirect bullying can inflict emotional wounds that are as severe as physical injuries. Victims may develop patterns of compliance with unfair demands or become anxious and depressed.

Anxiety and Emotional Distress: Victims often suffer from chronic anxiety, which can lead to physical ailments and hinder their overall well-being (Farahat, 2019). This anxiety can disrupt daily functioning and contribute to a sense of helplessness and fear.

2. Academic and Social Impact

Academic Performance: Bullying negatively impacts academic performance, with victims often experiencing a decline from “marginal to poor” performance due to their emotional distress and difficulty concentrating (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017). Higher rates of absenteeism and school drop-out rates are observed, with 16% of boys and 31% of girls reporting absences to avoid victimization (Rigby, 2022).

Social Isolation: Victims frequently find themselves less popular and socially isolated compared to their peers. The effects of bullying extend beyond school years, with victims carrying psychological scars into adulthood, impacting their social interactions and self-esteem (Gordon, 2018).

3. Long-Term Effects

Psychological Scars: The trauma from bullying can persist long into adulthood, leading to long-term issues such as poor self-esteem, anxiety, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Mobarki *et al.*, 2020). Victims may also develop a pattern of compliance with unfair demands, contributing to ongoing personal struggles (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

4. behavioural Patterns

Adaptation and Compliance: Continuous bullying may lead victims to expect mistreatment from others, resulting in maladaptive behaviours, such as increased anxiety or depression. Some victims may even adopt bullying behaviours themselves as a coping mechanism (Farehat, 2018).

5. behavioural and Social Consequences

Chronic Aggression: Bullies who are not effectively intervened upon may continue their aggressive behaviour into adulthood. This can result in persistent issues in maintaining positive relationships and a tendency toward deviant behaviours (Antonopoulos, 2015).

Deviant behaviour: Research highlights that bullies are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours such as vandalism, theft, and drug use. They may also experience difficulties in forming stable friendships, often associating with other bullies who reinforce aggressive behaviour (Farahat, 2019).

Social and Criminal Issues: Chronic bullies are often involved in more serious criminal activities, including sexual harassment, domestic violence, and gang involvement. Their behaviour can lead to increased antisocial tendencies and criminal behaviour as adults (Mobarki *et al.*, 2020).

6. Psychological Impact

Increased Anxiety: Bullies who use aggression to cover their insecurities may experience heightened anxiety and self-esteem issues. They may also be more prone to carrying weapons and getting involved in violence (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017).

Impact on Bystanders

1. Psychological Effects

Fear and Anxiety: Bystanders may experience anxiety and fear as they witness bullying incidents. This can impact their own mental health and create a sense of helplessness (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

behavioural Adoption: Bystanders may either adopt the behaviours of the bullies or victims, contributing to the perpetuation of bullying dynamics (Gordon, 2018).

2. Social and Academic Impact

Poor Academic and Social Outcomes: Bystanders who are involved in bullying situations, either passively or actively, often exhibit poor academic achievement and a lack of bonding to school. They may also have fewer friends and exhibit conduct problems (Antonopoulos, 2015).

Counselling Techniques for Managing Bullying

1. Preventive counselling Programs

a. **Awareness and Education:** Implementing counselling programs that focus on educating students about the nature and consequences of bullying can significantly raise awareness and foster empathy (Abd El-Fatah *et al.*, 2022). These programs typically involve workshops and seminars designed to help students understand the impact of bullying and the importance of respectful behaviour (Cross *et al.*, 2019). By raising awareness early, schools can prevent bullying before it begins (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

b. **Social Skills Training:** counselling interventions aimed at developing students' social skills can enhance their ability to interact with peers in a positive and constructive manner (Gordon, 2018). Programs might include role-playing scenarios, communication exercises, and assertiveness training

to help students build confidence and improve their interpersonal interactions (Magaji-Yusuf *et al.*, 2020). These skills are crucial for preventing bullying by promoting respectful and empathetic communication (Farehat, 2018).

2. Intervention Strategies

a. **Individual counselling:** Providing one-on-one counselling for both victims and perpetrators of bullying addresses their specific needs and underlying issues (Farahat, 2019). For victims, counselling can offer support for coping with trauma and rebuilding self-esteem (Ugboha & Rotshak, 2022). For perpetrators, it can focus on addressing behavioural problems and encouraging positive behaviour change (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017). This personalized approach helps to address the unique circumstances of each student involved (Hellström *et al.*, 2015).

b. **Group counselling:** Group counselling sessions offer a platform for students to share their experiences and strategies for handling bullying (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024). These sessions can also facilitate the development of a supportive peer network and foster a sense of community among students (Rette & Pawlowski, 2016). Group counselling helps to build solidarity and provides mutual support, which can be instrumental in managing bullying situations (Antonopoulos, 2015).

3. Crisis Intervention

a. **Immediate Support:** Providing counselling during or immediately after a bullying incident is crucial for addressing the immediate psychological needs of affected students (Fareo, 2015). Crisis intervention strategies include de-escalation techniques and offering a safe space for students to process their experiences (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). Immediate support helps to mitigate the emotional impact of the incident and aids in the swift recovery of the students involved (Mobarki, Morsi, & Hamouda, 2020).

4. Parental and Teacher Involvement

a. **Family counselling:** Engaging families in counselling sessions can help address any contributing familial factors and support a collaborative approach to resolving bullying issues (Farahat, 2018). Parents can be guided on how to reinforce positive behaviours at home and support their children through the challenges they face (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2018). Family involvement is essential for creating a consistent and supportive environment for students (Ugboha & Rotshak, 2022).

b. **Teacher Training:** Educators play a critical role in identifying and addressing bullying (Karololwanga & Gatua, 2023). Training programs for teachers should focus on recognizing signs of bullying, implementing effective intervention strategies, and fostering a supportive classroom environment (Gordon, 2018). By equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge, schools can better address bullying and create a positive learning atmosphere (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

The Need for counselling Interventions

i. Prevalence and Impact

Research shows that a significant number of secondary school students experience or engage in bullying, which has serious implications for their mental health, academic performance, and social relationships (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Understanding the prevalence of bullying is crucial for developing effective interventions (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016).

ii. Consequences

Victims of bullying often suffer from anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024). Perpetrators may exhibit increased aggression and other behavioural issues (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017). Addressing these consequences through targeted counselling is essential for supporting both victims and perpetrators (Fareo, 2015).

Limitations of Current Approaches

a. Traditional Disciplinary Measures

Often, traditional disciplinary measures do not address the underlying emotional and psychological issues contributing to bullying (Farahat, 2019). These approaches may be insufficient for preventing recurrence and addressing the needs of all affected parties (Magaji-Yusuf *et al.*, 2020).

b. Reactive Approaches

Many existing strategies are reactive rather than proactive (Gordon, 2018). They may fail to prevent bullying before it starts or provide comprehensive support to those involved. There is a need for more proactive and holistic approaches that address the root causes of bullying (Hellström *et al.*, 2015).

Targeted Intervention Strategies

1. Crisis Intervention

i. Immediate Support

In the aftermath of a bullying incident, providing immediate support is crucial (Mobarki, Morsi, & Hamouda, 2020). This includes creating a safe space for students, addressing their emotional needs, and implementing short-term strategies to de-escalate the situation (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). Quick and effective crisis intervention helps to stabilize the situation and support students' well-being (Ugboha & Rotshak, 2022).

2. Involvement of Parents and Educators

i. Parental Engagement

Family counselling can address contributing factors at home and reinforce positive behaviours and communication strategies (Farahat, 2018). Parents play a vital role in supporting their children and collaborating with the school to address bullying issues (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2018).

ii. Teacher Training

Educators need training to recognize signs of bullying, intervene effectively, and foster a supportive classroom environment (Karololwanga & Gatua, 2023). Training programs should cover strategies for maintaining a positive school climate and managing bullying incidents effectively (Gordon, 2018). Properly trained teachers can significantly contribute to preventing and addressing bullying in schools (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

Counselling Implications

a. Individual counselling

Individual counselling aims to address the psychological and emotional needs of both victims and perpetrators of bullying. This approach focuses on helping individuals work through their unique challenges and experiences related to bullying. Several therapeutic techniques are employed to support individuals in managing their emotions and resolving underlying issues:

- i. **Cognitive-behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT helps could individuals identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviours associated with bullying (Hellström, Persson, & Hagquist, 2015).
- ii. **Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT):** SFBT could assists clients in developing practical solutions and coping strategies to address their current issues (Magaji-Yusuf, Esere, & Oniye, 2020).
- iii. **Trauma-Informed Care:** This approach ensures that counselling practices are sensitive to the impact of trauma and provide a safe space for healing (Farahat, 2018).

Through individual counselling, individuals often experience improved self-esteem, better emotional regulation, and enhanced conflict resolution skills. These benefits help victims and perpetrators alike navigate their experiences more effectively and contribute to their overall well-being (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017).

b. Group counselling

Group Counselling seeks to facilitate peer support and collective problem-solving among students. It provides a space for individuals to share their experiences and learn from one another. Techniques used in group counselling include:

- i. **Social Skills Training:** Enhances interpersonal interactions and helps students build confidence (Farehat, 2018).
- ii. **Empathy Development Exercises:** Foster understanding and compassion among participants (Ekemoruah, Enakpoya, & Okorodudu, 2024).
- iii. **Peer Mediation Sessions:** Encourage collaborative conflict resolution (Mobarki, Morsi, & Hamouda, 2020).

Participants in group counselling often develop enhanced social skills, increased empathy, and stronger peer relationships. These outcomes contribute to a more positive and cohesive school environment, where students support each other and work together to address bullying issues (Farahat, 2019).

c. Family counselling

Family counselling involves engaging families in addressing bullying behaviours and creating supportive home environments. It aims to improve family dynamics and reinforce positive behaviours at home. Family therapy plays a crucial role in addressing relational issues and enhancing

communication within the family unit (Gordon, 2018). It helps families navigate conflicts and improve their interactions, fostering a more supportive environment for all members.

Parent training sessions are designed to equip parents with effective strategies to support their children. These sessions provide practical tools and techniques that parents can use to reinforce positive behaviours and address challenges at home (Ekemoruah, Enakpoya, & Okorodudu, 2024).

Collaborative problem-solving involves working together to tackle bullying-related issues. This approach encourages open dialogue and joint efforts between students, families, and schools to develop effective solutions and support systems (Farahat, 2019). By engaging in this collaborative process, all parties can contribute to resolving conflicts and preventing further incidents of bullying.

Family counselling leads to improved family relationships, better communication strategies, and consistent reinforcement of positive behaviours. These outcomes support the child's development and enhance efforts to address and prevent bullying (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017).

d. School-Wide counselling Programs

School-wide counselling programs aim to create a comprehensive framework for addressing bullying across the entire school community. These programs involve various stakeholders and encompass broad strategies to tackle bullying:

- i. Anti-Bullying Campaigns: Raise awareness and educate the entire school community (Farahat, 2019).
- ii. Peer Mentoring Programs: Provide support and guidance among students (Rette & Pawlowski, 2016).
- iii. Teacher Training Initiatives: Equip educators with the skills to recognize and address bullying effectively (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024).

The establishment of school-wide counselling programs leads to a positive school climate, increased awareness of bullying issues, and a reduction in incidents of bullying. These comprehensive efforts foster a safer and more inclusive school environment (Hellström, Persson, & Hagquist, 2015).

Implementation Strategies

1. Developing a Comprehensive counselling Plan

To address bullying effectively, schools should design a comprehensive counselling plan that encompasses preventive measures, intervention strategies, and robust support systems (Goncy *et al.*, 2015). This plan must be customized to fit the specific needs of the student population and the nature of bullying issues present (Fareo, 2015). A well-rounded plan includes proactive approaches to prevent bullying, methods for intervening when bullying occurs, and support mechanisms to assist affected students (Farahat, 2019).

2. Integrating counselling into School Culture

a. Integration of counselling Interventions

counselling interventions should be seamlessly integrated into the school culture. This integration involves creating an environment that prioritizes student well-being and promotes open dialogue about bullying and related issues. By embedding counselling practices into the everyday fabric of the school, students are encouraged to engage in conversations about their experiences and seek help when needed, fostering a supportive and communicative atmosphere (Gordon, 2018).

b. Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring and evaluation of counselling programs are crucial for assessing their effectiveness and making necessary improvements. This process includes gathering feedback from students, parents, and teachers, as well as analyzing the impact on bullying behaviour and overall student outcomes (Ekemoruah *et al.*, 2024). Effective monitoring ensures that counselling programs remain relevant, responsive, and capable of meeting the evolving needs of the school community (Farahat, 2019).

Conclusion

Counselling interventions are a vital component in addressing and mitigating bullying behaviour among secondary school students. The consequences of bullying are extensive and multifaceted, affecting the mental health, academic performance, and social relationships of victims, bullies, and bystanders. Effective intervention and counselling strategies are essential to mitigate these impacts and foster a supportive and inclusive school environment. Addressing bullying comprehensively through individual, group, and school-wide counselling can help alleviate the adverse effects and promote positive outcomes for all students involved. By implementing preventive

programs, providing targeted support, and involving key stakeholders, schools can create a more positive and supportive environment. Effective counselling approaches not only address immediate issues but also contribute to the long-term emotional and social development of students, fostering a healthier school climate.

Suggestions

1. Schools should integrate counselling services into their standard offerings, ensuring accessibility for all students. Also, dedicated roles for school counsellors could also be established to train them in bullying prevention and intervention.
2. School management should provide ongoing training for educators and counsellors on effective counselling techniques and bullying prevention strategies.
3. Management of schools should implement programs that engage parents in counselling efforts and educate them about the signs of bullying and effective responses.
4. The state ministries of Education in collaboration with secondary school management should ensure that counsellors, teachers, and school staff are well-trained in recognizing and addressing bullying behaviour.
5. State ministries of Education should encourage collaboration between counsellors, parents, and educators to create a unified approach to bullying prevention and intervention.
6. Psychologist, counsellors and future researchers should continuously evaluate the effectiveness of counselling interventions and adapt strategies based on feedback and emerging needs.

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