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# **Bullying Behaviours and Psychosocial Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigated bullying behaviours and psychosocial adjustment of secondary school students. The researcher sought to determine the forms of bullying behaviour and psychosocial adjustment exhibited by students and also to determine whether there are gender and age differences in bullying and psychosocial adjustments of students. The sample was 288 students drawn using stratified sampling technique from both private and public secondary schools in Ilorin south local government Area. An adapted questionnaire titled "Bullying Behaviour and Psychosocial Adjustment" (BBPAQ), patterned after Olweus Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire, was used to collect data from the students. The two research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Research hypotheses 1, 2, 5 and 6 were tested using uncorrelated t-test while research hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested using one-way ANOVA, at 0.05 level of significance. The results reveal that nicknames and due to size rank highest among 25 types of bully, knowledge of handling stress and worries rank first among types of psychosocial adjustment; no study also found that there are no significant differences in students' bullying and psychosocial adjustment due to gender, age and type of school. Based on the findings, the researchers pointed to the fact that the most common form of bullying is the indirect bullying and it was recommended among others that school administrator, psychologists, counselors, teachers and parents pay more attention and address bullying behaviours among students.

**Keyword:** Bullying Behaviour, Psychosocial, Adjustment, Secondary School Students.

Bullying is a form of abuse or harassment committed by one or more children against another child or children. According to Olweus (1993) bullying is a repeated negative acts committed either physically or verbally by one or more children usually against a weaker victim. Smith & Sharp (1994) defined bullying as a situation where one or more youth employs physical, emotional or verbal abuse to make life miserable for another. Bullying behaviour according to Olson (2007) is not normal childhood behaviour and



should not be seen as such because children are continuously being harassed by their peers at school.

Bullying among secondary school students is a very serious issue which should not be ignored because the victims are continuously miserable. Wing (2004) states that bullying imparts on the physical, emotional and social health of children involved. The bullies and those being bullied are usually associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment which manifests in their having difficulty in making friends, inability to have relationship with classmates and greater loneliness (Nansel, Craig, Overpack, Saluja & Ruan 2004). Hendriksen and Schrans (2010) defined psychosocial adjustment as adaptive task of managing upsetting feelings and frustrations. According to their study, the six domains of psychosocial adjustments are peer relations, dependency, hospitality, productivity, anxiety/depression and withdrawal. According to Nuhu (2013) severe bullying contributes to immediate problems such as neurosis, sleeping difficulties, study difficulties, truancy and depression as well as long term problems such as permanent anxiety, low self-esteem and school dropout. Bullied students more often suffer from humiliation, suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, difficulty with interpersonal relationship and psycho-somatic complaints (Janson & Hazler, 2004; Kim, Koh & Leven-thal, 2005). The study of Driksen & Schraus (2010) reported that male bully-victims are more likely to get involved in high-risk behaviours like carrying a gun to school, smoking cigarettes, alcohol intake, cheating and picking fight. These reactions usually go undetected more in public schools because of the large class size.

The study of Nansel et. al (2003) reported that bullying is prevalent across countries, however with a considerable variation among countries. According to Belsky (2008), bullying is a highly prevalent phenomenon that has harmful and long-lasting effects on victims and negative impact on school climate. The effect of bullying according to Kumpulainen (2008) can be serious and even fatal because individuals who are persistently subjected to abusive behaviour are at risk of stress related illness which can sometimes lead to suicide.

Gianluca and Tiziana (2009) reported that medical practitioners, school psychologists and educators have recently started becoming increasingly aware of the adverse consequences of bullying among school children. Victims of bullying more often than not demonstrate poor social and emotional adjustment. They are usually socially isolated and lonely, and always look for reasons to be absent from school (Arseneault, Walsh, Trzesniewsa, Newcombe and Caspi, 2006). The worst outcome is that a severely bullied child takes his/her own life. Bullies are more likely to grow into such behaviours such as domestic violence, criminality and substance abuse (Olweus 1993) Bullies are also more likely to display negative and anti-social behaviour like truancy, delinquency, substance abuse etc. during adolescence and they are also at risk of psychiatric disorders. (Smith, morita, Junge-Tas, Olweus, Catalano & Slee, 1999). Bullying behaviour according to Yulan, Ian, Ming, Mbulo, Chei, Chen and Duanne, (2010) is a problem that influences individuals, peer groups, families, schools and communities.



According to Olweus (1994), bullying behaviour can be physical (hitting, pushing and kicking), it can be verbal (name calling, provoking making threats and rumors). Other behaviour such as making faces and creating social exclusion are also forms of bullying. Nansel et al (2003) reported that boys are more likely to bully and be bullied than girls and they are more involved in direct physical aggression like hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving around or being locked indoors while indirect bullying such as name calling, teasing, rumors, rejection and taking of personal belongings is more common among girls. Uba, Siti, Nor and Rumaya (2010) asserted that there is a relationship between gender and bullying behaviour. The study of Griezel et al (2012) discovered that boys engage more and are more targets of bullying than girls. A similar study by Hoertel et al (2011) also found the probability of boys being more involved in bullying than girls. Additionally, the studies of Chapell et al (2006), Crick and Crotmeter (1995) and Wang et al (2009) all suggested that both boys and girls are involved in bullying but boys are significantly more aggressive and exhibits overall direct physical forms of bullying. Males according to the study of Crick and Nelson (2002) used physical and relational aggression with similar frequency while females mainly used relational aggression alone. This finding was supported by the study of Prinstein et al (2001). This study also reported that females are more involved in indirect bullying while males used more aggressive and direct forms of bullying.

Bullying occurs more in overcrowded classrooms as it is found in public schools and play grounds because there is little or no supervision like in private schools. Private schools also take bullying more seriously than public schools (Swearer, 2011). Nuhu (2013) further stated that bullying is evident in every school, public or private but more evident in public schools because of the larger class sizes and more social circles. Oluweus (1993b) found that large class or school size may be one of the causes of bullying while low class size has a positive effect on quelling disruptive behaviour of school students. Nuhu (2013) asserted that large classes which are common in public schools present more challenges for classroom management, pupils' control, marking, planning and assessment.

Much as the prevalent of bullying is on the increase across countries, the percentage of students who report being bullied in Nigeria and in Ilorin South is still very low and this could be because of the fear of being bullied the more. Harmful as bullying maybe to its victims, it is most times ignored by many teachers, school psychologists, counselors and administrators because of its silent but adverse effects. In most cases bullying is perceived as not a serious problem therefore little or no attention is paid to the behaviour (Nuhu 2013). This lukewarm attitude according to Idowu and Yahaya, (2006) promotes bullying behaviour the more among secondary school students and could sometimes lead to a more serious violent behaviour like the several school shootings in the United States of America by boys who were always described as loners. These boys may have been bullied at some point in school making them to be withdrawn from the society and developed a low self-esteem about themselves and



hatred for the society. Cohn & Canter (2008) reported that schools' shootings often show how victims' frustration with bullies can turn into vengeful violence. This study was thus designed to investigate bullying behaviours and psychosocial adjustment of secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government, Nigeria.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The main purpose of this study is to identify the forms of bullying behaviours and psychosocial adjustment as well as examine the contributions of age, gender and school types to bullying and psychosocial adjustment of secondary school students in Ilorin South, Nigeria. It was hypothesized that there are no significant differences in bullying and psychosocial adjustment due gender, age and school types of secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area

## **Method**

### ***Design***

The research design adopted for this study was correlational design. Correlational study as defined by stranger (2004) is a quantitative method of research in which two or more quantitative variables from the same group of subjects are used to determine if there is a relationship between the variables without necessary deciding which variable is the cause and which is the effect.

### ***Participants***

The population for this study was all secondary school students in Ilorin, Nigeria. The target population was all secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government. The sample was 288 junior and senior secondary school students drawn using stratified sampling technique from eight secondary schools in Ilorin south local government. Gender and school type were used as strata. Simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting 36 (Thirty-Six) junior and senior students from each school.

### ***Instrument***

The instrument for data collection is tagged "Bullying Behaviours and Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire" BBPAQ. It had three (3) sections: A, B & C. Section A dealt with demographic details of the participants, section B dealt with bullying behavior while Section C dealt with psychosocial adjustment. Section A has four items, section B has 25 items while section C has 10 items. The scale of response in this questionnaire was of four-point Likert (i.e. Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3 and Strongly Agree = 4. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer. A weighted score of 4, 3, 2 and 1 was attached to positive statements in order of magnitude while 1, 2, 3 and 4 was attached to negative statements.

The face and content validity of the instrument was established through vetting by five (5) experts in the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin.

The corrections and suggestions were affected by the researchers. Hence, Content Validity Index of BBPAQ obtained was 0.88. The test-retest reliability approach was adopted with an interval of two weeks of the first and second administrations. The responses obtained from the first and second administration were subjected to reliability test through Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic. At the end of the computation, a coefficient of 0.75 was obtained which implied that the instrument is good enough, could be used to collect data in this study and any other related study.

### ***Procedure***

The instrument was administered to the students by the researchers. Some teachers in the selected schools were made use of as research assistants to assist in the distribution and collection of the instrument. This was necessary for effective retrieval of the questionnaires.

Percentage was used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants. Mean and standard deviation and rank order were used to analyse forms of bullying and psycho-social adjustments; uncorrelated t-test was used to analyse sex and school types differences while and one-way ANOVA was used analyses age difference of students in forms of bullying and psycho-social adjustment at 0.05 level of significance SPSS 23.0 version was used to analyzed the data

### **Results**

The results of the study are presented tables followed by their interpretations

#### **Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Frequency counts and percentage were used to describe personal information of the participated in this study.



**Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

| Categories         | Characteristics        | Frequency        | Percentage (%)        |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>      | Male                   | 137              | 47.6%                 |
|                    | Female                 | 151              | 52.4%                 |
|                    | Total                  | 288              | 100.0                 |
| <b>Age</b>         | <b>Characteristics</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|                    | 10-12Years             | 99               | 33.5%                 |
|                    | 13-15 Years            | 142              | 49.3%                 |
|                    | 16 – 18 Years          | 37               | 12.8%                 |
|                    | 19 Years and Above     | 10               | 3.4%                  |
|                    | Total                  | 288              | 100.0                 |
|                    | <b>Characteristics</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>School Type</b> | Private Schools        | 144              | 50.00%                |
|                    | Public Schools         | 144              | 50.00%                |
|                    | Total                  | 288              | 100.0                 |

Table 1 shows that out of 288 students sampled, 137 (47.6%) were males while the rest 151 were females (52.4%). In the same vein, 99 (33.5%) were within the age range of 10 to 12 years; 142 (49.3%) were within the age bracket of 13 to 15 years; 37 (12.8%) were within the boundary of 16 to 18 years while the rest 10 (3.4%) were within the age limit of 19 years and above. Lastly, 144 (50%) were from both private and public schools respectively.

**Table 2**  
**Forms of Bullying Behaviour Prevalent Among Secondary Schools Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area**

| S/No | Statements   | Mean   | Std.    | Rank            |
|------|--|--------|---------|-----------------|
| 1    | My fellow students hurt me by calling me names, teased, and made jest of me        | 1.6944 | .83710  | 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| 2    | I was given nickname because of my size  | 1.6736 | 1.01095 | 2 <sup>nd</sup> |
| 3    | How often have other students(s) bullied you?                                      | 1.6563 | .79407  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> |
| 4    | Have you been bullied in other ways?   | 1.5486 | .67643  | 4 <sup>th</sup> |
| 5    | Other students(s) threatened to put me in trouble.                                 | 1.4826 | .68308  | 5 <sup>th</sup> |
| 6    | I hurt fellow student(s) by calling him/her names, teased and made jest of him/her | 1.4653 | .58926  | 6 <sup>th</sup> |

|    |   |        |        |                  |
|----|---|--------|--------|------------------|
| 7  | I was made fun of because of how my face looks  | 1.4618 | .72193 | 7 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 8  | Have you been bullied in the class, hostel, school bus stop, on the bus in the dining room etc. | 1.4514 | .68666 | 8 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 9  | How often have you bullied other students?  | 1.4375 | .73460 | 9 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 10 | I gave nickname to fellow student(s) because of his/her size.                                   | 1.4340 | .62119 | 10 <sup>th</sup> |
| 11 | fellow student(s) spread false rumours about me.  | 1.4063 | .71194 | 11 <sup>th</sup> |
| 12 | I was made fun of because of my tribe   | 1.3681 | .65992 | 12 <sup>th</sup> |
| 13 | Stronger student(s) forcefully took my belongings   | 1.3611 | .67932 | 13 <sup>th</sup> |
| 14 | I bullied fellow student(s) in other ways   | 1.3403 | .61529 | 14 <sup>th</sup> |
| 15 | I was fought, kicked, spat, and pushed by another student(s)                                    | 1.3125 | .65698 | 15 <sup>th</sup> |
| 16 | I am often isolated because another student(s) spread false rumours about me                    | 1.2465 | .54580 | 16 <sup>th</sup> |
| 17 | I threatened to put other student(s) in trouble.  | 1.2431 | .49733 | 17 <sup>th</sup> |
| 18 | I made sexual harassment statements to fellow student(s).                                       | 1.1667 | .44173 | 18 <sup>th</sup> |
| 19 | I fought, kicked, spat and pushed fellow student(s)   | 1.1667 | .44954 | 18 <sup>th</sup> |
| 20 | I am always excluded fellow student(s) from group activities.                                   | 1.2326 | .47006 | 18 <sup>th</sup> |
| 21 | Other student(s) made sexual harassment statement about me                                      | 1.1563 | .40021 | 21 <sup>st</sup> |
| 22 | Other student(s) often feel isolated because I spread false rumors about him/her                | 1.1354 | .42451 | 22 <sup>nd</sup> |
| 23 | Other student(s) sent negative text   | 1.1319 | .34915 | 23 <sup>rd</sup> |



| messages to me on my mobile phone |   |        |        |                  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------|--------|------------------|
| 24                                | I sent negative text messages to another student(s) on his/her mobile phone | 1.1076 | .39888 | 24 <sup>th</sup> |
| 25                                | I forcefully took fellow student(s) belongings because I am stronger.       | 1.0764 | .27887 | 25 <sup>th</sup> |

Table 2 reveals that out of 25 statements that addressed forms of bullying behaviours prevalent among secondary schools' student in Ilorin South Local Government Area, the statement which stated that my fellow student hurt me by calling me names teased and made jest of me, with the mean score of 1.6944 and standard deviation of .83710 ranked first. The statement that stated I was given nickname because of my size, with the mean score of 1.6736 and standard deviation of 1.01095 ranked second. The statement which asked how often other students bullied you, with the mean score of 1.6563 and the standard deviation of .79407 ranked third. All other statements followed but the least is the statement which stated that I forcefully took fellow student(s) belongings because I am stronger, with the mean score of 1.0764 and the standard deviation of .27887.

Table 3

Forms of Psychosocial Adjustment Prevalent Among Secondary Schools Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area

| S/No | Statements  | Mean   | Std.    | Rank            |
|------|---|--------|---------|-----------------|
| 1    | Students in my school are kind and helpful                                  | 2.6215 | 1.17723 | 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| 2    | We were taught how to handle stress and worries in your school              | 2.3507 | 1.11621 | 2 <sup>nd</sup> |
| 3    | My parents/guidance are aware of my problems and worries                    | 2.0764 | 1.13592 | 3 <sup>rd</sup> |
| 4    | I often feel lonely   | 1.8333 | .79633  | 4 <sup>th</sup> |
| 5    | I am always worried about going to school that I don't sleep well at night. | 1.7257 | .96873  | 5 <sup>th</sup> |
| 6    | I physically fight those bullying me.                                       | 1.6250 | .82111  | 6 <sup>th</sup> |
| 7    | I am happy if I have to miss classes or be absent from school               | 1.4514 | .72130  | 7 <sup>th</sup> |
| 8    | When I think about going to school I  | 1.4236 | .68919  | 8 <sup>th</sup> |



|    |   |        |        |                  |
|----|---|--------|--------|------------------|
|    | sometimes feel like running away  |        |        |                  |
| 9  | I feel so sad and hopeless about school                                     | 1.3785 | .66192 | 9 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 10 | When I think about going to school I sometimes feel like committing suicide | 1.2326 | .51936 | 10 <sup>th</sup> |

Table 3 revealed that out of 10 statements that addressed types of psychosocial adjustment prevalent among secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, the statement which stated that student in my school are kind and helpful, with the mean score of 2.6215 and standard deviation of 1.117723 ranked first. The statement, "We were thought how to handle stress and worries in the school", with the mean score of 2.3507 and standard deviation of 1.11621 ranked second. The statement "My parent/guardian are aware of my problems and worries" with the mean score of 2.0764 and the standard deviation of 1.13592 ranked third. All other statements followed but the least is statement which stated that when I think about going to school I sometimes feel like committing suicide, with the mean score of 1.2326 and the standard deviation of 0.51936. :

**Table 4**

Differences in Bullying Behaviours of Male and Female Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria

| Sex      | N   | X     | Sd.   | Df  | .t- value | Critical value | t- Sig. |
|----------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----------|----------------|---------|
| Male     | 137 | 65.69 | 09.62 |     |           |                |         |
|          |     |       |       | 286 | 0.241     | 1.968          | 0.15    |
| Female   | 151 | 62.88 | 8.19  |     |           |                |         |
| P = 0.05 |     |       |       |     |           |                |         |

Table 4 shows that the t-value = 0.241, df = 286, sig = 0.15 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.



Table 5

Difference in the Psychosocial Adjustment of Male and Female Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.

| Sex    | N   | Mean  | Sd.  | Df  | t- value | Critical t-value | Sig. |
|--------|-----|-------|------|-----|----------|------------------|------|
| Male   | 137 | 33.59 | 6.86 | 286 | 0.450    | 1.968            | .031 |
| Female | 151 | 32.78 | 5.99 |     |          |                  |      |

P = 0.05

Table 5 reveals that the t-value = 0.450. df = 286, p = 0.31. The p value is greater than the 0.05 significance level. This means that there is no significant difference in the psychosocial adjustment of male and female secondary school students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.

Table 6

Difference in the Bullying behaviour of Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria on the Basis of Age Distributions.

|                | Sum of Square | Df  | Mean Square | Cal. F-value | Critical F-value | Sig. |
|----------------|---------------|-----|-------------|--------------|------------------|------|
| Between Groups | 12.432        | 3   | 4.144       | 1.75         | 2.63             | 0.13 |
| Within Groups  | 672.512       | 284 | 2.368       |              |                  |      |
| Total          | 684.944       | 287 |             |              |                  |      |

P = 0.05

Table 6 indicates that the calculated F-value is 1.75 and the critical F-value is 2.63 with degree of freedom (3, 287) p = .013 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implied that there is no significant difference in the bullying behaviour of secondary school students on the basis of age distribution in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.



Table 7:  
Difference in the Psychosocial Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria on the Basis of Age Distributions.

| Age            | Sum of Square | df  | Mean Square | F-value | Critical F-value | Sig. |
|----------------|---------------|-----|-------------|---------|------------------|------|
| Between Groups | 22.101        | 3   | 7.367       |         |                  |      |
| Within Groups  | 1030.636      | 284 | 3.629       | 2.03    | 2.63             |      |
| Total          | 1052.737      | 287 |             |         |                  | 0.13 |

P = 0.05

Table 7 shows that the F-value = 2.03, df= (3,284), p=0.13 which is greater than p = 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the psychosocial adjustment of secondary school students on the basis of age distribution in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.

Table 8:  
Difference in the Bullying Behaviour of Private and Public Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.

| School types | N   | Mean  | Std. | Df  | t- value | Critical t-value | Sig. |
|--------------|-----|-------|------|-----|----------|------------------|------|
| Private      | 144 | 67.53 | 8.03 |     |          |                  |      |
|              |     |       |      | 287 | 0.952    | 1.968            | 0.49 |
| Public       | 144 | 66.92 | 7.53 |     |          |                  |      |

P = 0.05

Table 8 indicates that the calculated t-value is 0.952, df = 287, p = 0.49 which is greater than p = 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the bullying behaviour of students from private and public secondary school in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.



Table 9  
Difference in the Psychosocial Adjustment of Male and Female Secondary School Students in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.

| Variables | N   | Mean  | Std. | df  | t- value | Critical t-value | Sig.  |
|-----------|-----|-------|------|-----|----------|------------------|-------|
| Private   | 144 | 30.72 | 5.01 | 287 | 1.260    | 1.968            | 0.280 |
| Public    | 144 | 29.83 | 4.52 |     |          |                  |       |

P = 0.05

Table 5 reveals the t-value = 1.260, df = 287, p = 0.280 which is greater than p = 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the psychosocial adjustment of students from private and public secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Nigeria.

### Discussion

The findings of this study show that the form of bullying behavior most prevalent among secondary school students in Ilorin South local government area is name calling, teasing and making jest. This is closely followed by giving nickname because of size. However, the least form of bullying behavior was taking fellow students belongings forcefully. In support the study of report of Nansel et al (2003) which states that name calling, teasing and giving nicknames is an indirect form of bullying and can most times go on unnoticed.

The finding of this study also revealed that students are kind and helpful to one another and that schools teach students how to handle stress and worries. A good number of students also notify their parents/guidance of their problems and worries. These findings are pointers to positive psycho-social adjustment. This finding is contrary to the study of Arsneault, Walsh, Tresniewa, Mewcombe and Caspi (2006) which stated that bully victims are usually socially isolated and lonely and always look for reasons to be absent from school which is negative psycho-social adjustment.

No significant difference is found in the bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students in Ilorin South local government. Nuhu (2013) states that bullying victims generally suffer from poorer psychosocial adjustment and greater loneliness.

No significant difference was found in the bullying behaviour and psychosocial adjustment of secondary school students in Ilorin South local government based on school type. Contrary to this finding is the study of Swearer (2011) and Nuhu (2013) which reported that bullying occurs more in overcrowded classrooms as it is found in



public schools. They also reported that bullying is more evident in public schools because of their larger class size.

### Conclusion

This study established that different forms of bullying are prevalent in schools in Ilorin South local government. However, these forms of bullying did not affect psychosocial adjustment of students as the study reveals that they have positive psychosocial adjustment. It is concluded also that sex, age and school types do not exert effects on the form of bullying and psycho-social adjustment of students in Ilorin South local government secondary schools.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made.

School administrators, psychologists, counselors, teachers and parents need to pay more attention and address bullying behavior among students especially those indirect forms of bullying such as name calling, nicknaming social, isolation etc.

It is also imperative that school administrators, educators and parents build a good relationship with their students/wards and gain their trust and be a source of support for them.

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