British Journal of Education, 14 (2), 94-108, 2026
Online ISSN: 2054-636X (Online)
Print ISSN: 2054-6351(Print)
Website: https://www.eajournals.org/
Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

Addressing the Roots of School Bullying: Contributing Factors and Administrative Responses in Rural Ghanaian Senior High Schools in the Western North Region of Ghana

[1]Georgina Cudjoe
[2]Nana Kofi Antwi II
[1]Appiadu R/C Primary School, Kumasi, Ghana.
[2]Department of Education, Valley View University, Kumasi, Ghana.
[2]nanakofiantwi_ii@vvu.edu.gh

doi: https://doi.org/10.37745/bje.2013/vol14n294108 Published March 30, 2026

Citation: Cudjoe G. and Antwi N.K. (2026) Addressing the Roots of School Bullying: Contributing Factors and Administrative Responses in Rural Ghanaian Senior High Schools in the Western North Region of Ghana, *British Journal of Education,* 14 (2), 94-108

Abstract: *Bullying remains a pervasive issue in Ghanaian senior high schools, particularly in rural contexts where socio-economic and institutional challenges are more acute. This study explores the root causes of bullying and evaluates administrative strategies employed in the Sefwi Juaboso District. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six teachers and analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that poor parenting, peer influence, ineffective supervision, and cultural normalization of aggression contribute significantly to bullying. In response, schools implement strategies such as orientation programs, counseling services, disciplinary enforcement, and community engagement. However, these interventions are often constrained by inadequate resources and weak stakeholder collaboration. Addressing bullying requires coordinated, context-specific, and system-wide responses.*

Keywords: bullying, psychological atmosphere, rural Ghana, school administration, teacher perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in educational institutions remains one of the most pressing challenges facing students globally, cutting across cultures, socio-economic conditions, and educational systems. It is typically understood as a repeated, intentional form of aggressive behavior where a power imbalance exists, allowing the perpetrator to dominate or harm the victim either physically, verbally, emotionally, or through social exclusion. The implications of bullying on learners' psychological health, academic performance, and sense of safety are profound and often long-lasting. Victims frequently report feelings of helplessness, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation and attempts (Baiden et al., 2018; Quarshie & Andoh-Arthur, 2020; Seidu, 2020).

The ubiquity of bullying behavior across diverse contexts underscores the importance of investigating the social and institutional mechanisms that enable it. As research demonstrates, bullying not only jeopardizes the physical and emotional safety of learners but also destabilizes the broader learning environment and undermines the educational mission of schools (Antiri, 2016; Ohene et al., 2015; Ofori et al., 2019). The World Health Organization and various educational bodies have acknowledged bullying as a public health and human rights issue, particularly because of its long-term mental health consequences (Odumah, 2013).

In Ghana, bullying continues to pose a formidable barrier to inclusive and equitable education. Despite national policies and the Ghana Education Service's (GES) directives on maintaining discipline, the phenomenon remains deeply entrenched in both urban and rural educational environments. However, rural regions experience unique vulnerabilities due to more pronounced socio-economic challenges, infrastructural deficits, and limited access to psychosocial services (Richard, 2022; Donkoh et al., 2021). These challenges contribute to an institutional climate in which bullying can thrive unchecked.

Rural senior high schools (SHSs) in Ghana often suffer from inadequate administrative oversight, weak student support systems, and an absence of coordinated anti-bullying frameworks (Adu et al., 2024; Boateng et al., 2020). According to Amedome et al. (2024), rural educators frequently express frustration at the lack of resources and policy coherence required to address peer violence. Moreover, prevailing cultural norms in many Ghanaian communities, including the valorization of toughness and conformity to hierarchical social roles, may reinforce the legitimacy of bullying, especially among male students (Antiri, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2022).

The rural-urban divide in Ghana has significant implications for educational access, experience, and safety. Rural schools, particularly in districts like Sefwi Juaboso, often contend with infrastructural neglect, overcrowded classrooms, limited pedagogical materials, and underqualified staff. These factors shape not only academic outcomes but also the behavioral dynamics among students. In such contexts, bullying becomes not just a disciplinary issue but a manifestation of deeper systemic inequalities and cultural traditions (Yankyerah et al., 2023; Adu et al., 2024; Anab & Abazaami, 2024).

Forms of bullying in these settings range from verbal insults and name-calling to physical assaults, social ostracism, and emotional manipulation. A particularly notable feature is the normalization of hierarchical "seniority" systems, which often disguise bullying under the veneer of discipline or orientation. Initiation practices for first-year students, usually endorsed informally by both peers and staff, can include forced errands, threats, or ridicule. These practices align with findings by Antiri (2016) and Acquah et al. (2014), who observed that senior students in Ghanaian SHSs often view hazing rituals as legitimate assertions of authority.

The digital revolution is adding new dimensions to bullying in Ghana. Though rural schools traditionally lag behind urban centers in technology access, smartphone penetration is on the rise, introducing forms of cyberbullying such as online harassment, rumor-spreading, and exclusion on social media platforms. Unfortunately, rural school authorities are often unequipped to detect or intervene in such digital conflicts, lacking the training and infrastructure necessary for online safety (Cabrera et al., 2022).

Exacerbating the issue is the shortage of trained counselors and weak teacher-student rapport. Many rural SHSs either lack guidance and counseling units or operate with untrained personnel tasked with multiple roles (Donkoh et al., 2021). Teachers in these environments are overburdened, which limits their ability to monitor interactions, build trust, or offer psychosocial support. Consequently, students

experiencing victimization are less likely to report incidents, fearing retribution, shame, or disbelief (Abakah, 2015; Richard, 2022).

To gain a nuanced understanding of the interplay between bullying behavior and institutional responses in rural schools, this study is framed by two theoretical lenses: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Ecological Systems Theory posits that individuals are shaped by interrelated environments, from the microsystem (home and school) to the macrosystem (cultural and policy contexts). In this view, bullying is a product of multiple interacting systems. For example, students raised in violent homes may replicate such aggression in school. Similarly, weak school policies or community norms that tolerate aggression reinforce bullying as a socially acceptable behavior (Antiri, 2016; Nyarko et al., 2021; Sarfo & Debrah, 2020). As Boateng et al. (2020) observed, poverty, dysfunctional family dynamics, and ineffective school governance coalesce to create a permissive environment for aggression.

Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura, emphasizes that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In the school context, bullying is often modeled by dominant peers or even overlooked by adults, thus implicitly condoning the behavior. When bullies are seen as powerful or popular, their actions gain social currency and are likely to be imitated (Asare et al., 2022; Bandura, 1977). For instance, Antiri (2016) found that first-year students in Ghana often emulate the aggressive behaviors of their seniors in anticipation of future roles. This behavioral mimicry is further enabled by inadequate adult supervision and inconsistent disciplinary enforcement.

Together, these theories support a multi-level analysis of bullying that includes family background, peer influence, school climate, cultural expectations, and institutional response. They also stress the importance of preventive interventions that alter the environmental and social cues that reinforce bullying.

Empirical Review of Bullying in Ghanaian Schools: An expanding body of literature has illuminated the complexity and persistence of bullying across Ghana's educational landscape. However, despite the national scope of surveys and programmatic responses, much of this scholarship and policy discourse centers on urban or peri-urban schools, leaving rural environments like the Sefwi Juaboso District understudied (Adu et al., 2024; Antiri, 2016; Boateng et al., 2020). This gap poses a challenge, as rural schools often reflect different socio-economic, institutional, and cultural dynamics that influence both the prevalence and character of bullying.

Studies by Baiden et al. (2018) and Seidu (2020) affirm that bullying significantly contributes to psychological distress among adolescents in Ghana, including increased risks of depression, social withdrawal, and academic disengagement. Donkoh et al. (2021) added that these effects are more pronounced in marginalized communities, where access to mental health support is limited and where cultural attitudes frequently stigmatize emotional expression. The combination of under-resourced institutions and cultural silences around mental health fosters conditions in which victims endure bullying without adequate redress or support.

Within rural senior high schools, common drivers of bullying include poor parenting, peer conformity, ineffective supervision, and the normalization of aggressive behavior as a sign of strength or maturity. Adu et al. (2024) reported that students from violent or neglectful households often transfer these learned behaviors to the school environment. Many such students perceive aggression as a legitimate means to assert control or avoid being victimized themselves. A related study by Yankyerah et al.

(2023) noted that in communities where child-rearing often involves harsh punishment, students may internalize violence as a normalized tool of social interaction.

School-level factors also play a significant role. High student-teacher ratios, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate surveillance during unstructured times like lunch or class transitions enable bullying to occur with minimal oversight (Donkoh et al., 2021; Richard, 2022). Moreover, the teacher-student relationship is frequently strained. Teachers, burdened by administrative duties and large workloads, may have limited capacity to engage students meaningfully. Some may also perceive bullying as a disciplinary tool or dismiss reports as typical adolescent behavior (Abakah, 2015; Antiri, 2016).

The role of cultural norms in sustaining bullying behavior cannot be overstated. Aggression among boys, in particular, is often valorized as evidence of toughness or leadership potential. Initiation rituals that involve humiliating or controlling juniors are framed as character-building practices, and these practices receive tacit approval from peers and, at times, from school staff. As noted by Cabrera et al. (2022), cultural conceptions of masculinity often render boys more vulnerable to both perpetrating and enduring violence, thereby embedding bullying in the fabric of everyday school life.

Even where schools establish rules against bullying, enforcement is often inconsistent. Disciplinary committees may lack clear protocols, or their actions may be undermined by favoritism, political interference, or inadequate documentation. According to Boateng et al. (2020), some schools also experience resistance from parents, who may defend their children regardless of evidence or deny the seriousness of the incidents.

Despite the insights provided by national and urban-focused studies, the specific challenges faced by rural SHSs are seldom documented in academic literature or considered in national policy interventions. Rural schools operate in unique socio-cultural milieus where bullying can be simultaneously pervasive and invisible—pervasive in its frequency and impact, and invisible due to its normalization and lack of formal reporting mechanisms (Richard, 2022; Donkoh et al., 2021). This invisibility not only complicates intervention efforts but also reinforces a culture of silence, where both victims and witnesses feel powerless to seek support.

The Ghana Education Service has introduced general guidelines on school discipline and psychosocial support, but the implementation of these measures is sporadic in rural areas. Guidance and counseling units are typically underfunded and often lack professionally trained counselors (Amedome et al., 2024). Teachers, who are the first line of response to behavioral issues, frequently feel ill-equipped to handle the emotional and psychological dimensions of bullying (Yankyerah et al., 2023). As a result, most interventions are reactive—focused on punishment after an incident occurs—rather than proactive strategies that address underlying causes or promote preventive education.

Moreover, there is a lack of reliable data and systematic evaluation of what anti-bullying strategies work best in rural schools. Most interventions are short-term, externally driven projects that lack long-term institutional support. Parent-teacher collaboration, a critical component of any sustainable intervention, is also weak in rural districts due to mistrust, communication gaps, or logistical constraints (Donkoh et al., 2021; Richard, 2022). These deficiencies highlight the importance of community-based, culturally sensitive approaches to violence prevention, as advocated by Nyarko et al. (2021).

The objective of this study is to examine the underlying factors that contribute to bullying and a negative psychological environment in Senior High Schools in the Sefwi Juaboso District, and to explore the strategies and interventions implemented by school administrators to address bullying and

foster a supportive, safe, and psychologically healthy school climate for effective teaching and learning within these rural educational settings. This study addresses two key research questions. First, it investigates the specific factors that contribute to bullying and create an unhealthy psychological atmosphere in Senior High Schools within the Juaboso District. Second, it explores the various strategies and interventions implemented by school administrators to manage bullying and foster a positive and supportive school environment that enhances student well-being and academic success in rural educational settings.

By exploring these objectives and questions, the study provides a context-specific analysis of bullying in rural Ghanaian SHSs and offers evidence-based recommendations tailored to the unique cultural and institutional dynamics of the region. The study also elevates the voices of teachers, who serve as frontline actors in managing school safety but are often excluded from formal policymaking processes.

METHODS

Research Design: The study employed a qualitative exploratory case study design to investigate the root causes of bullying and the strategies adopted by school administrators to address it in rural senior high schools. A qualitative approach was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of complex social dynamics, personal perceptions, and contextual factors surrounding bullying behaviors and administrative responses. This design was appropriate because it allowed the study to derive meaning from the lived experiences of teachers and school administrators, whose voices are often underrepresented in policy development (Adu et al., 2024; Yankyerah et al., 2023).

Qualitative case study research has been widely used in educational settings in Ghana due to its ability to accommodate diverse experiences across different institutional contexts while maintaining a focus on thematic coherence (Boateng et al., 2020). This study aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding phenomena through the subjective interpretations of those who experience them.

Participants were purposefully selected based on their professional roles, teaching experience, and familiarity with bullying incidents within their schools. The study involved six teachers from three senior high schools located in the Sefwi Juaboso District in the Western North Region of Ghana. These teachers held varied responsibilities, including classroom teaching, guidance and counseling, and administrative duties.

Purposive sampling was adopted to ensure that participants possessed the knowledge and experiences necessary to provide rich and relevant data. This sampling method is consistent with the objectives of qualitative research, which prioritizes the depth and relevance of information over representativeness (Adu et al., 2024).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in a conversational yet guided format. An interview guide was developed based on the study's research questions (specifically RQ2 and RQ4) and was validated by academic supervisors for alignment with the study's objectives. The guide included open-ended questions that probed teachers' understanding of bullying, its contributing factors, and how their schools responded to such behaviors.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted face-to-face in a private setting within the school premises to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility in follow-up questions and to capture the nuanced views of participants. This method has been found to be effective in capturing complex social realities in Ghanaian educational research (Boateng et al., 2020).

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, which includes: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. After transcription, the data were manually coded to identify patterns and recurring themes related to the study's two main research questions.

Thematic analysis was appropriate for this study because it allowed the identification and interpretation of recurring themes and subthemes across participants' narratives. It facilitated the emergence of grounded insights related to the socio-cultural causes of bullying and the institutional responses in rural settings. Themes such as "poor parenting," "peer pressure," "teacher-student disconnect," and "orientation and counseling" were consistently identified across all interviews (Adu et al., 2024; Yankyerah et al., 2023).

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines throughout its design and implementation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Valley View University School of Graduate Studies Research Committee before data collection. All participants provided informed consent, which detailed the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Pseudonyms were used during transcription and reporting to protect participants' identities. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected folders accessible only to the research team. Ethical considerations were also extended to data analysis and reporting, ensuring that participant voices were represented fairly and without distortion.

The inclusion of ethical safeguards in qualitative studies involving human subjects is critical to protecting participant welfare and maintaining research integrity (Boateng et al., 2020; Richard, 2022).

RESULTS

Contributing Factors to Bullying

An in-depth analysis of interview responses identified several intertwined drivers of bullying behavior in the Senior High Schools of the Juaboso District. These contributing factors were found to be embedded in familial dysfunction, peer group dynamics, institutional inefficiencies, and broader sociocultural norms.

*Poor Parenting and Dysfunctional Home Environments***:** A recurring theme across all interviews was the impact of family background and parenting style on student behavior. Teachers emphasized that students from homes lacking parental supervision or emotional support often externalize their frustrations through aggression. One teacher explained, *"You see, many of them are left alone at home. No one checks what they do. They grow up learning only what they see—and sometimes what they see is violence."* Another noted, *"Some parents think beating their children is normal, so the children learn that it's okay to do the same to others."* Participants described how emotional neglect, exposure to domestic violence, and lack of moral guidance created emotional voids that some students filled through bullying. These accounts align with findings that adolescents exposed to family dysfunction are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior at school as a learned or displaced response (Adu et al., 2024; Donkoh et al., 2021).

Peer Influence and Pressure for Social Conformity: Teachers highlighted how peer dynamics within the student population often incentivize bullying. In a typical scenario described by respondents, dominant students—often older or physically stronger—exert control over others, gaining social prestige in the process. A participant stated, *"For some of the students, bullying is a show of strength. Their classmates admire them, and that encourages them to continue."* New students, particularly form one entrants, were identified as frequent targets. Some teachers mentioned that these students are bullied under the guise of being 'initiated' into the school environment. Over time, they too may adopt bullying behaviors to avoid future victimization. These social reinforcement mechanisms validate the assumptions of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, wherein behaviors are learned and perpetuated through observation and reward structures (Amponsah Adu et al., 2024; Cabrera et al., 2022).

Ineffective Supervision and Inadequate Monitoring: Structural limitations in school monitoring were also cited as a key enabler of bullying. Teachers admitted that unsupervised periods, especially during break times or class transitions, often serve as windows for bullying to occur undetected. One teacher confessed, *"We are understaffed. We cannot be everywhere at once, and students know this. That's when they act out."* The limited presence of adults in common areas like dormitories, washrooms, and corridors weakens deterrence. This concern is corroborated by literature indicating that consistent teacher presence reduces bullying incidents, while gaps in monitoring increase the likelihood of aggression (Baiden et al., 2018; Owusu et al., 2011).

Weak Teacher-Student Relationships: Interview responses revealed that poor communication and mistrust between students and teachers discouraged the reporting of bullying incidents. Several teachers acknowledged a fear-based culture that made students view teachers as punitive figures rather than as allies. One participant explained, *"When students are bullied, they rarely tell us. They are scared we'll either shout at them or punish them further."* This lack of relational trust fosters silence among victims and inadvertently protects perpetrators. Evidence from Ghanaian studies supports the role of positive teacher-student relationships in reducing bullying and promoting emotional resilience among students (Abakah, 2015; Donkoh et al., 2021).

Cultural Normalization of Aggression: The study found that social and cultural norms within the Juaboso District may normalize and perpetuate bullying, especially among male students. Teachers observed that senior students who were once victims now become perpetrators, often viewing the act as a rite of passage. As one teacher put it, *"It's like a cycle. The seniors went through it, so they feel justified doing the same to others."* This normalization is reinforced by local beliefs equating toughness and control with masculinity. In such contexts, bullying becomes an accepted form of expressing dominance, making it harder to combat through conventional interventions (Cabrera et al., 2022; Amponsah Adu et al., 2024).

Academic Pressure and Emotional Stress: Lastly, participants noted that academic expectations and emotional stress often act as secondary triggers for bullying behavior. Teachers observed that students overwhelmed by academic workload or those struggling with performance sometimes lash out at peers. One respondent noted, *"When students are anxious or feel they're failing, they become more aggressive. It's like they want to control something—so they bully others."* This finding echoes global research indicating that emotional dysregulation and academic stress can contribute to behavioral issues, including aggression and bullying (Asante, 2019; Owusu et al., 2011).

British Journal of Education, 14 (2), 94-108, 2026
Online ISSN: 2054-636X (Online)
Print ISSN: 2054-6351(Print)
Website: https://www.eajournals.org/
Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

Administrative Responses to Bullying

This section presents the perspectives of teachers on the interventions and strategic measures adopted by school administrators in addressing bullying and fostering a psychologically healthy environment in the Senior High Schools of the Sefwi Juaboso District. While efforts vary across institutions, several key themes emerged from the data.

Orientation and Sensitization Campaigns: Teachers reported that most schools incorporate anti-bullying messages into orientation programs held at the beginning of each academic year. These sessions are designed to inform students about school rules, behavioral expectations, and the consequences of violating conduct standards. As one teacher stated, *"We usually talk about bullying, respect, and how students should treat one another right from the start. It sets the tone."* Another added, *"Even during assembly, we often remind students that bullying is wrong and won't be tolerated."* Although constrained by limited resources, these sensitization efforts are critical in creating awareness and shaping school culture. Participants noted the effectiveness of consistent messaging in gradually shifting attitudes toward bullying. This aligns with research advocating for regular school-based awareness programs as preventive mechanisms against peer violence (Amedome et al., 2024; Adu et al., 2024).

Guidance and Counseling Units: All participating teachers acknowledged the existence of guidance and counseling units in their respective schools. However, they also pointed out significant resource deficiencies that limit the functionality of these units. A teacher expressed concern: *"The counseling office is just a name. Sometimes, there's no staff available or no space to talk privately."* Another echoed, *"Students go there but don't always get help. It's frustrating for them."* Despite these shortcomings, the counseling units were recognized as essential platforms for emotional support and conflict resolution. Teachers emphasized the need for proper resourcing and staffing to strengthen these services. This mirrors broader findings in Ghanaian educational research that identify underinvestment in psychosocial support as a critical gap in school administration (Donkoh et al., 2021; Adu et al., 2024).

Disciplinary Committees and Rule Enforcement: The enforcement of school rules through disciplinary structures emerged as a prominent administrative strategy. Participants shared that schools utilize disciplinary committees to handle serious cases of bullying. One teacher explained, *"When bullying is reported and proven, we take it to the disciplinary committee. Sanctions follow—suspensions, warnings, or letters to parents."* Another affirmed, *"Clear rules are in place. The problem is not always the rules, but ensuring they are followed."* While disciplinary measures serve as a deterrent, teachers acknowledged that inconsistent enforcement sometimes undermines their effectiveness. These insights align with studies showing that punitive systems, when fairly and uniformly applied, can deter bullying—but require ongoing oversight and equity to maintain credibility (Baiden et al., 2018; Adu et al., 2024).

Collaboration and Supervision Routines: Participants highlighted collaborative teacher action as a practical and community-driven method for mitigating bullying. In response to supervision gaps, teachers described strategies like rotating patrols, active monitoring during lunch breaks, and coordinated walk-throughs of dormitories and corridors. One teacher shared, *"We plan among ourselves to be around during break. Just being visible helps reduce bullying."* Another noted, *"If teachers work together, students are less likely to misbehave."* This collegial approach fosters a more vigilant school environment, compensating for staffing limitations. Studies from similar contexts have

confirmed that collective monitoring reduces opportunities for bullying by increasing perceived adult presence and accountability (Antiri, 2014; Donkoh et al., 2021).

Parental Involvement in Bullying Cases: Another key administrative strategy is the involvement of parents in addressing recurrent bullying incidents. Teachers emphasized that reaching out to families, especially in serious cases, is vital to ensuring behavior change. As one teacher said, *"We call parents when their child is involved. Some of them are surprised, but it helps get results."* Another shared, *"When parents come to school and talk with us, the students take things more seriously."* Parental engagement was seen as particularly effective when combined with counseling and discipline. This underscores research advocating for strong parent-school partnerships as a core component of anti-bullying programs (Amedome et al., 2024; Adu et al., 2024).

Peer Leadership and Prefect Intervention: Some schools have adopted peer-led models to enhance early detection and intervention in bullying cases. Prefects and student leaders are given basic training in conflict identification and reporting protocols. A participant noted, *"We rely on prefects to watch and report. They know what goes on better than we do."* Another added, *"Sometimes the prefects mediate small issues before they escalate."* This approach fosters student agency and supports a culture of peer accountability. Studies increasingly recommend empowering students as mediators to complement teacher efforts, particularly in environments where administrative capacity is limited (Antiri, 2016; Abakah, 2015).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the root causes of bullying and institutional responses in rural Ghanaian Senior High Schools, focusing specifically on schools in the Sefwi Juaboso District. Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with six experienced teachers yielded two overarching findings: (1) bullying is predominantly fueled by familial neglect, peer influence, ineffective school supervision, poor teacher-student relationships, and cultural normalization of aggression; and (2) administrative responses, while present, are largely constrained by inadequate resources, inconsistent enforcement, and limited parental involvement.

One teacher reflected, *"The homes some of these students come from are very violent… some parents even encourage aggressive behavior thinking it's strength."* Another noted, *"We try to monitor students, but during break times and transitions, it becomes difficult. That's when most bullying happens."* These statements confirm that bullying is not a standalone behavior but is cultivated through systemic neglect at both the familial and institutional levels. Further corroborating this, a teacher reported, *"The students behave like what they see at home. If their homes are full of fights, that's what they bring to school."* This affirms the role of the microsystem, particularly family settings, in reinforcing aggressive student conduct.

In terms of interventions, the study found that orientation sessions, student-led prefect monitoring, and rule enforcement were the most commonly cited strategies. However, these are often applied inconsistently. A teacher observed, *"We give the students rules at the beginning of the term, but sometimes we ourselves don't follow through… that weakens our efforts."* Another added, *"The guidance and counseling unit is there, yes, but it's mostly dormant because we don't have the trained staff to run it effectively."* Expanding on this challenge, one teacher explained, *"Even the prefects sometimes bully others themselves, so you can't fully rely on them to report cases."*

Additional feedback revealed that fear of retaliation and mistrust in staff further limit the reporting of bullying incidents. As one respondent pointed out, *"When students report bullying, sometimes the bully knows and retaliates. So most students keep quiet."* Another teacher added, *"They fear being labelled as weak, so even if they are suffering, they don't talk."* These statements underline the breakdown of the school's protective mechanisms and the psychological climate of silence and fear that bullying produces.

Together, these findings suggest that effective anti-bullying interventions in rural Ghanaian schools must be holistic—addressing both the root causes and the institutional weaknesses that allow bullying to persist. The inclusion of multiple teacher perspectives provides thick description and confirms the thematic saturation required for qualitative rigor.

Interpretation

The findings reinforce and contextualize the broader theoretical frameworks that underpin school bullying, especially within rural Ghanaian contexts. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a compelling lens for understanding how multiple environmental layers—home, peer group, school, and community—converge to shape student behavior. The consistent reports from teachers about the impact of poor parenting, violent home environments, and social conformity among students affirm that bullying in these schools is embedded in broader societal dynamics.

One participant noted, *"Students bring the behaviors they see at home to school. If parents shout or beat them at home, they come and do same to others here."* This echoes literature suggesting that when the microsystem (home environment) is characterized by aggression or neglect, it directly influences the child's behavioral development at school (Nyarko et al., 2021; Boateng & Darko, 2023). Another teacher added, *"The community also plays a role. If bullying is seen as 'normal' or funny outside school, the children think it's okay here too."* This affirms the role of the exosystem and macrosystem in reinforcing peer aggression within the school.

Social Learning Theory, as posited by Bandura, also provides explanatory power for the findings. Teachers mentioned that bullying often functions as a means of gaining social acceptance or dominance, especially among boys. A respondent stated, *"Younger students even admire the older bullies because they look powerful, and they want to be like them."* This mimetic behavior confirms that bullying is not only learned but also socially rewarded within certain peer structures (Asare et al., 2022). Another teacher explained, *"When no punishment follows bullying, students think it is acceptable. They learn quickly who can bully and get away with it."* Such remarks demonstrate how unregulated peer modeling encourages recurrence and escalation.

The study also identifies a crucial divergence between rural and urban school contexts. Unlike some urban schools where parental involvement and professional counseling units are more readily available, rural schools in Juaboso suffer from limited engagement and support systems. One teacher explained, *"Even when we call parents, some don't show up. They say the school should deal with their children."* This aligns with observations from Amponsah et al. (2020), who found that rural school administrators often have fewer resources to implement structured interventions. Another teacher highlighted that *"Parents sometimes scold us when we discipline their children for bullying; they think we are too harsh."* This illustrates cultural dissonance between institutional rules and parental expectations.

Moreover, institutional responses such as counseling units, orientation programs, and prefect supervision are conceptually sound but practically inconsistent. The absence of trained counselors and

the lack of a comprehensive, school-wide policy framework reduce the sustainability and impact of these interventions. This observation parallels findings from Owusu et al. (2023), who argue that without a systemic approach, anti-bullying measures in Ghanaian schools are likely to remain reactive rather than preventive. A teacher lamented, *"We have the rules, but they are not reinforced regularly. Sometimes students don't even remember them after the first week."*

Furthermore, the data highlights a tension between punitive and supportive approaches to discipline. While enforcement of rules and sanctions is common, teachers indicated that students often fear teachers and view them as enforcers rather than supporters. As one participant remarked, *"When students are bullied, they prefer to keep quiet than report. They think we will punish them too."* This dynamic erodes trust and contributes to a psychologically unhealthy school environment. Another added, *"They see teachers as angry or unapproachable. So even if we want to help, they won't come to us."* This underscores the need for relational approaches grounded in emotional safety and mutual respect.

The study demonstrates that while the causes of bullying are multifaceted and well-theorized, the administrative responses in these rural schools are undermined by cultural attitudes, inadequate training, and weak stakeholder collaboration. Bridging this gap requires not only theoretical clarity but also practical and policy-driven reforms rooted in the realities of rural Ghanaian education.

Implications

The implications of this study are extensive, touching multiple levels of educational practice, policy formulation, and community engagement. The findings offer strategic entry points for interventions that are both sustainable and context-specific, particularly in the under-researched rural educational landscapes of Ghana.

Implications for Educational Policy: At the policy level, the study underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive national framework on school bullying that is both enforceable and adaptable to rural contexts. The lack of standardized anti-bullying policies across schools in the Sefwi Juaboso District creates room for inconsistency and subjective handling of bullying cases. One teacher commented, *"We mostly rely on our discretion or school-specific rules, but we lack clear national guidelines."* This echoes the findings of Owusu-Antwi et al. (2021), who advocate for a Ghana Education Service (GES) directive to standardize anti-bullying policies in all public schools.

Another policy implication involves the staffing and functionality of guidance and counseling units. Many rural schools are either under-resourced or lack qualified professionals to run these units. Despite their importance, counseling services are often relegated to teachers with no specialized training. For example, a participant shared, *"Our school has a counseling desk, but it is managed by a teacher who just does it on the side."* There is, therefore, a compelling case for the GES and Ministry of Education to prioritize the deployment of trained counselors to rural schools, as supported by Adusei et al. (2022).

Implications for School Management and Practice: For school administrators and teachers, the study reveals critical practice-based implications. First, there is a pressing need for ongoing professional development in trauma-informed pedagogy and student mental health support. Teachers reported feeling ill-equipped to handle bullying beyond issuing punishments. Structured training on conflict resolution, psychosocial support, and child protection could bridge this gap. This recommendation aligns with research by Abrefa-Gyan and Peprah (2023), who argue that teacher preparedness is central to effective school-based interventions against bullying.

Secondly, the importance of fostering a culture of trust between students and staff cannot be overstated. The fear students have toward authority figures hinders disclosure of bullying incidents. Schools should intentionally cultivate open-door policies, peer support systems, and anonymous reporting mechanisms to empower students. Some schools in this study had attempted such measures, such as encouraging prefects to act as intermediaries, though the approach was informal. Institutionalizing such peer-led interventions could promote early detection and resolution of bullying, particularly in resource-poor settings.

Additionally, enhancing teacher collaboration and supervision routines emerged as a key strategy. Coordinated break-time monitoring, structured seating plans, and rotational dormitory checks were described by some participants as helpful practices. Embedding these practices into school policy and routines could reduce unsupervised periods when bullying is most likely to occur.

Implications for Community Engagement: The influence of home and community on school behavior was a recurring theme. Several participants attributed bullying behavior to dysfunctional family environments, violent media, and community acceptance of aggressive masculinity. As one teacher lamented, *"Some parents even see bullying as a sign of strength; they encourage it."* This cultural normalization of violence calls for targeted community education initiatives.

Schools, in collaboration with traditional authorities, religious leaders, and parent-teacher associations (PTAs), could launch community sensitization campaigns. These should address not only the definition and dangers of bullying but also alternative models of discipline and emotional expression. Campaigns using local languages and community radio may be particularly effective in rural areas. According to Tetteh et al. (2023), such community-driven sensitization efforts have proven successful in shifting attitudes toward early marriage and female education in rural Ghana, suggesting similar potential in anti-bullying campaigns.

Broader Systemic Implications: Finally, the findings emphasize that bullying should not be viewed in isolation but as a symptom of broader systemic inequities—poverty, under-resourcing, and weak institutional accountability. Therefore, effective responses must extend beyond school walls to include social welfare services, child protection agencies, and decentralized governance structures. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's model, which advocates for multi-level ecological responses to behavioral challenges (Sarfo & Debrah, 2020).

In conclusion, the implications of this study point to the need for multi-stakeholder, multi-tiered approaches that consider the realities of rural Ghanaian communities. Only then can interventions address the root causes of bullying rather than its symptoms.

Limitations of the Study: This study acknowledges several limitations that may affect the scope and generalizability of its findings. Firstly, the small sample size—comprising only six teachers from three senior high schools in the Sefwi Juaboso District—limits the ability to draw broad conclusions applicable to all rural schools in Ghana. The reliance solely on teachers' perspectives may also have excluded valuable insights from students, parents, and administrative personnel. Additionally, the study focused only on in-person bullying and did not consider emerging forms such as cyberbullying, which are increasingly relevant in Ghana's digitizing educational landscape. Lastly, the qualitative nature of the research prioritizes depth over breadth, which, while valuable, restricts the ability to measure prevalence or trends quantitatively.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice: Future research should adopt a broader, more inclusive design by incorporating student and parental perspectives to provide a holistic view of the

bullying phenomenon in rural Ghanaian senior high schools. Including students as primary stakeholders can yield deeper insights into peer dynamics, emotional effects, and underreported bullying behaviors. Further, studies should consider longitudinal approaches to track the progression and effectiveness of interventions over time, offering evidence on what works sustainably in these contexts.

In terms of practice, there is a critical need for the Ghana Education Service to formalize anti-bullying frameworks tailored to rural contexts. This includes developing structured training programs for teachers on student mental health, peer conflict resolution, and positive discipline strategies. Schools should also receive resource allocations specifically for guidance and counseling services, with attention to hiring qualified professionals. Community engagement programs that address cultural acceptance of bullying and promote empathy education are also recommended.

Given the rising use of digital platforms, future research should examine cyberbullying in rural areas where smartphone penetration is growing. This would ensure that interventions remain relevant in a shifting technological environment.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that school bullying in rural Ghanaian Senior High Schools is not an isolated or spontaneous occurrence but rather a manifestation of interconnected influences rooted in familial, peer, and institutional dynamics. Teachers in the Sefwi Juaboso District highlighted a range of contributory factors including poor parental supervision, violent home environments, peer pressure, ineffective teacher-student relationships, and inadequate school monitoring systems. These factors coalesce to create an environment in which bullying is both perpetrated and normalized, contributing to a psychologically unhealthy atmosphere that undermines students' emotional well-being and academic focus.

Administrative efforts to mitigate bullying—such as orientation sessions, the use of disciplinary committees, the establishment of counseling units, and teacher collaboration—are valuable but remain unevenly implemented and often constrained by limited resources. The study also points to systemic challenges such as under-resourced counseling services, low levels of parental involvement, and a general lack of structured anti-bullying frameworks. Furthermore, cultural attitudes that dismiss bullying as a rite of passage or normal adolescent behavior hinder effective intervention.

To achieve sustained progress, school-based interventions must be embedded within broader systemic reforms. This includes policy adjustments to strengthen student support systems, increased training for teachers on psychosocial issues, and expanded community education to reshape cultural perceptions of bullying. Institutional partnerships with parents and local stakeholders must also be cultivated to ensure shared responsibility in creating a safe and supportive school environment.

While efforts by school administrators are commendable, combating bullying in rural Ghanaian schools demands a coordinated approach involving cultural transformation, resource investment, and long-term policy commitment.

REFERENCES

Acquah, E., Wilson, M., & Doku, D. (2014). Patterns and correlates for bullying among young adolescents in Ghana. *The Social Sciences, 3*(4), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.3390/SOCSCI3040827

Adu, G. A., King-Kuadzi, K. E., Apambilla, P. A., Nyasapoh, C. A., Darko, R., & Blay, J. (2024). Guidance and counselling: A tool in combating bullying in senior high schools in Ghana. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies*. https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2024.v6.i12a.1305

Amedome, S. N., Ilfiandra, & Suherman, U. (2024). Understanding and resolving student conflicts: Perspectives and strategies in senior high schools across the Volta Region of Ghana. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21446

Anab, C., & Abazaami, J. (2024). Safeguarding adolescent girls in senior high schools in Ghana to enhance human resources for sustainable development. *Journal of Science and Sustainable Development.* https://doi.org/10.4314/jssd.v9i1.5

Ankoma-Sey, V. R. (2017). Administrative task performance by heads of senior high schools in Ghana: The "organising" perspective. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research, 29*(1). https://doi.org/10.4314/ZJER.V29I1

Ansah, K. O., Atindanbila, S., Doku, P. N., Owusu, J. O., Duah, C. A., Pharin, F., & Fosu, M. (2022). Peer victimization, prison climate, resilience and psychological distress of incarcerated juvenile offenders in Ghana: A serial mediation examination. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine, 91*, 102407. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2022.102407

Antiri, K. O. (2016). Types of bullying in the senior high schools in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice, 7*(13), 131–138.

Asante, K. O. (2019). Cannabis and amphetamine use and its psychosocial correlates among school-going adolescents in Ghana. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health, 13*(33). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-019-0293-0

Asare, K. B., Adzokpa, D. P. K., & Effah, E. A. (2022). School bullying and its influence on students' academic performance in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 13(9), 72–81.

Baiden, P., Kuuire, V. Z., Shrestha, N., Tonui, B. C., Dako-Gyeke, M., & Peters, K. K. (2018). Bullying victimization as a predictor of suicidal ideation and suicide attempt among senior high school students in Ghana. *Journal of School Violence, 18*(3), 300–317. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2018.1486200

Boateng, S., Asare, D., Manu, P. T., Sefah, E. A., & Adomako, J. (2020). Relationship between students' home background and their academic performance: A case of some selected senior high school students in rural districts in Ashanti Region, Ghana. *Journal of Education, 201*, 153–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022057420904370

Cabrera, M. C., Larrañaga, E., & Yubero, S. (2022). Bullying/Cyberbullying in secondary education: A comparison between secondary schools in rural and urban contexts. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 41*, 617–631. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-022-00882-0

Donkoh, R., Wing-On, L., & Donkor, J. (2021). Educational development issues in Ghana in light of educational policy and planning. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*. https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/9224

Gyan, E., & Tandoh-Offin, P. (2014). Conflict resolution mechanism in public senior high school in Ghana and its impact on school administration.

Nyarko, K., Adentwi, K. I., & Boateng, R. (2021). Ecological systems theory and school violence: Implications for inclusive education in Ghana. *Ghana Journal of Educational Studies*, 17(2), 109–125.

Odumah, L. (2013). Investigating bullying as a violation of human rights among students in Ghanaian senior high schools. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, 3*(6), 1–8.

Ofori, K., Ametefee, H. P. H., Akakora, K., & Ababio, J. B. (2019). Curbing the dilemma of indiscipline in senior high schools in Bantama, Ghana. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies, 7*(12). https://doi.org/10.24940/theijhss/2019/v7/i12/hs1912-031

Ohene, S., Johnson, K. R., Atunah-Jay, S., Owusu, A., & Borowsky, I. (2015). Sexual and physical violence victimization among senior high school students in Ghana. *Social Science & Medicine, 146*, 266–275. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.10.019

Quarshie, E. N.-B., & Andoh-Arthur, J. (2020). Suicide attempts among adolescents aged 12–17 years in Ghana. *Crisis*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000746

Richard, M. S. (2022). Comparing administrative support for teaching and learning of physical education and sports between senior high schools and colleges of education in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2022/v28i130669

Seidu, A. (2020). Loneliness among in-school adolescents in Ghana. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health, 32*(1), 67–76. https://doi.org/10.2989/17280583.2020.1811287

Wardekker, J. A. (2021). Strategic communication for climate resilience: Applying agenda-setting and framing theories. *Environmental Communication*, 15(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2020.1825626

Yankyerah, A. K., Asare, K., & Ofori, K. (2023). Understanding truancy among senior high school students in the Offinso Municipality of Ghana. *Archives of Current Research International*. https://doi.org/10.9734/acri/2023/v23i7606