

World of Hearing-Impaired Learner: A Case Study on Bullying

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ABSTRACT

In this case study, the experiences of a teenager who is hard of hearing are looked at. The teen has been bullied in many places, such as at home, at school, and in the community as a whole, and has been socially isolated, verbally abused, and physically hurt. Based on Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, the study used a qualitative method involving in-depth talks with seven carefully chosen individuals. These included the student and important people in his personal and social life. Even though the student was constantly being left out, the results show that he could deal with it by having a strong support system, becoming more self-aware, and being around policies that welcomed everyone. More and more problems made it clear that we must build loving homes, make schools and towns more welcoming and understanding, and push for gradual change through education and the law. The study shows that to stop bullying of disabled children, families, schools, neighborhoods, and politicians all need to work together on a complete plan. Its last idea is to include the above topics in future studies to help students with special needs more.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying has continued to haunt people in all walks of life. Although this was experienced by anyone regardless of their age, gender, status, education, and religion, this social phenomenon has still been mostly common and felt among students (Khasawneh, 2020). Among those that I observed who are specifically at risk and are deeply affected by bullying are those individuals with disabilities, such as those with hearing impairments. Many researchers have explored the issue of bullying in recent studies, opening our minds to this reality. Evidently, this social phenomenon is manifested in many places all over the world. In Nepal, the widespread presence of verbal bullying, relational bullying, physical bullying, and cyberbullying was reported (Maharjan & Shrestha, 2022). In Russia, results revealed that students whose parents belonged to low-income earners suffered school bullying compared to those whose parents were high-income earners (Kremen & Tsitsikashvili, 2020).

In South Korea, a quantitative study determined that there is a high probability of being victims of bullying in classes where there is high percentage of population on boys, pre-identified bullies, and students who have records of family violence (Sarzos & Urzúa, 2021). Another quantitative study in Egypt revealed that bullying has resulted in a negative correlation with the self-esteem of those adolescents with hearing impairment (Ghareb et al., 2023). Even in my own country, the Philippines, I found out in a qualitative study conducted by Lasin

(2023) in Cotabato City that physical disability which includes mouth deformity, leg impairment and hearing impairment are the reasons why individuals get bullied, thus, they become less confident compared to their peers which then consequently affects their class participation. Meanwhile, the study of Estojero (2022) focuses on the parents' experiences handling special needs children and it came out in the study that dealing with discrimination and bullying experiences of their children are among the main challenges faced by the parents.

Bullying, if not taken seriously, negatively affects academic literacy and social integration (Yu & Zhao, 2021) and negatively influences the overall well-being of all people involved (Camodeca & Nava, 2022). Its presence has resulted in severe behavioral problems, physical and mental health, and even to the extent of suicidal ideation (Shamsi et al., 2019; Sabramani et al., 2021), which are felt both by the bully and the bullied (Obregon-Cuesta et al., 2022). I resonate with the thoughts of Espelage and Hong (2019) that although there are many studies on bullying, these literatures are more focused on Western context, creating a striking gap in producing studies that would help understand this problem in other contexts such as the Philippines. There is indeed insufficient information published on qualitative methods done locally, particularly case studies on bullying experiences as well as coping strategies used to deal with these problems. Hence, I believe that there is an immense need to pursue more studies on the bullying difficulties of students, particularly those with special needs, such as hearing impairment.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study can meaningfully contribute to some individuals and groups of people, specifically related to special needs education. Also, the results can be spread globally as its main aim is to be in harmony with the drive for Sustainable Development Goals (SGD), particularly in the aspects of quality education, social inclusion, and reduced inequalities. On the micro level, the results that will be gathered can lead to the formulation of support and programs to create a friendly, safe, and nurturing environment for deaf students. This can also be an eye-opener for those who may be involved with bullying. The stories that will be explicitly shared about the struggles felt by those who are bullied can lead to awareness and hopefully positively change the behavior of those initiating bullying.

In addition, the teachers can also use the results as a basis for implementing strategies that would help prevent bullying in the classroom and even outside the school premises. Aside from that, the parents and families can see the results as inspiration to strengthen the support they can give to their children or loved ones struggling with hearing impairment. This study can also be a basis for future research that would want to do an exploration of bullying experiences of students with hearing disabilities.

At the macro level, this case study can significantly contribute to the sustainable development goals. As initially mentioned, this research exploration can target the areas of quality education, social inclusion, and reduced inequalities. The drive of Holy Cross of Davao College to provide an avenue for its students to focus on topics or phenomena that matter proves to be its way of providing quality education that would allow its students to experience the realities of life. Further, the main topic of this study deals with relevant issues as it urges people to be more compassionate to people who have special needs, thus promoting social inclusion and reducing inequalities. Lastly, this study can contribute to the vision and mission of Holy Cross of Davao College, specifically in engaging in building a more humane world. By focusing on the difficulties of bullying and hoping that it would become an eye-opener to all, this study will certainly address this vision. Also, since it is a mission of every institution to produce persons who will become effective agents of social transformation and change, then this study can instill on my mind the responsibility that lies on every student to become a graduate of this specialization who will be a contributor of societal development.

Problem Statement

This study was guided by the following research questions to uncover the experiences encountered by the deaf student: What are the difficulties encountered in the case (Hearing Impaired Learner) on bullying? What mechanisms were undertaken by the case (Hearing –Impaired Learner) to address the difficulties brought by bullying? What are the insights learned by the case (Hearing –Impaired Learner) after surmounting the difficulties?

Assumptions

The central philosophical assumption that provided the framework for understanding in this study was the ontological assumption. Ontology is defined as the study of how reality is perceived and how researchers understand human engagement with the world. Ontological assumptions explain the nature of reality and offer insight into what we know about these realities. In this case study, which aimed to uncover the bullying difficulties experienced by a hearing-impaired student, the goal was to reveal the realities the student faced. One such reality involved the presence of challenges brought about by bullying within the student's family, peer group, school, and community. For instance, the way family members, friends, teachers, classmates, and neighbors treated the student could have caused physical or emotional pain. Moreover, the interactions of those around the student, whether intentional or unintentional, might have led to emotional distress. The consequences of these bullying experiences, both for the student and those around him, constituted the realities that ontology seeks to explore. A case study approach was particularly appropriate, as it focused on eliciting the feelings and insights of participants through in-depth interviews. These personal realizations and narratives served as a rich source of information to achieve the main objective of the study.

Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored on the Social Ecological Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner outlined the following systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, later adding the chronosystem. According to this theory, individuals interact with interrelated systems within their environment. Human development was seen as the result of continuous interaction between the developing individual and the surrounding environmental systems. Since this study was qualitative, it employed an interpretative framework. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) emphasized that interpretivism focused on in-depth variables and factors associated with theory in relation to the study's context. They added that researchers following an interpretive paradigm centered their exploration on participants' experiences, as these were essential in describing realities grounded in the assumptions and theories underpinning the study. The research paradigm for this study was anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, which provided a comprehensive lens to understand the complex interactions influencing the experiences of the participant.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The method I used in this research study was the qualitative method, specifically the case study approach. As explained by Hancock et al. (2021), a qualitative approach required individual interviews, focus groups, observations, a review of existing documents, or a combination of these procedures, with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives rather than my own. According to these researchers, a case study is an intensive analysis of a single unit bounded by time and space. Since this description aligned with my intent to conduct a detailed exploration of the bullying experiences of a hearing-impaired student over a specific period and in a particular location, I found the case study approach to be the most appropriate method for this study.

Research Locale

I conducted this study in Banaybanay, Davao Oriental, a coastal municipality in Region XI. Banaybanay consisted of 14 barangays and had a total land area of 408.52 square kilometers, comprising 7.19% of the total land area of Davao Oriental. According to the 2020 Census, the municipality had a population of 44,451. In terms of educational institutions, there were 14 elementary schools and five secondary schools under the jurisdiction of the public schools district supervisor of Banaybanay District and the schools division superintendent of the Schools Division of Davao Oriental. All of these schools offered Special Needs Education classes, which made the location relevant and appropriate for my study.

Sample and Sampling

The primary participant on whom I depended to share experiences of bullying was a learner with a hearing impairment. This student was enrolled at Puntalinao National High School for the School Year 2024–2025. He served as the primary source of information regarding the struggles he experienced, particularly the difficulties he encountered, the coping mechanisms he undertook, and the insights he gained in overcoming those challenges. I triangulated the data I gathered from the student with the shared experiences of the significant people in his

life. This meant that aside from the learner with hearing impairment, I also included his parents, siblings, friends, teachers, classmates, neighbors, and counselors who were directly involved with him as participants. Their perspectives on the difficulties, coping strategies, and insights further enriched the data provided by the student. Since they were closely related to the primary participant, they served as a rich source of information, especially for aspects that the student might have overlooked or chosen not to disclose. I selected all human participants, including the learner with hearing impairment and the significant individuals mentioned, through purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling method required predetermined criteria. For the primary participant, the inclusion criteria included being officially diagnosed with hearing impairment, being enrolled at Puntalinao National High School in Banaybanay District, and being mainstreamed in a regular classroom. As for the significant others, they needed to be directly related to or engaged with the student whose bullying experiences were explored.

Interview Guide Questions

I used a semi-structured interview guide in this study. The main questions and their corresponding probing questions focused on the struggles and challenges faced by a learner with a hearing impairment. The interview also aimed to uncover the coping mechanisms he employed to deal with these difficulties. These questions were likewise posed to the students' parents and teachers to gather their perspectives on the same issues. Since I employed a semi-structured interview guide, I prepared a set of predetermined questions; however, I remained open to asking spontaneous follow-up questions during the actual interviews when such questions were deemed relevant and helpful in gathering substantial and meaningful data. After crafting the interview guide and its probing questions, I submitted them for validation to two experts in Special Needs Education and one expert in English Language studies. These validators were asked to provide feedback, comments, and recommendations to ensure that the questions were contextually appropriate, relevant, and valid for the situation being studied. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to apply all the suggestions provided by the validators to enhance the quality and accuracy of the instrument.

Data Gathering Technique

There were specific techniques that I needed to use in gathering the necessary data for this study. Since this was qualitative, particularly a case study, I had the data through in-depth interviews and observations. However, it was important that before doing the said interviews and observations, ethical clearance was first sought from the Research Ethics Committee of Holy Cross of Davao College. Aside from this, permission was also asked from the authorities, which included the Dean of the Graduate School and the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Davao Oriental. After the ethical clearance and permission, I started the in-depth interviews. This was done through structured and semi-structured interviews wherein the manner of interviewing was not only based on predetermined questions but also allowed questions that were not planned or not listed in the interview guide questions. After crafting the interview guide questions, I then subjected them to validation by the experts in terms of content and face validity. The interview primarily used verbal communication, done through face-to-face interactions, to gather data about the bullying difficulties of the hearing-impaired student. Although the data collected in qualitative interviews could not be generalized, Nathan et al. (2019) stressed that the exploratory nature of this technique allowed for the collection of abundant information that could provide relevant data about a specific case study. Aside from the in-depth interviews conducted with the student with hearing impairment and his or her parents and teachers, I also used observations as my means of collecting data. During the interviews, I took note of the movements, facial expressions, and gestures of the human participants. These observations also helped enrich the data that I gathered to produce an in-depth understanding of the bullying difficulties of the hearing-impaired learner and their coping strategies regarding his or her situation.

Data Analysis

The most popular technique used by researchers in analyzing qualitative data was thematic analysis. For this particular study, I adopted the steps proposed by Naeem et al. (2023). This was a six-step thematic analysis process that followed a structured approach in analyzing the data that I gathered. This meant that I strictly performed the step-by-step procedures and did not skip one or rearrange it, since it was more understandable and accurate to have it in its proper order.

Trustworthiness

As the main data gatherer in this qualitative study, it was my priority to mitigate potential harm that might have been encountered by the human participants. I first addressed the four dimensions of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was practiced by guaranteeing the validity of the data sources. In addition, transferability was addressed by discussing the procedures of the study in detail with the participants. Dependability was examined by checking if the procedures followed the standards of the specific design used. Confirmability was ensured by examining the data to confirm the results or interpretations of the study. Also, the ethical issues of volunteerism, privacy, confidentiality, risks, benefits, and safety were all addressed prior to, during, and after the conduct of the research study. For example, I made sure that the participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, which was secured through the informed consent form and assent form. I also assured the participants that all information in terms of identity, records, and everything that transpired in the study would be treated with the utmost privacy and confidentiality. All of the data would only be used for academic purposes, and no information would be divulged to the public for any other reason. Further, since this study required the sharing of personal experiences, I ensured that the participants would feel safe emotionally and psychologically as they exposed details about their bullying experiences, coping strategies, and personal insights on their situations. When cases of uneasiness or discomfort arose, I always prioritized the welfare of the human participants. This meant that they could withdraw from participation in the study without penalties. However, before this might happen, I assured them that I would provide all the support needed, such as debriefing sessions or counseling services, to ensure that the emotional aspects of the study were adequately addressed. Lastly, I covered all monetary expenses for the study so as not to burden the participants, and I also gave simple tokens that symbolized my gratitude to my participants. All of these processes were laid down, especially in securing the ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc. I made it a point to ensure that all ethical considerations were practiced throughout the study in order to establish ethical standards of research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I presented the modified paradigm following Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Social Ecological Theory, which includes four systems: the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem. Under the microsystem, the family has a direct influence. Under the Mesosystem, Teachers and Peers in School represent the connections between microsystems. In the Exosystem, Neighbors in the Community have been identified as indirect influences. In the Macrosystem, Policymakers are recognized for their cultural and societal influences. The emerging themes and subthemes, as well as the viewpoints and standpoints gathered from the interview transcripts of the participants, are also presented in this chapter.

Modified Paradigm

The modified paradigm showed the hearing-impaired learner as the center of data gathering and analysis. The analysis was also based on the theory used in this study, which is the Social Ecological Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). After carefully extracting themes and emerging sub-themes from the interview transcripts, I identified the different systems or categories under each system that had been involved in the life of the hearing-impaired learner. Under the microsystem, the family had direct influences. Family: Case A had experienced social exclusion and physical and emotional harm as a result of the difficulties encountered.

However, it was also within the family that a strong support system had been established. In this system, building a supportive home environment emerged as an important theme. Under the mesosystem, connections between teachers and peers in school were named, and to address the difficulties encountered by the case, the results revealed that a strong support system and self-awareness were crucial in addressing bullying. With this result, the need for awareness and inclusivity had to be promoted. Under the exosystem, the neighbors in the community were also identified to influence the bullying difficulties of the case being studied. In this system, as shown in the paradigm, the promotion of inclusive education and self-awareness was named coping strategies. Meanwhile, the importance of fostering respect and understanding was called upon. Lastly, for the macrosystem, the promotion of inclusive education had proven to address social exclusion, and heightening systemic change called for by policymakers was identified as a significant insight gathered from the interviews.

Emerging Themes and Sub-themes

The emerging themes and sub-themes are presented in the order of the research questions. Three topics are covered in this case study. First is the bullying experiences felt by the hearing-impaired learner. Second is the coping strategies employed in facing bullying. Third, the bullying insights can be shared with the people. These three components are also subdivided based on the different systems of Social Ecological Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Bullying Issues Encountered by a Hearing-Impaired Student

Bullying is a pervasive issue that affects individuals from all walks of life, particularly those with disabilities. Hearing-impaired learners often face unique challenges in their daily interactions with family, peers, school, and the community. This case study focuses on the difficulties of a hearing-impaired student who has encountered bullying in various aspects of his life, highlighting the perspectives of family members, peers, a teacher, a neighbor, and a classmate. Based on the interview transcripts, two emerging themes on the bullying experiences of the hearing-impaired student have been identified, which can be generally termed as social exclusion and physical and emotional harm.

Social Exclusion

Microsystem

The father recounted the struggles of Case A in coping with bullying at home, school, and in the community. At home, Case A faced communication barriers with siblings, leading to feelings of isolation.

"Sa balay, usabay sungogon na siya kay maglisod og sabot iyang mga ig-agaw sa iyaba ug siya pud maglisod ug sabot sa iyabang mga ig-agaw ug siguro pud makabantay jud na siya nga labi siya." (Father)

"At home, sometimes he gets teased because his cousins have a hard time understanding him, and he also has a hard time understanding his cousins. He probably also notices that he is different." (Father)

I felt a deep sense of sadness as I listened, knowing that the home, supposed to be a safe and nurturing space, had become the very place where the bullying began. Case A added, *"Pag mag dula sila dili ko nila paapilon, kanang naa pud silay laag dili ko nila panbanon."* (Case A)

"When they play, they don't let me join. And when they go out, they do not let me come with them either." (Case A)

His father's words deeply touched Case A because he had truly gone through it himself. As I listened, I couldn't help but feel the emotional weight he had carried.

Mesosystem

Case A's teacher acknowledged that hearing-impaired students face significant difficulties in school. They were often excluded from group activities and experienced a gap in social interactions due to their disability.

"Isip usa ka maestro no, nakita nako nga siya naka-encounter jud og mga bullying sa eskwelahan sama sa usabay kanang, dili siya paapilon sa grupo, usabay pud kay murag naa siyay gap between sa iyang mga classmate siguro tungod kay lagi sa iyabang kapansanan then murag dili siya agdon sa mga classmate" (Teacher)

"As a teacher, I've seen that he has really experienced bullying at school like sometimes, he's not allowed to join group activities, and at times, there seems to be a gap between him and his classmates, maybe because of his disability. It's like his classmates don't really include him." (Teacher)

This thought alone is enough to bring tears to my eyes (*makatulo sa luba*), knowing that children like Case A suffer not because they are different, but because the world around them fails to understand and embrace those differences.

A classmate agreed: *"Sa eskwelahan, ginabinuangan na siya labi na mag senyas senyas siya, sundog sundogon na siya sa among uban na classmate."* (Classmate)

"At school, he gets made fun of, especially when he uses sign language. Some of our classmates mimic him and make fun of the way he signs." (Classmate)

Upon learning his struggles, I felt deeply hurt, knowing that Case A, simply wanting to communicate, was mocked and excluded.

Exosystem

Case A's neighbor observed that Case A was frequently left out of group activities because others assumed he would not understand. Some neighbors even used derogatory language and wrote offensive remarks on him, mocking his inability to hear or read fluently.

"Usabay kanang dili siya ginapaapil pag naay groupings kay lagi dili siya kasabot.....gisultian pud siya ug mga bad words....ginasulatan ang pader ug amang amang, unya yaga yagaan siya ." (Neighbor)

"Sometimes, he's not included when there are groupings because they say he does not understand... He's also been called bad words... People even write things like 'mute' on the walls, and he gets mocked and made fun of." (Neighbor)

I felt a sharp pain in my chest. It wasn't just sadness, but a mix of emotions- anger, frustration, and helplessness. He was simply trying to fit in and do his best, but knowing that others were tearing down his confidence was deeply upsetting. A neighbor added, *"Pag mubaktas na siya pauli pagkahapon, ginasinggitan pud na siya ug amang sa ubang mga bata, unya padimalan pa jud na siya."* (Classmate)

"When he walks home in the afternoon, some of the other kids shout 'mute' at him, and they even mock him with gestures." (Classmate)

It is really painful to the heart because he hasn't done anything wrong, so why is he being treated like this?

Macrosystem

Case A is often left out of social gatherings. This exclusion hurts him, making him feel isolated and unwanted. Policies should promote inclusion and provide support so that everyone, including those with hearing impairments, can feel valued and take part fully.

"Wala jud intawon nay muduol sa iyaba aron paapilon siya kay kung ilang paapipilon, paminaw nila mapildi na jud sila sa mga contests or activities." (Neighbor)

"No one really approaches him to let him join, because they think that if they include him, they'll lose in contests or activities." (Neighbor)

Hearing this really make me feel deeply saddened, realizing that no one will even try to include him, just because they fear they'll lose in competitions or activities if he participates. A cousin supported:

"Naa jud to kaisa gipaapil na siya, unya kay napildi man na, siya na dayon gipasanginlan na napildi, suko kayo iyang mga kauban oi. Maong wala na na siya ginapaapil." (Cousin)

"There was this one time when they let him join, but because they lost, he was immediately blamed for it. His teammates got really angry. That's why they have not included him since then." (Cousin)

It's painful to the heart because, because of our disability, it feels like all the negativity is automatically directed at us. Where is fairness and justice in all of this?

Physical and Verbal Harm

Microsystem

The cousin had witnessed Case A's bullying firsthand. He reported that their classmates frequently hit Case A on the back and made fun of him. As a cousin, he intervened to stop the bullying and strove to educate others about Case A's condition.

"Pirminti man na siya gina bully sa akong manghod. Usabay man gani kay iyaba na sumbag sumbagon ang likod ug usabay pud sungog sungogon siya." (Cousin)

"My younger sibling is always bullying him. Sometimes, my sibling even punches him in the back, and at times, he gets teased as well." (Cousin)

As I listened to him speak, I watched the pain in his eyes and heard it in his voice. It was as if every word he said carried the weight of the hurt he had seen- and perhaps even carried himself. I couldn't help but be deeply moved and overwhelmed with empathy. It was heartbreaking to witness someone so young speak of such cruelty with a heavy heart. A Mother recalled: *"Makasab an gani nko na akong mga pag umangkon kay ila intawon ng binuungan, mubilak lang bya na sa daplin." (Mother)*

"I've scolded my nieces and nephews because they're the ones making fun of him, but he just cries on the side." (Mother)

I could really feel the pain the mother was going through in her trembling voice, because when a child is hurt, the mother's pain is doubled.

Mesosystem

In school, teachers cannot always be on guard for Case A. As the teacher shared the difficulties that Case A encountered, he also expressed guilt, knowing that there were times when things happened beyond his control.

"Usabay dli siya paapilon sa group activities, murag naay gap between sa iyang mga classmates, siguro pud tungod sa iyang kapansanan, nab usabay himoon siya na kataw anan." (Teacher)

"Sometimes, he is not included in group activities. It seems like there's a gap between him and his classmates, maybe also because of his disability. Sometimes, they even make fun of him." (Teacher)

I could feel the pain the teacher felt - the same pain that Case A carries every day. A classmate also recounted an incident during their practice when others cursed at him- a painful reminder of the verbal abuse he constantly endured.

*"Pag practice namo, giyanawan na siya ug grabe kasakit na words jud, giingnan pud na siya ug bad words like 'p*tan* **a'. Looy kaayo siya, mihawa na lang siya sa line." (Classmate)*

*"During our practice, he was harshly scolded with really hurtful words. He was also called bad words like 'p*tan* **a'. He looked so pitiful, he just left the line." (Classmate)*

As she spoke, her voice trembled and cracked with emotion, as if he was holding back tears. I could see and feel how sorry she was for him- her words carried both sadness and guilt.

Exosystem

I really felt so sorry for him- it broke my heart when some of his neighbors called him hurtful names such as "bungol" (deaf) or "amang" (mute). Instead of showing kindness, they chose to tease and disrespect him. What hurt me even more was hearing about an incident where, while he was selling banana fritters, another child physically assaulted him when he asked for payment, prompting them to seek justice by reporting it to the police.

"Naa jud time kaditong namaligya siya ug maruya nga pagpaningil niya gisumbag siya sa bata, tapos mao to gipa blotter nako ang bata oi sa pulis." (Mother)

"There was really a time when he was selling banana fritters (maruya), and when he was collecting payment, a kid punched him. That's when I reported the kid to the police." (Mother)

Instead of showing kindness, they chose to tease and disrespect him. It felt like my heart was crushed upon hearing this, knowing that Case A is not being treated properly because of his disability.

"Sakit kaayo akong likod kay gisumbag ko." (Case A)

"My back really hurts because I was punched." (Case A)

It's deeply upsetting and concerning to know someone was hurt and left in pain, just because he has a disability-hearing impairment. Is it his fault that he is that way?

Mechanisms Undertaken by the Case (Hearing Impaired Student)

Despite the difficulties encountered by the case (Hearing – Impaired Student) on bullying, the child and even those around him, particularly his family, peers, neighbor, and teacher, have named mechanisms undertaken that were done to surmount the difficulties encountered by the case (Hearing – Impaired Student) on bullying. These themes emerge: Strong support system, self-awareness, and promotion of an inclusive environment.

Strong Support System

Microsystem

A dominant theme in the narratives was the crucial role of family in helping Case A student surmount the difficulties encountered in bullying. As I listened to the mother express her strong emotional commitment to Case A's well-being, her voice filled with unwavering love and concern, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of admiration and compassion for her. She emphasized how much she believes in his potential and constantly encourages him to push through. She said, *"Sa among pamilya, labi na ko as mama, ginapabinumdum nako sa iya pirmi na espesyal siya ug naa siyay daghang skills o potential sa kinabubi. Pandungog ug pagsulti lang ang wala sa iyaba, dili na mao ang mag define sa iyang pagkatao. So ginaingnan namo siya ug go lang pirmi."* (Mother)

"In our family, especially me as his mother, I always remind him that he is special and that he has many skills and potential in life. It's only hearing and speaking that he lacks, but that doesn't define who he is. So we always tell him just to keep going." (Mother)

As I listened to the mother express her strong emotional commitment to Case A's well-being, her voice filled with unwavering love and concern, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of admiration and compassion for her. She emphasized how much she believes in his potential and constantly encourages him to push through.

Similarly, the cousin played an active role in defending and educating others about Case A's condition. She mentioned, *"Ako pud isip ig agaw niya, nagapaningkamot pud na ipasabot sa uban ang iyang sitwasyon ug angay pud siya respetohon ug tratuhon sama sa pagtrato sa uban kay dili man siya labi sa amoa, tao man pud siya."* (Cousin)

"As his cousin, I also try my best to help others understand his situation and that he deserves to be respected and treated just like everyone else, because he's not different from us—he's a person too." (Cousin)

I could feel and see her sincerity as she spoke with deep love and determination. Giving an assurance that your family will be there for you no matter what.

Mesosystem

The importance of friendships is another recurring theme. Case A acknowledged that true friends who accepted him had helped build his self-confidence. He confessed, *"Nakatabang pud sa akoo na naay koy classmate na nahimo nakong amigo na nakasabot sa akoo ug dawat nila kung unsa ko."* (Case A)

"It also helped me that I had a classmate who became my friend, someone who understood me and accepted me for who I am" (Case A)

Hearing this, I felt a sense of warmth and relief. It was heartening to know that, despite all the challenges he encountered, there were people who truly saw him for who he was. Case A's mother also added this, stating that friendships had played a significant role in his emotional resilience. She said, *"Nakita pud nako nga nakatabang jud*

ug dako nga nakakita siya ug mga amigo nga gidawat ug gisabot siya- isa jud ni sa rason nga nakadugang para ma boost iyang confidence o iyang kumpyansa sa iyang kaugalingon." (Mother)

"I also saw that it really made a big difference when he found friends who accepted and understood him. This was one of the main reasons that helped boost his confidence and self-esteem." (Mother)

I could see happiness in her eyes, knowing that her child had finally found friends who accepted and understood him. This is the happiness of a mother that cannot be measured.

Self-awareness

Case A's testimony revealed a journey toward self-advocacy. Initially, Case A struggled with the pain of being bullied, but over time, he learned how to respond. I admired his strength as he mentioned, *"Naka- experience ko ug bullying sa eskwelahan, sakit kaayo sa buot pero nakakat on ko na barugan ang akong kaugalingon. Bisan sa kasakit, nakaya nakong mubarog." (Case A)*

"I experienced bullying at school, and it really hurt, but I learned to stand up for myself. Even with the pain, I was able to stand tall." (Case A)

Case A was also adapted by developing new ways to communicate. There was a gentle smile on his face, but I could also feel the mix of pride and pain in his voice. He revealed, *"Nakat on pud ko ug different ways to express myself, like paggamit ug sign language ug naningkamot ko to understand people na dili kaayo makasabot sa akong sitwasyon." (Case A)*

"I also learned different ways to express myself, like using sign language, and I made an effort to understand people who may not fully understand my situation." (Case A)

While I was watching him sign, I felt a deep sense of admiration—it was a powerful reminder of strength and resilience. His gesture reflects not only strength but also a deep sense of empathy and compassion.

Promotion of Inclusive Environment

The school's efforts to foster an inclusive environment for students with hearing impairment did not go unnoticed. As the parents shared, the teachers have worked hard to provide activities where the students with hearing disabilities feel valued and cared for.

"Dako jud akong pasalamat kay Sir kay ginasisiguro niya na makaapil akong anak sa mga activities sa school. Happy kaayo ko maminaw pag mag share siya sa mga ginabuhat niya sa eskwelahan. Isip usa ka inahan, happy kaayo ko na naay tao nga nagaatiman ug nagatan aw sa akong anak nga pareho sa uban" (Mother)

"I'm very grateful to Sir because he makes sure that my child can participate in school activities. I'm so happy to listen when he shares what he's been doing at school. As a mother, I'm thrilled that there's someone who cares for and looks after my child just like the others." (Mother)

The mother's narratives highlighted the broader community's role in supporting an individual. I could see the warmth in her eyes and hear the genuineness in her voice as the mother expressed concern about Case A's exclusion from social activities.

Exosystem

The narratives from the neighbor highlighted the broader community's role in supporting an individual. I could sense the sadness in her voice as the neighbor expressed concern about Case A's exclusion from social activities.

"Kasagaran jud, dili na siya paapilon sa mga dula kay syempre hunahuna sa uban lisod siya pasabton. Sakit kaayo paminawon na ginalikayan siya sa uban tungod sa iyang kapansanan." (Neighbor)

"Most of the time, he's not included in the games because, of course, others think it's hard to make him understand. It's excruciating to bear that others avoid him because of his disability." (Neighbor)

However, this individual actively made an effort to support Case A, and it was truly heart-warming to learn about it. It reminded me that inclusion isn't just the job of one person—it must be a shared responsibility. Seeing someone care like that gave me hope.

"Ginaduol nako na siya, aron mapakita nako sa iyaha na naa siyay amigo na andam maminaw sa iyaha ug dawhat siya kung unsa man siya. para mapa feel pud nako na he is not alone. Kay naa ko andam mo mutabang sa iya." (Friend)

"I approach him to show him that he has a friend who is ready to listen to him and accept him for who he is. I want him to feel that he is not alone because I am here, ready to help him." (Friend)

I could truly feel her concern and care, offering a sense of comfort and support. It reflects her genuine empathy and a commitment to being there for him in times of need.

Macrosystem

The teacher's account revealed both the barriers and the efforts made to create a more inclusive environment. Stating that policymakers have a significant impact and taking action by bringing sign language into every school, training our teachers, and providing the proper support. He commented,

"Kasagaran sa iyang mga classmate dili kabibalo mo sign language, maayo na lang gani karon kay gipabugtan na jud ang inclusive education, naa nay mga training sa mga teachers on Basic Sign Language." (Teacher)

"Most of his classmates don't know sign language, but thankfully, inclusive education has really been strengthened now, and teachers are being trained in Basic Sign Language." (Teacher)

In addition to listening to the teacher share, I am genuinely grateful that it is slowly creating an environment where he will never feel alone and excluded again. She mentioned, *"Aron jud siya matabangan, himoong inclusive ang ilang klase ug unta e educate iyang classmates about his situation and so far sa akong napansin medyo ok na man na ilang pagtagad sa iyaha." (Mother)*

"To help him, they should make his class inclusive and educate his classmates about his situation. So far, from what I've noticed, their treatment of him has improved." (Mother)

I could really feel that she is hopeful that her child's situation will be understood and that their collaborative efforts will create a more accepting and supportive environment for his son (Case A).

Insights Learned from the Case

The collected narratives revealed significant insights into the challenges faced by Case A due to bullying, exclusion, and social barriers. Through the perspectives of the student, his family members, teacher, neighbor, and classmate, key themes emerge: building a supportive home environment, the need for awareness and inclusivity, the importance of fostering respect and understanding, and promoting systemic change. These insights emphasize that addressing bullying requires collective effort from families, schools, and communities.

Building a Supportive Home Environment

Microsystem

The narratives highlighted that the support of family played a crucial role in helping Case A cope with bullying. The cousin acknowledged that bullying had affected Case A's confidence, but family encouragement had been instrumental in helping Case A face these challenges.

"Usabay, tungod sa ginabuhay sa iyaha murag nawad an na siya ug confidence. Pero sa kanunay naa man mi na pamilya niya nagasuporta, ginadasig pud namo siya and of course among love sa iyaha. Ug kini nakatabang jud ug dako aron mabalik ang iyang confidence ." (Cousin)

"Sometimes, because of what's happening, it seems like he loses his confidence. But always, he has us, his family, supporting him. We encourage him, and of course, our love for him. This has really helped a lot in bringing back his confidence." (Cousin)

I couldn't help but feel a wave of compassion while listening to him. Case A, himself, recognized that having a supportive home environment had helped him navigate bullying.

"Ang suporta sa akong pamilya, na nasabtan jud nila akong sitwasyon, dako kaayong tabang aron makaya nako ug atubang ang mga challenges ug magpadayon para sa maayong future." (Case A)

"The support from my family, who truly understands my situation, has been a great help in enabling me to face the challenges and keep moving forward for a better future." (Case A)

Hearing those words truly touched my heart. They made me feel proud and inspired and reminded me how powerful genuine support from loved ones can be. I admired his strength in facing such challenges with their help.

The Need for Awareness and Inclusivity

Mesosystem

A common barrier to acceptance and understanding was the lack of awareness and knowledge about the struggles of Case A. The teacher pointed out that many people, including educators and students, did not fully grasp the challenges faced by Case A due to a lack of sign language skills and inclusive practices. She said, *"One major factor that often leads to misunderstandings between teachers, students, and hearing-impaired individuals is the lack of knowledge in sign language. Sakit hunahunaon o makalagot na simple way of communicating with dili nato mahimo"* (Teacher)

"One major factor that often leads to misunderstandings between teachers, students, and hearing-impaired individuals is the lack of knowledge in sign language. It's painful to think about or frustrating when a simple way of communicating is not possible." (Teacher)

It's painful to realize how something as simple as communication can create such a barrier to belonging and understanding. He further stressed that this gap should not become an excuse for exclusion but rather an opportunity for learning, a chance for growth and understanding.

"Even if we lack knowledge of sign language, we should not let it become a barrier to inclusivity. Hearing-impaired students have the right to learn just like everyone else, and as teachers, we also have the opportunity to learn from them." (Teacher)

It really speaks to the heart of inclusive education. I admire the mindset that sees teaching as a two-way learning process, especially when it comes to hearing-impaired students. We truly have so much when we open ourselves up to their world.

The Importance of Fostering Respect and Understanding

Exosystem

Several narratives stressed the importance of treating hearing-impaired individuals with dignity and respect. With his voice filled with a mix of hope and vulnerability, Case A made a heartfelt plea for acceptance.

"Akong hangyo sa tanan na unta atong ipakita ang respeto ug pagsabot sa mga tao, hilabi na sa mga naay kapansanan pareho nako. Gusto lang pud namo na maapil mi, masuportahan sa among pag eskwela ug maapil sa mga activities" (Case A)

"My plea to everyone is that we show respect and understanding to people, especially those with disabilities like me. We just want to be included, supported in our education, and be part of the activities." (Case A)

Case A's classmate acknowledged, with a sense of empathy, that exclusion often happened due to communication challenges. There was a hint of frustration in his voice, but he firmly believed that even small efforts could help foster respect and inclusion.

"Pag naay tapoktapok gud, ako siya ginapaapil, ako siyang tawagon, maayo na lang sa akong simple na paagi mapakita namo na apil siya ug girespeto namo siya ." (Classmate)

"When there's a gathering, I make sure to include him, I call him over. Thankfully, in my simple way, we're able to show that he is included and that we respect him." (Classmate)

The neighbor reinforced this point, speaking with a sense of urgency, stating that exclusion and avoidance were sadly common. You could see the frustration in her voice as she emphasized how crucial it was for the community to take responsibility in ensuring that hearing-impaired individuals, like Case A, felt valued. She said, *"Ang uban magkatawa sa iyang pagsulti, uban pud kay likayan siya kay dli lagi sila kasabot. D ba looy no, maong nagapaningkamot ko na ipakita sa iyaba ang akong respeto ug pagtagad."* (Neighbor)

"Some people laugh at the way he speaks, and others avoid him because they don't understand him. Isn't that sad? That's why I make an effort to show him my respect and attention." (Neighbor)

It's sad how easily people can be cruel when they don't understand someone. But the words of those who love him—their choice to stand by him and show that he is valued—are truly powerful.

Promoting Systemic Change

Macrosystem

The narratives end with a powerful call to action, a heartfelt reminder that everyone has a role to play in ensuring that hearing-impaired individuals, like Case A, are not marginalized. The mother's voice was full of urgency and conviction as she made a compelling statement about policymakers' ethical responsibility.

"Sakit hunabunaon na kung walay panaghiusa sa pag suporta, mahiya pud jud sila. ato pud unta mabutang atong sarili sa ilang situasyon, kung unsa atong bation kung kita pud ang ing anaon." (Mother)

"It's painful to think that without unity in support, they will really feel weak. We should also try to put ourselves in their situation and think about how we would feel if we were treated the same way." (Mother)

The teacher added with heartfelt conviction that society must move beyond recognizing differences. It is not enough to just be aware- we must embrace inclusivity as a shared experience, where everyone feels they belong.

"Murag, we need to share this awareness with others, encouraging them to understand sa mga struggles sa hearing-impaired individuals ug nga dili sila maka feel na labi sila. Ma feels nila ang sense of belongingness, without barriers or discrimination." (Teacher)

"It seems like we really need to share this awareness with others, encouraging them to understand the struggles of hearing-impaired individuals and to make sure they don't feel different. They should feel a sense of belonging without barriers or discrimination." (Teacher)

This really hits home. The teacher's words really remind me of the power we have to create a more inclusive and loving world. Lastly, it's beautiful to think about how this kind of support can transform lives.

Viewpoints and Standpoints

As I conducted interviews about the bullying experiences of a child with a hearing impairment, I could not help feeling sad about the realities that he had been dealing with. Not being able to hear was already a big concern for the child, and being bullied because of this just added to the burden and even heartache for him and his family as well. I was fortunate to have been able to conduct a study on the experiences surrounding this child because it surely gave me an opportunity to share his experiences with the hope that it could touch the lives of many. Exploring the heartwarming conversations I had with all the participants led me to extract essential themes that covered the whole story of a child with a hearing impairment. The participants shared about social exclusion and physical and emotional harm as bullying experiences encountered by the students. Despite these experiences, the hearing-impaired student and the significant individuals who surrounded him also shared different coping strategies, such as a support system, self-awareness, and the promotion of an inclusive environment as effective ways to deal with the negative experiences. With these thoughts, they shared the emotional impact of bullying, the need for awareness and inclusivity, the role of family and social support, and the importance of fostering respect and understanding as significant insights that could be grasped by many to address the never-ending issues of bullying among those who have disabilities, like the case in this study. Being able to conduct interviews with the hearing-impaired students and those around them opened my eyes to the depths of the bullying realities that still happened within the boundaries of our places.

Elaboration of Themes and Sub-themes

This discussion focused on the various themes and sub-themes that emerged from the three key topics: the bullying difficulties faced by a learner with a hearing impairment, the mechanisms they employed to cope, and the insights gained from their experiences. Relevant studies were incorporated to provide deeper insights and contextualize the study's findings.

Supportive Home Environment creates a Strong Support System.

The general theme, Supportive Home Environment, encapsulates the difficulties faced by the learner with hearing impairment, including exclusion from group activities, feelings of isolation, avoidance in conversations, and gaps in social interactions. In this study, the father shared that his child often felt isolated from his siblings due to his condition. This finding aligns with the claims of Eroğlu and Cingi (2023), who emphasized the family's responsibility in helping children with hearing impairment overcome feelings of loneliness within the family. The study's results indicated that disability can lead to social disconnection, both within the family and in broader social events, as children with hearing impairment often find it challenging to participate in such activities. Despite experiencing social exclusion, isolation, and various forms of bullying, such as physical and verbal harm, the child was fortunate to be supported by his family. This significant presence played a vital role in helping him navigate life with a disability. These findings support Aktan et al. (2024), who concluded that family support is crucial in strengthening the self-confidence of children with hearing impairment. Furthermore, this result echoes Ashraf et al. (2023), who found that mothers of adolescent girls with hearing impairment empower themselves through positive thinking and self-encouragement, which enables them to provide strong support for their daughters, especially during challenging times. Thus, with the encouragement, protection, care, love, and support from his family, the child was able to face the challenges of living with a disability. The vital role of family support has been deeply recognized by participants in this study and is reflected in related research. This study's findings align with Paskaran and Yasin (2020), who argued that parents must focus on creating a home-based learning environment, fostering social interaction, communication, and providing emotional and academic support to help children develop their potential and address emotional and social struggles.

Strong Support System and Self-Awareness: Social Exclusion and Physical and Emotional Harm

Social exclusion and the resulting physical and emotional harm remained significant issues experienced by individuals with disabilities and those from marginalized communities. The development of strong support systems and self-awareness was identified as essential in mitigating these harms and in promoting resilience, well-being, and social inclusion. These findings supported the claim of Aktan et al. (2024), who asserted the importance of building friendships, particularly for students with hearing impairments, as such relationships could help enhance their self-confidence. It was confirmed that children with hearing impairment needed to form bonds and friendships beyond their immediate families in order to develop social skills essential for navigating the challenges associated with their physical condition. The findings also emphasized that inclusive education worked best when supported by an entire school culture that valued diversity and acknowledged individual needs. Teachers who became aware of their own biases and emotional responses were better able to adapt to the needs of students with disabilities and foster psychologically safe learning environments.

Beyond the support from the learner's immediate family, community support—including that from peers, teachers, and neighbors—also played a significant role in his experience navigating life with a hearing disability. This aligned with the study of Fadda et al. (2024), which affirmed that encouraging social interaction in mainstream classrooms improved student engagement across all conditions and promoted tolerance among peers. Furthermore, Said Sabry et al. (2021) emphasized that extending community support to adolescents with hearing impairments significantly contributed to the development of their self-esteem.

Promotion of Inclusive Education and Self-Awareness: Importance in Fostering Respect and Understanding

Promotion of an inclusive environment where these concerns are addressed is expressed by the participants with the hope that it can promote inclusivity. In the community, participants shared that people tend to avoid having conversations with children who have a hearing impairment, which then leads to problems in interacting with other people. These findings affirm the claims of Aktan et al. (2024), who stated that children with hearing disabilities often experience difficulties in social communication and interaction, which can increase their risk of being bullied. The present study also affirms the result of Aktan et al. (2024) when it came out in the in-depth

interviews that people also acknowledge the importance of being able to make friends, especially for those who are hearing-impaired, as this can also build self-confidence in the student with such a hearing disability. People are urged to become more inclusive, respectful, and understanding of these students. The participants mentioned that even small efforts could foster respect and inclusion. This result was also strongly emphasized in the study by Mendoza et al. (2023), which revealed that teachers working with hearing-impaired students affirmed the need for moral support, awareness, and understanding from people across all walks of life. Such support can help students overcome the difficulties they encounter in daily life. Therefore, he has been standing up for himself and finding ways to help him communicate with others. This result also supports the study by John (2023), which indicated that hearing-impaired students demonstrate a high level of resilience in facing the challenges brought by their impairment. Additionally, they have a strong sense of self-concept, as they actively engage in activities that boost self-esteem, such as participating in school and extracurricular activities, which provide opportunities to interact with others.

Inclusive Education as a Means to End Social Exclusion: A Promotion of Systemic Change

With all the personal sharing of the participants, I was able to extract one important insight that is believed to significantly help address the reasons why bullying has continued to haunt not only hearing-impaired students but also all others who have special needs, regardless of the case. The participants have urged policymakers to look into practices, policies, and reforms to promote an environment where inclusivity, empathy, and understanding thrive, especially in accommodating hearing-impaired individuals. This finding affirms the study of Joo et al. (2023) that bullying victimization can persist into adulthood if policymakers and school administrations do not give sufficient attention and emphasis to the issue. The results showed that they highly encourage the promotion of an inclusive environment where everyone, regardless of differences, is welcomed and valued. In the interviews, the participants expressed simple acts of teaching mainstream students the nature of inclusivity and how this can be done in classrooms with hearing-impaired students. This result affirms the study of Hara (2020), which strongly advocates for the inclusion of diverse students in lessons, activities, and interactions within the classroom. However, the lack of teaching and learning materials intended for hearing-impaired learners and the inadequacy of even simple sign language training for regular students are common concerns that add up to the worries of these types of students. Hence, students and teachers are also encouraged to become properly trained in sign language skills, and students must also be exposed to the concept of inclusivity in classroom settings and beyond.

Challenges

Bullying is an issue that has long been discussed and has been tried to be addressed by many people. However, many still fall victim to this. It is saddening to know that those who have already struggled, just like hearing-impaired children, are the very people who are also significantly exposed to this social issue. Hence, this topic is still relevant and timely and needs to be explored by researchers. Although, it is a topic where researchers might encounter difficulties in obtaining reliable information especially in sensitive places like schools, researchers still need to dwell on this and be prepared in ensuring clear guidelines most especially in terms of participation support and in handling emotional and psychological effects that might be experienced by those who are bullied and of their families as well as the people around them. It is also important to note that the sensitive nature of doing case studies or other research methods related to bullying should not hinder researchers' exploration of such a social issue. To lessen these challenges, ethical reviews and standards must be followed to ensure the integrity of the study being covered.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research provided a strong insight into the life of a hearing-impaired kid who has experienced social isolation, verbal insults, and even physical damage in many ways. Drawn from very intimate conversations with the student and those closest to him, these tales mirror the reality that many disabled people suffer in silence. Looking via Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, it became evident that bullying is a systematic problem rather than a one-time event occurring in the home, school, neighborhood, and society. Though these trying times are difficult, the student's path exposed resilience just as strong. He started to overcome the suffering with his increasing self-awareness, the unrelenting support of his family, the compassion of certain classmates and professors, and the latter's encouragement. His narrative is one of optimism, strength, and the potential for transformation and suffering. These encounters provide significant insights. Families are important in forming a

child's self-esteem. Their love and support may shield even the most severe external criticism. Schools, too, must be more active by creating settings where all students feel included, understood, and protected. Teachers have to be educated not just in pedagogy but also in empathy and communication, including knowledge of sign language. Communities should be allies, not bystanders. Policymakers also have to enhance inclusive school systems and anti-bullying legislation protecting the most vulnerable on a bigger scale.

The study advises that future educational initiatives emphasize developing inclusive and kind systems, both in practice and policy. Schools should include awareness campaigns normalizing diversity and sign language. Families should be equipped with information and tools to help their kids socially and emotionally. Researchers are also urged to investigate these topics in more general settings to keep voicing students who usually go unnoticed. Ultimately, this research reminds us that inclusion is a dedication, not just an idea. Creating environments where every student is seen, recognized, and appreciated helps us lower bullying and develop a fairer and human society.

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