An Analysis of the Prevalence and Effects of Bullying At a Remote Rural School in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa: Lessons for School Principals

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses the prevalence and consequences of bullying at a remote rural secondary school in South Africa. Premised on the qualitative research approach, the study used the case study design to select one school for study. An open ended questionnaire containing questions which sought qualitative narrative responses was completed anonymously by a sample of 31 grade 11 and 12 learners who had anonymously indicated that they had been bullied while at school. For data analysis, common emerging themes were identified from learners' qualitative responses. The study found that bullying was prevalent at the school under study and concludes that bullying affects student performance as students divert their attention from learning to how to avoid being bullied. The paper therefore recommends a holistic approach in dealing with bullying where all stakeholders are involved, that is, teachers, parents, learners and other relevant bodies.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying of students in schools is an acknowledged phenomenon worldwide (Smith and Brain 2000; Butler 2006; De Wet 2006; Aluede et al. 2008; Isidiho 2009; Olweus and Limber 2010; James 2010; Román and Murillo 2011). Early notable systematic research on bullying in the literature is attributed to Dan Olweus in the 1970s in Scandinavia (Smith and Brain 2000; De Wet 2005; Olweus and Limber 2010; Isidiho 2009). Such research eventually spread across the world, for example, in America (Román and Murillo 2011; Higdon 2011; Nansel et al. 2003) Ireland (Livesey 2010), Australia (Butler 2006; Maher 2009) the United Kingdom (James 2010), Norway (Midthassel, Minton and O'Moore 2009), Taiwan (Wei, Williams, Chen and Chang 2010), Malaysia (Salwina et al. 2009)

Bullying has been variously defined in the literature. According to Olweus and Limber (2010: 125),

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"Expressed in more everyday language, bullying can be characterized as intentional, repeated, negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behaviour by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself… Bullying can thus be described as aggressive behaviour or intentional harm doing that is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength.

The University of Texas at Tyler Innovation Academy (2014: 1) defines bullying as "Repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that: (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school." Most definitions of bullying in the literature share common tenets with the University of Texas at Tyler Innovation Academy and Olweus and Limber's definitions above namely intentional, aimed to harm, unprovoked, repetitive behaviour, an imbalance of power, inability to defend oneself and negative impact on

the victim (Smith and Brain 2000; De Wet 2005, 2006; Butler 2006; Aluede et al. 2008; Isidiho 2009; James 2010; Kruger 2011; Román and Murillo 2011; Protogerou and Flisher 2012)

Some countries internationally have reported high incidences of school bullying while others show relatively low figures. James (2010) cites large-scale surveys of bullying around the world by Berger (2007) who report victimisation rates of between 9 and 32 per cent, and bullying rates of between 3 and 27 per cent. Román and Murillo (2011) report on a large scale study conducted in 2007 by Plan International, a non-governmental organization on school violence in 49 developing and 17 developed countries. The results showed that more than half of sixth-grade primary students had been robbed, insulted or struck by peers at school during the month prior to the data collection. In Northern Ireland, McGuckin et al. (2010) state that previous research carried out in 2002 for the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) indicated that 40 per cent of primary school pupils and 30 per cent of post-primary school pupils had been bullied in the previous two months from the date of data collection. Meanwhile in Argentina, a study by Román and Murillo (2011) reports that almost a third of secondary students report having school supplies or other objects they have taken to school taken from them or broken. In the same vein, Aluede et al (2008) state that in American schools, there are approximately 2.1 million bullies and 2.7 million victims while Isidiho (2009) states that research in the United States of America revealed that half of all violence against teenagers occurs in school bullying, on school property, or on the streets near the school. Citing Cyberbullying Statistics (2014) and Internet Safety Statistics (2014) in the United Kingdom, Nobullying.com (2014) states that the numbers show that when it comes to UK children, almost half (46%) of children and young people say they have been bullied at school at some point in their lives. In Africa, Chabalala (2011) cites a study by Egbochuku (2007) which found that in Nigeria 78% of learners in junior secondary school had been victims of bullying, while 71% had bullied others.

In South Africa research on bullying has also gained momentum and resulting studies have shown that bullying is also common in the South African schooling system (De Wet 2005; 2006; Govender 2007; Marais and Meier 2010; South African Council of Educators 2011; Kruger 2011; Chabalala 2011; Protogerou and Flisher 2012; Mestry and Khumalo 2012). This is despite efforts at protecting the rights of the children enacted in the Constitution of South Africa (1996: section 28 [1][d]) which clearly states that every child has a right "to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation). Section 10 of the Constitution also states that "everybody has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity to be respected and protected".

A synopsis of the statistics on bullying in South Africa paints an equally grim picture. Marais and Meier (2010: 41) report that, "Disruptive behaviour continues to be the most consistently discussed problem in South African schools", while the South African Council of Educators (2011) concludes that what is becoming evident in South African society is that violence is a serious worry in both primary and secondary schools, across age, gender, race and school categories. Looking at provincial prevalence, Kruger (2011) reports that various surveys conducted in the Western Cape amongst learners and teachers found that the majority of schools reported problems with fighting, physical violence and bullying among learners, as well as the intimidation of teachers by learners, and learners by teachers. In Bloemfontein, Greef (2004) cited in Chabalala (2011) found that 56.4% of learners had been victims of bullying. Meanwhile in Gauteng, according to Protogerou and Flisher (2012) bullying has been reported to be as high as 61% in a sample of high-school students in Tshwane.

Forms and Causes of Bullying

Bullying can take several forms; direct and easily observable and subtle and not easily identifiable for those not involved. According to James (2010) bullying can be physical or direct when it hurts an individual in a tangible way such as for example hitting and kicking. It can also consist of indirect actions such as stealing or damaging other learners' belongings or hurting them emotionally. Indirect bullying as Marais and Meier (2010) show, can take the form of name calling, teasing, taunting, mocking, as well as intimidating other learners. Whitted and Dupper (2005) cited in De Wet (2005) delineate two other types of bullying – racial bullying and sexual bullying. They explain that racial bullying

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consists of making racial slurs, writing graffiti, mocking the victim's culture or making offensive gestures while sexual bullying includes passing inappropriate notes, jokes, pictures, taunts, or starting rumours of a sexual nature or inappropriate physical touching. Martinez-Criado (2014) isolates three forms or strategies that bullies use namely; "(i) physical: kicking, hitting, punching, shoving and spitting; (ii) verbal; gestural or written communication involving browbeating (intimidating) language such as teasing, ridicule, sarcasm, insults, threats (also gestural and verbal), name-calling, graffiti, notes or drawing; and (iii) social or relational behaviour to harm the reputation and relationships of a targeted child, such as rumour-spreading, social isolation of peers (or exclusion), actions against their properties such as damage, hide, theft or destruction of other property."

Bullying has been attributed to various causes. Family factors such as harsh parenting style, family conflicts and abuse have been identified as causes of bullying behaviours among school goers (Chabalala 2011; Mestry and Khumalo 2012; Protogerou and Flisher 2012). According to the South African Council for Educators (2011: 26) for example, "A recent national survey found that even though the majority of South African parents are against corporal punishment, 57% smack and 33% beat their children". Some bullies may thus see their behaviours as normal because they grow up from families in which everyone regularly gets angry and shouts (Aluede et al. 2008).

Factors inherent in the bullies themselves have also been found to contribute to incidences of bullying. According to Marais and Meier (2010), many learners misbehave because they want to gain attention and/or recognition. In this regard, as shown by Kruger (2011), according to existing literature, bullying behaviour between peers is a way of gaining social power, status or popularity in the school setting. "At times bullies think that when they bully others they will gain popularity at school and therefore be respected by all learners at school" (Chabalala 2011).

Bullying may also result from school related factors. Negative school climate, inadequacy of teachers as role models; lack of appropriate training for teachers, the abolition of corporal punishment, overcrowded schools; deficient organisational structure of the school, and rundown,

ill-kept physical appearance of the schools are cited as contributory to bullying behaviour (De Wet 2003; Marais and Meier 2010; Mestry and Khumalo 2012). In this regard, Chabalala (2011) is of the opinion that bullying rates can be influenced by how the school personnel react to bullying. If in a school, teachers do not see anything wrong with bullying, the problem might be high in such a school. "If teachers yell at learners, while exhorting them not to yell, learners are taught that undesirable behaviour is appropriate when you are an adult or if you have the power in your hands" (Marais and Meier 2010: 54).

Some Documented Effects of Bullying

Several negative mental, social, psychological and physical outcomes associated with bullying behaviour have been documented for both victims of bullying and bullies (Butler 2006; Livesey et al 2007; James 2010; Olweus and Limber 2010). For example, De Wet (2005: 708) reports that, "Victims of bullying often suffer from mental health conditions, with high levels of depression and suicidal ideation". A study of 3918 New South Wales school children in grades 6 to 10 from 115 government and non-government schools reported in Butler (2006) showed that bullying behaviour was associated with increased psychosomatic symptoms including, headache, stomach ache, backache, feeling low, irritable or bad temper, feeling nervous, difficulties getting to sleep and feeling dizzy. According to Department of Education (2014), in some circumstances the consequences of bullying may lead to a child or young person experiencing pronounced social, mental or emotional health difficulties.

Poor mental and physical health prevents learners from feeling happy at school and achieving good or satisfactory academic performance (De Wet 2005). A study by Glew et al. (2005) cited in Román and Murillo (2011) that analysed the relationship between bullying, school attendance, academic achievement, self-perception, and sense of belonging and security among primary pupils in urban public schools in the United States of America showed a greater likelihood of low achievement and lesser sense of belonging and security than those who did not report being bullied. De Wet (2005) further notes that bullying may result in truancy from school (to

prevent bullying from occurring), or absence from special school activities or certain classes. In the same vein, Aluede et al. (2008) report higher rates of absenteeism and drop out among victimized students than rates among non-bullied peers.

Other reported consequences of bullying include long-term relationship and intimacy issues (McGuckin et al. 2010) weapon carrying, vandalism, potential involvement in anti-social and criminal activity (Livesey 2007) and having problems with the police (De Wet 2005). In order to appropriately deal with scourge of bullying, it is imperative that context surrounding bullying behaviour be carefully examined so that context specific anti-bullying programmes that include all those involved, are implemented to ensure that learners can learn in a safe, secure and positive environment.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to investigate the causes, prevalence and effects of bullying at one particular school in order to come up with interventions to reduce bullying and promote a safe conducive learning environment for students. The objectives of the study were specifically to:

- Establish the causes, prevalence and extent of bullying at the selected school;
- Examine the effects of bullying on victims at the selected school and;
- Explore interventions that could be put in place for the recognition of, intervention in, and prevention of bullying at the selected school.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was premised on the qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2005), the goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand a central phenomenon, which is the concept or process explored in a qualitative research study. In this case the central phenomenon of interest was bullying. The study used a case study design and selected one school as case. Yin (2003: 23) defines case study research as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". This definition resonates with the definition by Creswell (2003) who defines case study design as in-depth, intensive enquiry reflecting a rich and lively reality and exploration of a bounded system. The aim was not necessarily to generalize to other contexts but to respond to the problem of bullying at this particular school selected as the case.

Population and Sampling

The focus of the study was on grade 11 and 12 learners at the school. After one of the authors had observed cases of bullying while teaching and during co-curricular activities, permission was sought from the school principal to address all grade 11 and 12 learners on bullying. After the address, students were requested to write their names and class on pieces of paper and to indicate whether or not they had experienced any form of bullying. They were then informed that they would be contacted individually. A total of 31 learners indicated having experienced bullying and these constituted the sample for the study

Data Collection and Analysis

An open ended self-reporting questionnaire (James 2010) asking about their bullying experiences was issued after explanation to the 31 learners. During data collection, the following instructions adapted from Isidiho (2009: 12) were provided to the learners:

- This is not a test or examination but a request to indicate your experience of bullying in your school.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Your answer is the right answer for you.
- Please read every question and statement carefully before answering.

The respondents were informed of the right not to respond to any questions if they did not feel like. Assurance of confidentiality was given through informing the learners that all data would be treated confidentially and that no student identities would be revealed. For data analysis, common emerging themes were identified from learners' qualitative responses. Where quantification of the responses was possible, data was quantified and presented in tables.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to emerging themes based on the learners' responses to the semi-structured questions. Although the questions were open ended, student responses tended to converge for most questions and these are quantified into tables. Some learners gave more than one response to questions, for example, and therefore appear more than once in some of the tables. The total number of learners does not necessarily add up to thirty one for all tables. The first question sought to understand the learners' conception of bullying.

Learner Understanding of Bullying

On the question which sought to find out students understanding of bullying various diverse responses were given. From the 31 responses, seven main forms of bullying were identified and these are; kicking, beating, calling names, bad treatment of others, hurting other people, forcing others to do what they do not like, forcibly taking other peoples belongings, and screaming at others as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Learner understanding of bullying

Theme	Number	Percentage
Kicking	8	25.8
Beating	6	19.3
Calling names	4	12.9
Bad treatment of others	5	16.1
Hurting other people	2	6.5
Forcing others to do what they do not like	6	19.3
Screaming at others	2	6.5

Other concerns raised by the learners included being rude to others, making others feel down and low, threatening other learners and harassing others. From the learners responses it can be concluded that kicking is the most prevalent form of bullying at this school

Causes of Bullying

The aim of the third question was to find out what students identified as the causes of bullying at school. Again overarching themes were identified in the learners' responses namely drugs and smoking, age, unequal treatment by teachers, jealousy, poverty, broken homes, and they are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Causes of bullying

Theme	Number of learners	Percentage
Drugs and smoking	2	6.5
Age	6	19.3
Unequal treatment by teachers	4	12.9
Jealousy	2	6.5
Poverty	4	12.9
Broken homes	2	6.5

It can be seen from Table 2 that age is the greatest contributor to bullying. The older learners tend to bully the younger ones. The importance of treating all learners in the classroom equally and fairly is important as shown by the number of students who indicated that bullies targeted those they thought were receiving preferential treatment from the teachers. Poverty also comes out as major cause of bullying as evidenced by the percentage of students who mentioned it. Other causes though not mentioned by many students as shown in the table include drugs and smoking, jealousy and broken homes. Other mentioned causes not on the table included previous abuse of the now bully, repeating grades, lack of respect from other learners, to attract teachers attention when they felt they are not receiving it and alcohol abuse. A further probing question seeking to find out how bullying manifested itself or started in the classroom or school produced results on Table 3.

Table 3: How bullying manifested itself

Theme	Number of learners	Percentage
Negative attitude towards a person/hating a person	10	32.3
Jealousy	3	9.6
Little fights and rough playing	2	6.5
Witnessing parents fights	1	3.2
Seeking love and acceptance	2	6.5
Anger	3	9.6

The major driver of bullying as shown on Table 3 seems to be negative attitudes and hatred of the victims by the bully. Anger and jealousy also seem to be the other main drivers of bully behaviour. Other identified signals of bully behaviour in the learners' responses included little fights and rough playing, seeking to be famous, witnessing parents fight at home and seeking love and acceptance.

Learners Most Likely to be Vulnerable to Bullying

Learners also had the opportunity to say who was most likely to be a victim of bullying in the school. New comers (70.9%) and the quiet and shy learners (16.1%) seem to be the greatest victims of bullying according to Table 4. Other categories of victims included those girls who liked to hang out with boys, the young who could not defend themselves, those who liked to gossip, those perceived to be loved by teachers and learners getting high grades in class.

Table 4: Learners most likely to be vulnerable to bullying

Category	Number of learners	Percentage
Girls who hang out with boys	2	6.5
Quiet and shy learners	5	16.1
Those who do not want to do bad things	2	6.5
Those that like to gossip	1	3.2
Learners getting high grades	1	3.2
Responses about bullies	9	29
New comers	22	70.9
Young and can't defend themselves	2	6.5

The Behaviour of Bullied Children in School

A question was also asked on how bullied learners behaved in class. The majority of the victims according to 45% of the learners were said to tend to be quiet and lonely and skeptical about mixing with other learners. Victims were said to be generally scared and sometimes demonstrated strange behaviour.

Effects of Bullying on Victims

Responses to the question that sought to ascertain the effect of bullying on the teaching and learning situation indeed revealed that learning was adversely affected as shown in the themes on Table 5.

Table 5: Effects of bullying on victims

Theme	Number of learners	Percentage
interrupted as teacher attends to the bullying	15	48.3
Absenteeism	3	9.6
Lack of concentration by learners, class stops focusing	4	12.9
Victim fees hurt/unwanted/cries	20	64.5

As shown on Table 5, 64.5% of the learners showed that the victim would feel embarrassed and as result will not be able to properly concentrate on their studies. The interruption of teaching and learning as a result of in-class bullying also seems to be a major problem as shown by 48.3% of the learners. One learner had this to say, "The victim will start to cry and the class will laugh and the teacher has to stop for few minutes to manage the class and calm the victim." When the teacher has to frequently stop in the middle of lesson to address issues of bullying the flow of the lesson is lost and this affects students learning. Other concerns as shown on the table include absenteeism by victims and the lack of concentration by other students in class.

How Bullies Behave

There was also a question that requested the learners to describe the behaviour of bullies and their responses are captured in Table 6. The majority of the responses as shown in Table 6 (35.4%) described the behaviour of bullies as bad and wrong. They were also described as generally bossy, strong, nasty, crazy and angry, negative and lacking respect. The implication of this is the need for counseling lessons during life orientation classes on values and acceptable behaviour.

Table 6: How bullies behave

Behaviour	Number of learners	Percentage
Bad and wrong	11	35.4
Strong	1	3.2
Bossy	3	9.6
Nasty	3	9.6
Lost mind/crazy	2	6.5
Angry	2	6.5

How the School Handles the Problem of Bullying

A question was included in the questionnaire that sought to determine measures put in place in schools to deal with bullying. Various responses were given by learners and themes identified are shown in the Table 7.

The learners' responses show that efforts are being taken in the school to deal with the issue of bullying. Fifty four percent of the learn-

Table 7: How the school handles the problem of bullying

Theme	Number of learners	Percentage
The bullies are punished(including corporal punishment	17	54
Calling parents of the bullies	9	29
Suspend the bullies	4	12
Call the police to talk to bullies	1	3.2
Teachers shout at the bully	3	9.6

ers indicated that where bullying was reported the perpetrators were punished. Such punishment includes corporal punishment which has legal implications. The calling of parents of perpetrators to the school by the principals is a demonstration that they would like to work with parents to alleviate bullying and should be commended. The invitation of law enforcement agents (police) should also be commended as it might act as a deterrent against future bullying. In addition counseling sessions for both perpetrators and victims would help concientize them on the ills of bullying.

Measures That Can be Taken to Control Bullying

The last question sought to find out what learners felt could be done to resolve the issue bullying. Major themes are recorded in Table 8.

Table 8: Measures that can be taken to control bullying

Theme	Number of learners	Percentage
The bullies are punished(include	17	54
Include police	5	16.1
Give harsh punishments(including suspension)	4	12.9
Support system /counselling	7	22.5
Set rules	6	19.3
Nothing/no measures can help	4	12.9
No response	4	12.9

It was heartening to note that a sizeable number of learners (22.5%) suggested a support system involving various stakeholders to resolve the issue of bullying. This support system included the call for counselors to come to the school to talk to learners and educate learners on their constitutional rights. Another sizeable number however has lost all hope (12.9%) and feels nothing can be done to stop bullying in schools as shown on the table above. Other recommendations given included the need to give harsher punishment including suspension, and the need to set clear rules in the school.

DISCUSSION

Concept of Bullying

The findings of this study indicate that bullying is a prevalent phenomenon at the school under study. Learners generally had an idea of what bullying entails and identified kicking, beating, calling names, bad treatment of others, hurting other people, forcing others to do what they did not like, screaming at others and forcibly taking other peoples belongings as the dominant forms of bullying at the school. The issue of 'calling names' in the learners' responses seems to resonate with findings by Livesey et al. (2007) that frequently reported behaviour was bullying by which mean names, comments or rude gestures and Protogerou and Flisher (2012 who report of bullying being expressed in an open, direct way, specifically physically hitting, kicking, punching someone; verbally threatening, insulting, teasing, taking belongings. Similarly, Bott (2004) cited in Marais and Meier (2010) as a teacher, testifies that several learners reported that they were frequently called names such as stupid, dumb, skinny, fat or retarded by other learners in the classroom and on the playground, and that they felt ashamed and humiliated by the experience of being called those names. Other concerns raised by the learners in this study which included being rude to others, making others feel down and low, threatening other learners and harassing others confirm findings by De Wet (2005) that bullied learners may fear rejection, being excluded or ignored, may feel betrayed, or fear being ridiculed in class by the spread of nasty rumours.

Causes and Manifestation of Bullying

From the findings, bullying has been attributed to several causes at school namely the use of drugs and smoking, age, unequal treatment by teachers, jealousy, poverty, broken homes with age as the greatest contributor with older learners bullying the younger ones. In this regard, James (2010) states that in western societies, bullying involves the abuse of power by

one or several persons who are perceived as more powerful, often due to their age, physical strength and , broadly involves older pupils victimising younger children. The issue of power imbalance in bullying is also raised by Vivolo-Kantor and Gladden (2014) who see bullying as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. The issue of home background as contributing to incidences of bullying is also reported by Mestry and Khumalo (2012) whose research participants had the perception that learners with discipline problems come from a family background where there was physical abuse, conflict and domestic violence. Protogerou and Flisher (2012) also argue that bullying is often attributed to personality and family characteristics reinforced by growing up in families that tolerate aggression and the use of power-assertive discipline, such as corporal punishment.

A major driver of bullying according to findings seems to be negative attitudes and hatred of the victims by the bully. Anger and jealousy also seem to be the other main drivers of bully behaviour. Other identified signals of bully behaviour in the learners' responses include little fights and rough playing, seeking to be famous, witnessing parents fight at home and seeking love and acceptance. On the issue of anger and jealousy, bullies could be angry at the way they are treated by teachers and therefore seek revenge elsewhere as shown in a study by Marais and Meier (2010) where respondents believed that learners' disruptive behaviour amounted to retaliation for punishment by teachers. The importance of treating all learners in the classroom equally and fairly is important as shown by the number of students who indicated that bullies targeted those they thought were receiving preferential treatment from the teachers.

Seeking fame and popularity among peers is one of the reasons given for bullying by the learners in this study. This need for status by bullies is also documented in the literature. When students find that putting others down gives them approval from their peers and makes them feel more important , popular and in control, they are likely to do it repeatedly (Aluede et al. 2008; Chabalala 2011). Similarly, as Protogerou and Flisher (2012) and Kruger (2011) show bullying behaviour between peers is a way of gaining social power, status or popularity in the school setting. In the same vein, Healy (2014) reports that new research suggests that as students become more popular and climb the social hierarchy of middle and high school, they are at increased risk for gossip, harassment and even physical attacks from rivals competing for status.

Characteristics of Bullies

The majority of the respondents in this study described the bahaviour of bullies as bad and wrong. They were described as generally bossy, strong, nasty, crazy and angry, negative and lacking respect. According to findings by Isidiho (2009), a learner who is stronger, more aggressive, bolder and more confident typically bullies other learners who are weaker, more timid and who tend not to retaliate. The findings relating to characteristics of bullies in this study agree with those of Protogerou and Flisher (2012) who argue that bullies possess a hot-tempered, impulsive and domineering temperament. Similarly, the Kansas State Department of Education (2014) identifies aggressive bullies are the most common type of bully and states that young people who fall into this category tend to be physically strong, impulsive, hot-tempered, belligerent, fearless, coercive, confident, lacking in empathy for their victims, have an aggressive personality and are motivated by power and the desire to dominate others. The implication of this is the need for lessons during life orientation classes on values and acceptable behaviour and the introduction of counseling programmes.

Targets of Bullying

Particular kinds of learners are identified as potential bully victims in this study. Newcomers and the quiet and shy learners seem to be the greatest victims of bullying. Other categories of victims included those girls who liked to hang out with boys, those that liked to gossip and learners getting high grades in class. With regard to new comers, Ward (2007) cited in South African Council of Educators (2011) argues that children who drop out and who change schools frequently are more likely to take part in violent behaviour. Also pertinent in this study is the finding that learners getting high grades were

most likely targets for bulling (Table 4). Evidence from the literature (Chabalala 2011) also shows that learners who excel academically may become victims of bullying as bullies become jealous when someone progresses faster than them. The Department of Education (2014) identifies several categories of pupils who are particularly vulnerable to bullying and may be severely affected by it, such as those with special educational needs or disabilities, going through a personal or family crisis, or suffering from a health problem and children in care that are frequently on the move who may be vulnerable because they are always the newcomer. Such bullying may actually result in deteriorating performance of the victim.

Effects of Bullying

Results show that bullying can result in dire consequences for the victim. The majority of the victims of bulling in this study were said to be quiet and lonely and skeptical about mixing with other learners and generally scared. De Wet (2005) argues that bullied children tend to suffer from elevated levels of depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, social isolation. De Wet (2005) further states that victims of bullying may also feel lonely and isolated from their friends and classmates. Citing several research studies, Martinez-Criado (2014) reports that research on victimization has found that both males and females who have been bullied can suffer from depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms (headaches, sleep or feed problems) and have interpersonal difficulties, higher school absenteeism and lower academic competence.

The interruption of teaching and learning as a result of in-class bullying also seems to be a major problem at the school under study as shown by 48% of the learners. When the teacher has to frequently stop in the middle of lesson to address issues of bullying the flow of the lesson is lost and this affects students learning. As Marais and Meier (2010) show, bullying behaviour can interfere with the teaching and learning and give the example of a learner who distracts other learners during lesson presentation.

Worrying over bullying is given as having a negative effect on concentration span in class by the victims (Table 5). Lack of concentration ultimately leads to deterioration in learner performance. Quiroz et al. (2006) cited in Chabalala

(2011) explains that learners who are targets of bullying are fearful and spend their energy worrying about when and how they will be bullied again and this has an impact on their studies, because instead of them concentrating on their studies, they concentrate on what they can do to protect themselves against bullies and how the bullying will take place. In the same vein, Livesey et al. (2007) report that within the school environment, the victim of bullying may have impaired concentration and decreased academic performance.

Another effect of bullying from the findings was that some learners even avoided school because of bullying (Table 5). Absenteeism due to fear of bullying is also recorded in literature. Aluede et al. (2008: 156) report that, "rates of absenteeism are higher among victimized students than rates among non-bullied peers, as are drop-out rates".In a study by Kruger (2011) teachers stated that school truancy and school refusal were common effects of bullying and that learners did not want to come to school because of the bullying that they endured at school. Similarly, Olweus and Limber (2010) document that bullied children are more likely than non-bullied peers to want to avoid school.

Measures in Place to Control Bullying

It was heartening to note from the findings that efforts were being taken in the school to deal with the issue of bullying. Fifty four percent of the learners indicated that where bullying was reported the perpetrators were punished. The calling of parents of perpetrators to the school by the principals is a demonstration that they would like to work with parents to alleviate bullying and should be commended. Marais and Meier (2010) also advise that all stakeholders in education should be involved in managing disruptive behaviour namely policy makers at national, provincial and local level, school principals, teachers, personnel providing specialist support systems, parents and society at large. Similarly, Martinez-Criado (2014) avers that it is known that adult supervision in the playground decreases the incidence of face-to-face bullying and schools that increase the number of adults who are watchful in the playground and who intervene on any suspicion of bullying reduce the incidents of bullying in their school.

It was re-assuring to note that a sizeable number of learners (22%) suggested a support

system involving various stakeholders to resolve the issue of bullying. This support system included inviting counselors to school to talk to learners and educate learners on their constitutional rights. This call from learners resonates with the call by the South African Council of Educators (2011) for a human rights culture in a school context that upholds the constitutional rights of every learner and teacher to dignity, equality and freedom. Furthermore, De Wet (2005) advocates a comprehensive anti-bullying programme that includes all those involved to ensure that learners can learn in a safe and bully-free environment.

Other recommendations given by the learners in this study included the need to give harsher punishment including suspension, and the need to set clear rules in the school. One of the strategies to manage bullying, according to Bott (2004) cited in Marais and Meier (2010) is the joint setting of classroom rules by learners and teachers regarding relationships. Mestry and Khumalo (2012) also suggest the adoption of a whole school approach which ensures that classroom discipline reflects the school's policies and the establishment of ground rules. In the same vein, Protogerou and Flisher (2012) suggest a, "Whole-school interventions include a combination of methods involving the school at all levels, such as enforcing anti-bullying rules and specific sanctions for those breaking the rules, teacher training, classroom curricula, conflict resolution techniques, counselling, as well as providing educational material". University of Texas at Tyler Innovation Academy (2014) meanwhile suggests a learning environment free from bullying which includes for example, the establishment of clear procedures for reporting and response, age appropriate student instruction, staff development and parent or guardian involvement arguing that professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indeed reveal that there is bullying at the school under study which manifests itself as kicking, beating, calling names, bad treatment of others, hurting other people, forcing others to do what they did not like, screaming at others and forcibly taking other learners belongings. Factors leading to bully-

ing are identified in the study as drugs and smoking, age (older learners bullying younger learners), unequal treatment of learners by teachers, jealousy, poverty stricken backgrounds, broken homes. It is also evident from the study that bullying affects student performance as their attention is diverted from concentrating on their studies to worrying about the scourge of bullying. Bullying has also led to absenteeism (to avoid being bullied) and this again results in deteriorating academic performance. All hope is not lost however as learners indicated that where incidents of bullying were reported punishment was meted out to the perpetrators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, discussion and conclusions above, the following recommendations are advanced; That the school develops formal mechanisms and procedures for the reporting and recording of bullying and systems that will protect learners who report such incidents; The Department of Education 's Code of Conduct for schools which spells out the rules regarding learner behaviour at the School and describes the disciplinary system to be implemented by the school concerning transgressions by learners be made available to all teachers for sharing with their learners; A more pro-active role by the School Governing Body in involving all stakeholders in debates and deliberations around the issue of bullying and that staff development of teachers be conducted on the recognition, monitoring of bullying and effective intervention strategies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like any other study, this study had some limitations. Some leaners for example, might have feared disclosing the names of bullies for fear of victimisation. This limitation was however reduced by asking learners to provide their names on pieces of paper which were only available to researchers. The assurance to the learners that all data would be treated confidentially and that no individual names would be released also helped reduce this limitation. The fact that the study was conducted at only one school could limit the generalisation to a wider school population. The main aim of the study how ever was not generalisation but an action research project to resolve bullying at the particular school.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The paper recommends the following further studies to gain a holistic understanding of bullying in schools. A study could be conducted with the bullies to find out why they bully others at schools. A further study could be conducted to determine if any bullying of teachers by pupils is prevalent and what the effects are on teaching and learning. The bullying of pupils by teachers is yet another possible area of exploration for research. Finally a study of teacher bullying by school principals and /or school principal bullying by teachers could help bring a holistic view on the issue of bullying in the schooling sector.

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