

Causes of Bullying in Boarding High Schools in Zimbabwe

Kudenga Mugove

Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Applied Social Science, Zimbabwe Open University.

Abstract- This is part of a broad study that investigated bullying behaviours in boarding schools in Zimbabwe. This particular paper focuses on some of the possible causes of bullying behaviours in boarding schools in Zimbabwe. The study used descriptive survey design. The research participants were pupils in boarding schools in Zimbabwe and members of schools disciplinary committees. The sample of research participants consisted of twelve members of school disciplinary committee and forty children in boarding schools. Research participants from school disciplinary committees were selected using random sampling. School children were selected using stratified sampling technique and were then randomly selected. The study used questionnaires as research instruments. The study found out that bullying was prevalent in boarding schools in Zimbabwe. The main causes of bullying in boarding schools were lack of school rules and implementation of rules that deter bullying, influence of movies and films that show bullies as heroes watched by boarding school children, home background that encouraged bullying as a way of solving problems or did not discourage bullying, influence of peers who considered perpetrators of bullying behaviours as heroes and attention seeking behaviours of bullies. The study recommended that schools should have clearly down rules against bullying, bullying rules should be rigorously enforced, children should be conscientised on the ills of bullying behaviours, children should be empowered to report bullying so that they do not suffer in silence and children should watch films and movies that show helping behaviours as heroic.

Index Terms- Bullying, Disciplinary Committee, Boarder, Impact, Mission Boarding School

I. INTRODUCTION

When children are left in boarding schools it is the hope of parents that the school authorities take over the roles of parents as 'loco parentis'. This involves making sure all children are protected from all forms of harm including bullying. When children are bullied their academic performance is compromised implying that their future is negatively affected. It is important that the causes of bullying be interrogated so that when children interact on their own they do so in a spirit of collegiality and do not impose themselves over others. The causes of bullying should be investigated and ways of going around them found for the benefit of children who are left at care institutions.

Research Question: What are the main causes of bullying in government and mission boarding high school?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying Contextualised

Bullying has been defined in a number of ways over the years. Olweus (1993) the outstanding pioneer in the field of bullying defines bullying by saying:

“a person is bullied when he/she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons”.

O'Moore and Minton's (2004) definition of bullying is one of the most widely used definitions. They defined bullying as long standing violence, mental or physical conducted by an individual or group against an individual who is not able to defend him/herself in that actual situation. While bullying as defined by Roland (1993) is a long standing physical or psychological violence conducted by an individual or group and directed against an individual who is not able to defend him/herself in the actual situation. Thus looking at boarding school set up, the victims are more defenseless as compared to their day-school counterparts who have an upper hand in the particular setting, as the students live away from their parents. The major proportion of bullying goes unreported as victims are threatened into silence while both teachers and some parents do not take the problem seriously as they regard it as part of growing up.

In bullying the hurt that is done to the victim is both intentional and unprovoked resulting in the tainting of the victim's self-esteem. Bullying is usually done on the basis of imbalance of power where the victim is unable to defend him/herself in the actual bullying situation.

Bullying behaviour may take a variety of forms. What has been termed direct bullying is where the victims are more or less openly attacked by the perpetrator. Direct bullying involves physical bullying, gesture bullying, extortion and e-bullying or cyber bullying. Indirect bullying is to some extent more covert, usually involving deliberate manipulation of social relationships in order to socially isolate someone, cause to be ridiculed or to make others dislike the victim. It basically involves manipulation of the environment so that others behave negatively towards the victim.

Bullying should be viewed as an unacceptable form of interpersonal behavior. Unfortunately most bullying incidences go unreported as victims feel that adults do not take the problem of bullying seriously and times blame themselves for being bullied. At times the victims are shy and not assertive enough to open up and state the situation they are in. Rigby (2001) notes that bullying can be practiced by both males and females. Researchers have uncovered fairly consistent differences in the

way in which males and females perpetrate bullying behaviours. Whilst verbal bullying is generally the most common experienced form of bullying for males and females alike, male perpetrators are more likely than females to use direct means, whereas female perpetrators are more likely than males to use indirect methods.

Causes of bullying in boarding schools

Bullying can be a result of a variety of factors though it is difficult to ascertain which particular factor is responsible for a particular form of bullying. These factors include genetic predisposition, early socialization, modeling, operant conditioning, disorder in functioning of the superego, environmental factors and peer pressure.

Genetic predisposition

There are several factors that are considered to contribute in various ways to likelihood of bullying behaviours. Hallam and Reeds (2005) content that physiological theories say that the bullies are genetically different from others. Some supporting evidence comes from studies of twins which show consistently high concordance rates for anti-social behavior in identical than fraternal twins and other siblings. It is argued that there are certain personality traits that appear among most bullies such as aggressiveness, impulsive behavior, low in empathy and therefore not sensitive to the plight of others. The bullies generally enjoy and get satisfaction in seeing other children in pain. However it should be noted that when raised in a positive home environment the children with these personality traits can learn empathy and compassion which puts them at lower risk for bullying.

Tattum (1993) also suggest that children with a genetic predisposition to bullying may have risk for bullying lowered through provision of boarding school environment in which relations between students are positive. The schools should cultivate a culture of empathy where emphasis is on collegiality and deriving satisfaction from helping others. Schools that recognize and reward those that practice anti-bullying behaviours reduce the possibility of the bullying behavior manifesting.

Early Socialisation

Bullying behavior can be understood in terms of early socialization. According to Haralambos and Holborn (1995) if a child was deprived of motherly love during the first seven years, he/she could develop conduct disorders during childhood and anti-social personality disorder. There is a tendency of such children to compensate their shortcomings by inflicting pain on others. In the same vein O'Moore and Minton (2004) argue that dysfunctional families can contribute to the development of bullying behaviours in children. In dysfunctional families the socialization processes are characterized by inflicting pain on others. The interactions between the family members in a dysfunctional family are based on those with power imposing themselves on those without power. More so it has been observed that children who lack adult supervision or who are abused at home are at a higher risk of bullying others in schools. Since they do not have supervision most of the time they may inadvertently get used to inflicting pain on other children. Parents who are too lax with discipline may also expose their children to

risk of being bullies when they go to school. This implies that when schools are dealing with issues of bullying at boarding schools, there is need to look at the children's social background.

Modelling

Social learning theorists attribute bullying to both modeling and operant conditioning. Davison and Neale (1990) noted that children can learn aggressive behaviours such as bullying from adults who behave in this way. Children who are from families where bullying and aggressive behaviours are practiced are more likely to practice the aggressive behaviours. According to www.bullyingstatistics.org, in a culture fascinated with winning, power and violence, some experts suggest that it is unrealistic to expect that children will not be influenced to seek power through violence in their own lives. They will be viewing it as legitimate way of meeting their ends. Research points to world wrestling federation where glorification of bullies is done in the name of entertainment. Thus children who watch world wrestling federation on television may learn both physical and verbal bullying. It is important to point out that the high rates of domestic violence means that many young people grow up expecting that violence is an acceptable way to get what one wants. Aggressive behaviours such as bullying may be seen as an effective means of achieving a goal and is likely to be reinforced. Davison and Neale (1990) thus maintain that once initiated, bullying acts are likely to be maintained.

Peer Pressure

Bullying can also be a response to peer pressure within the school. Olweus (1993) noted that bullying can be seen as group phenomena. Within the school environment the peer group will often bully another group or individual for reasons which may be real or imagined or simply to have fun. Some bullies in previous studies have admitted to acting as part of a group for half of the bullying incidences they have been involved in. It is also important to note that bullying by an individual is often conducted with support of a group where the bully is glorified and seen as a hero.

Environmental Factors

According to www.bullyingstatistics.org, the institutions like boarding schools can also contribute to bullying behaviours. If the institution in which bullying takes place does not have high standards for the way people should treat each other, then bullying may be more likely and or prevalent. In cases where the rules are lax or are not strictly enforced there is room that bullying will occur. Institutions that have strict rules and close supervision of activities that children will be doing are likely to have fewer cases of bullying than where children are left unattended for long periods of time. Thus the institution would have an influence on why children bully.

Methodology

In this study the researcher used descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey was chosen because it places emphasis on the depth of the understanding of the deeper meaning of human experiences. The design offers rich descriptive reports on the individual's perception, attitudes, beliefs, views, feelings and interpretations of given events. The descriptive survey design is

defined by its methodical collection of standardized information from a representative sample of the population (Christensen,1994). The descriptive research design suits the context under which the present study was undertaken. The descriptive survey represents a probe into a given state of affairs that exists at a given time. It therefore means that direct contact was made with individuals whose characteristics, behaviours and issues were relevant to the investigation under study. In this case the researcher had direct contact with some of the children who were bullied or who saw bullying taking place and members of the disciplinary committee who handled bullying issues.

Sampling involves selecting people from the population to represent the entire population, (Polit 2001). In this study the sample consisted of boarding school children in forms one to six and members of schools disciplinary committees. The research used random sampling for selecting members of schools disciplinary committee. Twelve members of the disciplinary committees participated in the research. They consisted of six males and six females. According to Hallam and Reed (2005) simple random selection involves taking names completely at random, from a list by a person or a computer, so that each member of population has an equal chance of being selected. In the case of school children the research used stratified and random sampling.

Hallam and Reed (2005) maintain that in stratified random sampling, the population is put into segments called “strata” based on things like age, gender or income. Names are then selected at random from within each segment. For the purpose of this study, the researcher put the students into three segments based on level of education at the school which are junior (Form 1 and Form 2) ordinary level (Form 3 and 4) and senior level (Form 5 and 6). The researcher had cards numbered one to ninety per level. The cards were put in a box and shuffled and students allowed picking cards randomly. All students who picked up cards for multiples of ten per level per school were selected. As a result forty students of different ages, sex and level of education were selected.

Table 3 Causes of bullying according to students (N= 40)

	SA		A		SD		D			NS			Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Bullying is a problem in boarding schools	9	22	13	33	8	20	0	0	10	25	40	100		
The most bullied students are in form 1 and 2	19	48	11	27	2	5	2	5	6	15	40	100		
Poor upbringing is a major cause of bullying	12	30	14	35	03	08	01	2	10	25	40	100		
Bullying is inherited	6	15	9	22	7	18	5	12	13	33	40	100		
Films and movies influence bullying	11	28	14	35	05	12	04	10	06	15	40	100		
Bullies are attention seekers	16	40	18	45	2	05	01	02	03	08	40	100		
Lack of strict school rules cause bullying	25	62	14	35	01	03	0	0	0	0				
Counselling is used as intervention strategy to bullying	15	37	11	27	4	10	3	08	7	18	40	100		

Results of the study showed that 22% of respondents strongly agreed that bullying was a problem, 33% agreed, 20% strongly disagreed, none disagreed and 25% of the respondents were not sure if it was a problem in their school. Therefore a

The research used questionnaires as research instruments. Questionnaires were used because they are anonymous and do not require respondents to sit face to face with interviewer. This makes respondents to be more frank when responding to sensitive issues like bullying. Closed questions in the questionnaires provided data which could be easily quantified and analysed. Open –ended questions were there for realizing clarity on some ambiguous issues.

III. .RESULTS

Table 1 Gender of student respondents (N=40)

Gender	No of respondents	%
Male	18	45
Female	22	55
Total	40	100

On the gender of respondents, 45% were male and 55% were female.

Table 2 Level of education of student respondents (N=40)

Level	No of respondents	%
Form 1 and 2	16	40
Form 3 and 4	15	38
Form 5 and 6	9	22
Total	40	100

On the level of education 40% of respondents were in Form and 2, 38% were in Form 3 and 4 and 22% were in Form 5 and 6.

majority of the respondents (55%) have the belief that bullying is a problem in boarding schools.

The study found out that Form 1 and 2 students were the most bullied. 48% of respondents strongly agreed that Form 1

and 2 were the most bullied, 27% agreed, 5% strongly disagreed, 5% disagreed and 15% of respondents were not sure if the Form 1 and 2 students were the most bullied.

Thirty- percent (30%) of respondents strongly agreed that poor upbringing was a major cause of bullying, 35% agreed, 8% strongly disagreed, 2% disagreed and 25% were not sure if poor upbringing was a major cause of bullying.

On the issue of bullying being inherited from parents, 15% of respondents strongly agreed that bullying was inherited from parents, 22% agreed, 18% strongly disagreed, 12% disagreed and 33% were not sure bullying was inherited from parents.

On issue of films and movies influencing bullying 28% of respondents strongly agreed that films and movies influenced bullying, 35% agreed, 12% strongly disagreed, 10% disagreed and 15% were not sure.

On whether attention seeking was a reason for bullying 40% of respondents strongly agreed that bullies were attention seekers, 45% agreed, 5% strongly disagreed, 2% disagreed and 8% were not sure.

On lack of strict school rules as a cause of bullying the study found that 62% of respondents strongly agreed that lack of strict rules caused bullying, 35% agreed, 2% strongly disagreed and no respondents disagreed or were not sure if lack of strict rules caused bullying. On the issue of counseling being used as intervention strategy to bullying in schools, 37% of respondents strongly agreed that counseling was being used to deal with bullying 27% agreed, 10% strongly disagreed, 8% disagreed and 18% were not sure if counselling was being used to deal with bullying issues.

Table 4 Causes of bullying according to members of the Schools Disciplinary Committee Members (N=12)

	SA		A	SD		D	NS				Total	
	N	%		N	%		N	%	N	%	N	%
Bullying is a problem in boarding schools	2	17	6	50	01	8	2	17	01	8	12	100
The most bullied students are in form 1 and 2	3	25	8	67	0	0	1	8	0	0	12	100
Poor upbringing is a major cause of bullying	2	17	5	42	3	33	1	8	1	8	12	100
Bullying is inherited	1	8	1	8	1	8	2	18	7	58	12	100
Films and movies influence bullying	5	42	3	25	0	0	3	25	1	8	12	100
Bullies are attention seekers	5	42	5	42	1	8	1	8	0	0	12	100
Lack of strict school rules cause bullying	9	76	1	8	0	0	1	8	1	8	12	100
Counselling is used as intervention strategy to bullying	4	32	6	50	0	0	0	0	2	16	12	100

On bullying being a problem in schools 17% of respondents strongly agreed, that bullying was a problem in schools 50% agreed, 8% strongly disagreed, 17% disagreed and 8% were not sure. Therefore the findings point to the conclusion that bullying is a serious problem affecting weaker and junior students.

On the issue of Form 1 and 2 being the most bullied 25% strongly agreed that Form 1 and 2 were the most bullied strongly disagreed, 8% disagreed and no one was not sure.

On the issue of poor upbringing being a major cause of bullying seventeen percent (17%) of respondents, strongly agreed

Table 4.7 Gender of Respondents in Schools Disciplinary Committees (N=12)

Gender	No of respondents	%
Male	6	50
Female	6	50
Total	12	100

On the gender of respondents, 50% were male and 50% were female.

Table 4.9 Period saved as a member of disciplinary committee (N=12)

Time	No of respondents	%
Less than 5 years	2	16
5-10 years	7	60
11-15 years	1	8
16-20 years	1	8
More than 20 years	1	8
Total	12	100

On the period spent as a member of the disciplinary committee 16% of respondents had been members for less than 5 years, 60% for 5 to 10 years, 8% for 11 to 15 years, 8% for 16-20 years and 8% for more than 20 years.

that poor upbringing is a major cause of bullying, 42% agreed, 33% strongly disagreed, 8% disagreed and 8% were not sure.

On issue of films and movies influencing bullying, 42% of respondents strongly agreed that media influenced bullying, 25% agreed, 0% strongly disagreed, 25% disagreed and 8% were not sure. On issue of lack of strict rules on bullying being cause of bullying, 76% strongly agreed, that 8% agreed, on bullying caused bullying, 0% strongly disagreed, 8% disagreed and 8% were not sure.

On issue of bullies being attention seekers 42% of respondents agreed that bullies were attention seekers, 42%

agreed, 8% strongly disagreed, 8% disagreed and 0% were not sure. On the issue of counseling being used as intervention strategy to bullying in schools 32% of respondents strongly agreed that counseling was used as an intervention strategy to bullying, 50% agreed, no respondents strongly disagreed nor disagreed and 16% were not sure.

IV. DISCUSSION

Lack of strict school rules on bullying.

The study found out that lack of strict school rules on bullying is a major cause of bullying in schools. 84% of members of the disciplinary committees and 97% of school children strongly agreed and agreed that lack of school rules contributed to the existence of bullying at the boarding schools. When potential bullies discover that there are no strict rules against bullying they tend to engage in bullying and others also engage in bullying when they observe that bullies can get away with bullying. If those who bully others are reprimanded for unbecoming behavior and all other pupils observe the perpetrators being punished then it is likely that the bullying cases will not be repeated. The findings are in agreement with Walter (2010) who asserted that schools run by government have lax standards that lead to the occurrence of bullying and other misbehaviours and yet on the other hand church schools are known for high academic, and moral standards have a well as a disciplined student body. This would explain why bullying is more in government than mission schools.

Bullies are attention seekers

The research findings from the study also show that bullies engage in bullying behaviours as a way of seeking attention from adults in the school or fellow students. 40% of the students strongly agreed and 45% agreed that bullying was done as a way of attention seeking. Among members of the disciplinary committee 42% strongly agreed and the same percentage agreed that bullying was done for purposes of seeking attention. This could be due to the bully's personality inadequacies or lack of recognition through academic excellence. By engaging in bullying behaviours the bully gets attention from peers and is talked about by other pupils. Thus to gain attention the perpetrators of bullying bully other students to get into the limelight and be viewed as heroes. These findings agree with a writer at www.bullyingstatistics.org who indicated that if social recognition can be attained for negative behaviours than positive ones, bullying can occur for purposes of seeking attention.

Poor upbringing as a cause of bullying

The study also found out that 30% of the students strongly agreed and 35% of the students agreed that poor upbringing can be a cause of bullying in mission and government boarding schools. Among members of the disciplinary committee 17% strongly agreed and 42% agreed that poor upbringing could be a cause of bullying in mission and boarding schools. The poor upbringing results from broken families where children are raised by a single parent, be it the father or mother or raised by older siblings in case of death of parents. Where the family is not quite intact, moral guidance may be inadequate which will then be manifested by bullying behaviours when the child gets to

boarding school. This is also supported by Rigby (2008) in his findings which showed that bullying can be caused by social factors such as dysfunctional families where there are family or parental problems. Children who have positive relationships with their parents or family are less likely to bully others

Bullies are influenced by films and movies that they watch

The study also found out that bullying behaviours can be caused by films and movies that they bullies watch. The study results showed that 28% of the students strongly agreed while 35% agreed that films and movies influenced bullying behaviour of pupils. Among members of the disciplinary committee the results showed that 42% strongly agreed while 25% agreed the films and movies influenced the bullying behaviour of pupils. This is because the bullies would learn the bullying behaviours from the movies and films go to boarding school where they then practice what they watched in the films and movies. The findings are in agreement with Rigby (2010) who argued that physical violence in media may contribute to bullying, though this may be difficult to generalize as some can watch the films and movies but do not bully but the children will nevertheless bully other children.

Bullying as being inherited from parents

The study also found out that both disciplinary committee members and students were not sure if bullying was inherited from parents. The study found out that only 15% of the children strongly agreed and 9% agreed and 33% were not sure whether bullying was a result of inheritance. Among members of the disciplinary committee only 8% strongly agreed that bullying was inherited while also 8% agreed and 58% were not sure. The findings, however do not agree with Hallam and Reeds (2005) who argued that bullying may be genetically inherited. A trait that is genetically inherited is passed on from parents to children. All characteristics that are shown by a person are determined and passed on from generation to generation through the transmission of genetic information. This shows the members of the disciplinary committee and school children did not consider bullying to be genetically transmitted from generation but to be a function of some other factors.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that bullying was a problem in boarding schools both mission and government schools. The students and members of disciplinary committees revealed that junior students in Form 1 and 2 were the most bullied students. The perpetrators of bullying were identified as students in Form 3 and 4.

Students and disciplinary committee members revealed that lack of strict rules on bullying was the major cause of bullying in boarding schools. The findings also indicated that poor upbringing of bullies, films and movies that bullies watch and attention seeking were also causes of bullying. In addition to these causes the members of the disciplinary committees revealed that the poor socio-economic status of students can also be a cause of bullying. However the students and members of the disciplinary committees were not sure of genetics as a cause of bullying.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings the study makes the following recommendations:

- All schools need to have clearly laid down rules against bullying which should be signed by parents and students.
- Schools should seriously enforce rules that deter the slightest behavior that is related to bullying.
- All children enrolling at boarding school should be inducted on how to report cases of bullying.
- Conscientisation lessons on the ills of bullying need to be held regularly with attendance being compulsory for all pupils.
- Children should be shown films that depict individuals who help as heroes instead of showing bullying behaviours in a positive light.
- Parents need to be urged to create an environment that does not tolerate the existence of bullying behavior.
- Children should be made aware of positive behaviours that they can use to be recognized by society.

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AUTHORS

First Author – Kudenga Mugove. Senior Lecturer. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Applied Social Science, Zimbabwe Open University.