



Analyzing the Causes and Risk Factors Contributing to Bullying Among School Children

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Abstract. This study investigates the prevalence, causes, and risk factors of bullying among children in selected primary schools in Chieng District, Luapula Province, Zambia. Bullying manifests in various forms—physical, verbal, and emotional—and occurs both on school grounds and in surrounding environments. Despite its damaging effects, the subtlety of some bullying behaviors may hinder recognition by educators and staff. Utilizing a documentary analysis approach, the study examines existing literature and media on the subject. Findings reveal that bullying dynamics often involve groups, with certain individuals exploiting or isolating victims, while bystanders may inadvertently contribute to the problem due to fear of victimization. The repercussions extend beyond the immediate victim, impacting family members and peers who may experience guilt, anxiety, and stress. Based on these insights, the study presents recommendations to effectively combat bullying and enhance the academic and emotional well-being of students.

Index Terms- Bullying, Ringleaders, Followers, Reinforcers, Bystanders

I. Introduction

1. Introduction to Bullying and Overview

Bullying has emerged as a significant social issue in schools since the 1990s, affecting one in three individuals through various forms of harassment such as physical, verbal, and social bullying. Research indicates that bullying leads not only to immediate distress for victims but also long-term negative consequences, including diminished academic performance and decreased classroom engagement. A supportive school environment, bolstered by positive teacher-student relationships, can enhance student engagement and academic success, while unhealthy environments can harm educational outcomes.

2. Educational Structure and Bullying in Zambia

The Zambian educational system comprises three stages: primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Despite an evenly distributed school system, significant gender disparities exist in enrollment, particularly affecting girls due to various socio-economic barriers. Linguistic diversity in schools has been associated with increased social bullying, particularly in bilingual settings.

3. Public and Private Schools

Differences in class sizes between public and private schools significantly influence bullying dynamics, with larger classes in public schools correlated with higher bullying rates. Class behavior also varies, with private schools generally enrolling more academically motivated students, while public schools may



accommodate a broader range of behavioral issues. These dynamics contribute to a cultural cycle of bullying, wherein victims may become perpetrators.

4. Purpose of Research

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the effects of bullying on students' academic performance in both public and private schools in Zambia. The study examines the power dynamics of bullying and its impact on learning outcomes, aiming to illuminate the broader implications of bullying in educational contexts.

5. Research Questions

- What is the impact of bullying on academic performance?
- What types of bullying are prevalent in Zambian schools?
- What are the experiences of students regarding bullying in educational settings?

II. Literature Review

1. Introduction to Bullying

Bullying has evolved into a significant public health concern, particularly in educational settings, where children and adolescents frequently experience it through various forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying. The consequences of bullying are detrimental, leading to immediate and long-term physical and psychological issues for both victims and perpetrators.

2. Definition of Bullying

Bullying is defined as intentional aggressive behavior carried out over time by individuals or groups against those unable to defend themselves, characterized by a power imbalance. It encompasses repeated acts of physical aggression, verbal attacks, and social exclusion. The global prevalence of bullying is alarming, with studies indicating that 90% of students encounter bullying, often leading to declines in academic performance.

3. Types of Bullying

Bullying manifests in five main forms: physical, verbal, social, reactive, and cyberbullying. Each type has unique contexts and motivations, where physical bullying is easily identifiable, while verbal and social bullying can cause deep emotional harm. Cyberbullying, conducted through digital channels, adds another layer of complexity, demonstrating the evolving nature of bullying.

4. Incidence and Prevalence

Bullying persists across various demographics and settings, with underreporting by adults further complicating the issue. Victimized students often experience heightened levels of depression, correlating with academic disengagement and poor performance. Traditional bullying patterns reveal a cyclical dynamic where victims may eventually become perpetrators.

5. Bullying and Academic Achievement

Research emphasizes the negative correlation between bullying incidents and academic performance. Victims often experience fear, disengagement, and low self-



esteem, leading to poorer academic outcomes. Furthermore, exposure to violent environments, either in schools or neighborhoods, detracts from students' concentration and engagement, thereby worsening educational performance.

6. Bullying and Mental Health

The interplay between bullying and mental health is significant, with victims exhibiting signs of distress, anxiety, and depression. Risk factors for victimization often stem from individual characteristics and family dynamics, including poor conflict resolution within domestic settings. The mental health repercussions of bullying can be profound and long-lasting, influencing both academic success and social interactions.

7. Conclusion

Bullying represents a complex social issue with wide-ranging effects on mental health and academic achievement. While the dialogue has attempted to address bullying's presence in schools, there remains a need for more in-depth exploration of its impacts and the formulation of effective interventions to foster a safer and more supportive learning environment for all students.

III. Research Methodology

1. Introduction

This chapter details the methodology adopted for the study, focusing on a mixed explanatory design that integrates qualitative data from teacher interviews and quantitative data from student surveys. Conducted in Chiengwe District, Luapula Province, Zambia, the research aims to explore school bullying's nature, students' perceptions of bullying, and its impact on academic performance.

2. Research Design and Approach

A mixed-method research approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to capture a comprehensive understanding of the issue. An explanatory research design with two phases was implemented: first, quantitative data collection through surveys, followed by qualitative data collection via interviews to validate findings.

3. Context and Sampling Procedure

Random sampling was utilized to select 24 high school students aged 15-17 and six teachers from various schools, ensuring a representative sample and reducing bias. Parental consent was obtained for student participation, and ethical considerations, including anonymity and confidentiality, were prioritized throughout the process.

4. Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were gathered through online surveys administered to students, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers. Surveys included standardized questions about bullying experiences, while interviews offered deeper insights into teachers' perceptions and management strategies.



5. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize survey responses, while thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes from teacher interviews, shedding light on the frequency, types, and impacts of bullying.

6. Trustworthiness

To enhance credibility, triangulation, member checking, and external auditing were utilized. Teachers' insights were compared with student survey data to provide a comprehensive perspective on bullying experiences, and participant verification of transcriptions ensured accuracy.

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the District Education Board, with stringent measures taken to safeguard participants' identities and data storage. Informed consent was obtained from participants and parents, and data will be securely destroyed after five years.

IV. Data Analysis and Results

1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the analysis of primary data collected from 24 students and six teachers regarding the effects of bullying on academic performance in Zambian schools. The chapter includes participant response rates, quantitative descriptive results, and qualitative insights from teacher interviews.

2. Response Rate

All 24 student participants completed the surveys, representing a 100% response rate, allowing for comprehensive analysis.

3. Descriptive Analysis

The analysis highlighted the prevalence of bullying, with 83.3% of students reporting witnessing bullying. Physical and verbal bullying were identified as the most common types. Notably, half of the respondents did not report their experiences to authority figures, indicating a lack of trust in reporting systems.

The impact of bullying on academic performance was significant. 79.2% of participants acknowledged that bullying negatively affected their academic outcomes. Approximately 54.2% indicated that bullying primarily impacted performance in subjects shared with perpetrators.

4. Qualitative Analysis on Teachers' Perspectives

Thematic analysis of teacher interviews revealed five key themes: types and frequency of bullying, locations where bullying occurs, its impact on students, reporting practices, and strategies to mitigate bullying. Teachers reported daily occurrences and varied forms of bullying, primarily verbal and physical. They emphasized the serious consequences for students, including decreased academic



performance and psychological distress, though some noted limitations in the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms and school policies.

5. Chapter Summary

Overall, the analysis highlighted bullying as a pervasive issue in Chieng District's secondary schools, negatively impacting students' academic performance and emotional well-being. Both students and teachers reported inadequate responses to bullying incidents, underscoring the need for more effective intervention strategies to create safer learning environments.

V. Conclusion

Bullying among school children is a multifaceted problem influenced by a combination of individual traits, family dynamics, school environment, and broader societal factors. Children who bully often exhibit aggressive behavior shaped by their home life and peer relationships, while victims tend to be those who appear different or vulnerable in some way. The school climate and social norms play a crucial role in either discouraging or enabling bullying behavior. Addressing bullying effectively requires a comprehensive approach that involves parents, educators, and the community working together to foster empathy, promote positive social interactions, and create safe, supportive school environments. Only through understanding and targeting the root causes and risk factors can lasting change be achieved to protect all children from the harmful effects of bullying.

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