

Managing Bullying Among Senior Phase Learners in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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Abstract

Bullying is a global social phenomenon that negatively affects learners' psychological functioning, social life, and academic performance. This challenge is notable among senior phase learners in Amathole East secondary schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This study responds to the problem by exploring the challenges and possible solutions for managing bullying among senior phase learners. Lensing through Social Cognitive Theory, the qualitative study adopted interpretivism paradigm, a case study design, and recorded in-depth interviews were used to collect data from the participants. 15 participants (1 principal, 4 teachers, as well as 10 learners) were sampled using purposive sampling technique. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the participants. This study revealed that government laws, vindictive learners, anti-social learners and defensive parents, teachers not following up bullying cases, and community crime are the challenges stakeholders face in managing bullying. This study acknowledged that victims must be protected by placing police officers and security, offering moral and sexuality education, building a constant relationship with learners' parents and guardians, and encouraging socialization through the involvement and placement of social workers in a school setting. The study concluded that regardless of internal school stakeholder's endeavors to manage bullying, it remains impossible for bullying and its ramifications to be addressed by an individual stakeholder.

Keywords: Bullying, management of bullying, school stakeholders, senior phase learners.

Introduction

Bullying is a global phenomenon, and its notoriousness is gradually worsening with the clock tick even though other schools still perceive bullying as part of learner's growth. Both public and private schools report episodes of bullying among senior-phase learners. Galabo (2019) noted that learners are victims of all forms of abuse, discrimination, and ill-treatment in the school setting. According to Isdale et al. (2017), the occurrence of this global phenomenon has become increasingly evident in South African schools. It has come to acknowledgement through media reports and viral social media video clips of learners humiliating other learners in a school setting (Ncontsa & Sumba, 2013). The inclination of this problem has brought public concern about the lack of safety in schools (Juan et al., 2018).

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Bullying is hazardous behavior that has long been practiced mostly by adolescents in senior-phase schools. Bullying existed prior 19th century, although it was not labelled as bullying but interpersonal violence (D’cruze, 2000). In the 18th and 19th centuries, bullying was considered as an innocent misbehavior among schoolboys (Koo, 2007). Zincke and Valenzuela (2022) affirm that in the last couple of decades, bullying has become a relevant social problem in Chile, while Faris, Felmlee and McMillan (2020) state that in Europe, it began in the early 1970s in part because of Olweus as well as the trio of victim suicides in Norway in 1983. In Japan, bullying in schools captured public attention in the mid-1980s since numerous children committed suicide because of bullying (Crystal, 1994). Due to bullying being a global phenomenon, many countries have responded to it by adopting anti-bullying laws; for example, the Japanese government announced the introduction of the Anti-Bullying Act, enacted on 28 September 2013 (Sugimori, 2015). In United States, many types of bullying behavior are covered under existing federal-level harassment and discrimination laws, and schools can be found legally responsible for learners’ conduct if bullying is based on gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, ethnicity, or a physical or mental disability (Gale, 2019).

In the study conducted by Brown et al. (2008) in eight African countries, it was mentioned that bullying is a common act, although it is practiced in different forms. Maluleke et al. (2021) noted that in Namibian schools, that non-physical bullying, such as emotional bullying and cyberbullying, poses a major problem. Mauritians relate bullying among learners with blasphemy, and most Mauritian schools are working towards implementing Zero Tolerance Policies (Mungaroo, 2019). The study conducted by Antiri (2016) in Ghana unveiled that bullying existed for decades and was practiced in various forms, including physical, psychological, social, and verbal bullying. Antiri (2014) suggested that Ghana Education Service must develop policies that will address bullying in schools. He further proposed that schools must provide psychological support to the victims.

In the case of South Africa, legislation was passed in this regard. This includes Chapter 6 of Children’s Act 2005, which addressed the violation of learner’s rights, including laws that condemn bullying in schools. South African educationist Mathews (2021) reported that between April 2019 and March 2020, police recorded nine murders and nineteen attempted murders due to bullying in South African schools. This report shows that schools are not doing enough to enforce

these laws. Hence, school stakeholders must work together to come up with methods to manage bullying among senior phase learners.

In the Eastern Cape province where the study is conducted, Hendricks and Tanga (2019) argue that bullying is still prevalent in high schools, affects psychological functioning, and can hinder learner's academic progress. Most of the studies conducted in the Eastern Cape addressed the prevalence of cyberbullying, which according to Mtshazi (2021), has been an alarming aggression in the past years. Hendricks and Tanga (2019) identified learner absenteeism as one of the major challenges teachers frequently face as a consequence of social media humiliation among learners in the Sarah Baartman District, Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Hence, this identified lacuna necessitates the need for the study.

Statement of the problem

South African schools witnessed a startling number of learners being exposed to bullying almost weekly, although some schools perceived it as part of childhood (Mullis et al., 2016). Okumu et al. (2020) link bullying to the number of learner dropouts, suicides, lifelong emotional instability, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, learners not fully cooperating in the classroom, as well as an increased drug intake by learners. de Wet (2005) states that bullying can cause emotional problems such as depression, suicide, tension, fear, and feelings associated with stress. Concussion of these emotional problems can result in impaired concentration in the classroom, which makes them unable to focus and end up having no purpose of going to school anymore.

The presence of bullying in senior senior-phase schools raises sentiments about the lack of safety and security in schools (Juan et al., 2018; Langeveldt, 2023). Hence, the South African Constitution (1996 s.28) protects every child from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation. Lidzhegu (2012) states that the individual approach whereby a teacher works in isolation to resolve bullying behavior and its possible consequences has been marred by short-sightedness, which renders them ineffective. In simple terms, finding workable methods to manage bullying requires all school stakeholders to work in a wholesome manner, not as individuals. To address this problem, this study explores possible management methods that could reduce bullying in schools.

Research objectives

Based on the above problem statement, the following objectives were raised to guide the study:

- To outline challenges faced by stakeholders in managing bullying.
- To identify possible solutions to overcome challenges faced by school stakeholders in managing bullying.

Theoretical framework

This study was examined through the lens of Social Learning Theory, also known as Social Cognitive Theory. Albert Bandura proposed this theory in 1977 (Vinney, 2019). According to Berger (2015), SLT is an extension of behaviorism that emphasizes other people's influence over a person's behavior. Sutton (2015) states that SCT has also been used as the basis for behavior change interventions, again focusing almost exclusively on self-efficacy. SCT is an important heuristic for understanding the complexity of bullying behaviors and the social nature of involvement in bullying (Swearer et al., 2014). Bullying is also a behavior that learners observe in their societies and other learners at school. This study intends to seek methods that can help senior-phase schools achieve behavioral change among senior-phase learners that are involved in the act of bullying in their schools. Moreover, SCT is useful when applied to interventions aimed at personality development, behavior pathology and health promotion.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) is a comprehensive approach to managing bullying in schools, as it helps to identify the source of the problem and develop a more effective plan for intervention. This theory suggests that we should focus not only on the situation's external factors, such as interpersonal relationships and environmental conditions but also on the internal elements that can motivate or inhibit behavior, such as self-efficacy and goal setting. With SCT, school personnel are better able to recognize and create opportunities for positive development among learners who may have been victims of bullying. For example, instilling a sense of self-efficacy – defined by Albert Bandura as “belief in one's capability to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). – will be essential in helping these learners mastering the skills needed to manage and overcome bullying actively. By subtilizing Social Cognitive Theory in our approach, schools will be able to develop tailored interventions which fits

the specific needs of each learner involved, ultimately combating all types of bullying within contents while maximizing learners' wellbeing and welfare.

Methodology

Research Approach, Paradigm, and design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach since its subjectivity permits participants to voice their experiences and perceptions about a given phenomenon (Gibson et al., 2004). It also permits participants to voice out their views regarding the phenomenon in a descriptive manner. This study was lensed within interpretive paradigm because it enabled the researcher to gain further depth understanding by seeking experiences and perceptions about the phenomenon through language, shared meanings, and research instruments (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Furthermore, interpretivism focuses on experiencing participants' lived world to elicit an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Researchers explored methods of managing bullying among senior phase learners through utilization of case study design since it is famously used to investigate a real-life phenomenon and allows researchers to explore in-depth, multi-faceted issues in their real-life settings (Crowe et al., 2011). The researchers seek to obtain an in-depth appreciation of the challenges that hamper the management of bullying as well as solutions.

Participants and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to select 15 participants from one secondary school in Amatole East District, comprising 10 learners from grade eight and grade nine, 4 teachers, and 1 principal. The reason for utilization of purposive sampling is stated by Marshal (1996) that it allows the researcher to select the most productive sample to answer the research question. The researchers elicited data through utilization of face-to-face in-depth interviews during school intervals and after school. This instrument enabled the collection of descriptive information in a more relaxed atmosphere since participants may feel comfortable having one-on-one conversations with the interviewer (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In-depth interviews reveal significant insights which help researchers to discover real stories from people who experienced or witnessed them. Collected data was then transcribed into text for analysis purposes.

Data analysis

The thematic analysis technique was used to make sense of the data (Makena & Omodan, 2022). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps thematic analysis were used to analyze and interpret data collected using the transcribed in-depth interviews. These steps include getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, defining themes, and writing the research findings (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researchers followed this multi-step and were able to uncover valuable insights that have far-reaching impacts on the data towards making sense of the collected data. The themes deduced from the data were presented below.

Ethical considerations

The researchers acknowledged and adhered to Walter Sisulu University's ethical considerations, such as participants' rights, confidentiality, anonymity, consent, and permission for participation which is in line with Creswell's (2013) opinion that the researcher is obliged to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants. It is worth noting that participants were pseudonymized in the form of the following codes: Male teacher was coded as LM, female teachers were coded as TF, female learners were coded as LF, male learners were coded as LM, and the principal was coded as P.

Findings And Discussions

To present the findings of this study, the researcher thematically analyzed the data based on two themes: to explore the challenges faced by stakeholders in managing bullying and identify possible solutions to the challenges faced by stakeholders. To respond to these objectives, researchers identified sub-themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants. These are thoroughly elaborated below.

Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Managing Bullying

Findings evince the severity of stakeholders' challenges in their attempt to manage bullying among senior phase learners. These challenges, which they seemingly have no control over, include government laws, teachers not following up reports, anti-social learners and defensive parents, as well as community crime.

Government laws

According to the participants' perspectives, especially teachers, in the centuries of corporal punishment, a school setting used to be a harmonious environment since it was brought to learner's awareness that inhuman behavior was punishable. Teachers are also afraid of punishing bullies because they fear they may lose their jobs since corporal punishment has been abolished. Below are the participants' affirmations:

TF1 *"The fact that the government had to abolish corporal punishment took away our power to enforce policies as teachers. These learners behave ill because they know that they have many rights, and if we jeopardize them, we are surely going to lose our jobs."*

TF3 *"We cannot punish bullies; hence punishment has been abolished."*

According to participants' views, teachers are challenged by laws as they feel disadvantaged because the government entitled learners to the plethora of rights which teachers must be held accountable for jeopardizing. Teachers also pointed out that abolishing corporal punishment resulted in endless chaos in school since it was an effective method of disciplining learners. This analysis is based on TF1's view that learners bully others because they know they will not be corporally punished. Similarly, TF3 also emphasized the inability to punish inhuman behavior since the government abolished corporal punishment.

According to the above analysis, findings clearly show that in the absence of corporal punishment, teachers have been robbed of their power to maintain order in the school setting since they are no longer capable of punishing foul behavior. These findings are tantamount to Shaikhmag and Assan's (2014) study, stating that most of the education students believed that the abolition of corporal punishment had been a mistake leading to poor discipline in schools and it loosens teachers' grip on the learners.

Teachers do not follow up on reports

Out of 10 learners, the data was collected from only one who mentioned that teachers do not take him seriously sometimes.

LM2: *"Teachers do not believe me at times and do not follow up the report."*

According to this assertion, it is clear that teachers perceive some learners as untrustworthy and make no effort to ensure that the case is recorded and followed up. This statement arises from LM2's assertion that teachers sometimes do not believe him.

Based on the researchers' analysis, teachers' refusal to follow up some bullying cases demotivate learners from reporting bullying and erodes learners' trust and confidence in teachers. This finding is tantamount to Yoon and Bauman's (2014) study, which mentioned that learners do not have confidence in their teachers because they perceive them as inefficient at intervening in incidences of bullying.

Vindictive learners

It has also been mentioned that some learners prefer to fight bullies themselves instead of reporting them to their teachers. This extends the extent of school violence because when one party is defeated, both parties' peers join the fight to seek vengeance, and the school end up being a chaotic and unsafe environment. Participants mentioned that:

TF1 *"Some learners do not report bullying, and they fight back to avoid being perceived as cowards. This leads to more fighting because their peers join the fight and disturb the whole school."*

In the below extracts, learners expressed their fear:

LF1: *"I am scared to tell the class teacher because the bullies will beat us after school."*

LM1: *"If I said I will tell my teacher about what you did to another student, he threatened me about beating me after school."*

LF2: *"If I report, bullies beat me after school."*

LF3: *"Bullies call me bad names and promise to beat me after school."*

LF4: *"When we stop them, they end up bullying us almost every day. They ask why we stop them, and they bullying us too."*

LM4 *"When I tried to divide bully from the victim, the bully pushed me, and I fell, so I decided not to involve myself again."*

An assertion by TF1 shows that bullies are hot-blooded and impulsive learners who believe in revenge rather than tranquility as she stated that learners fight back instead of reporting bullying.

Learners identified “threats by bullies” as the challenge they face when trying to intervene in cases of bullying. Five learners stated that bullies promise to “deal” with them after school for reporting their behavior. Bullies frighten bystanders and witnesses to the extent of letting bullies go free without trying to stop or report them. This analysis stems from LM4’s report that he decided not to intervene in bullying instances because he was once pushed by a bully when he tried to divide a bully and a victim.

Based on this analysis, teachers remain unaware of bullying instances in the school setting since learners are not brave enough to report it and intervene in it because they fear bullies. This finding confirms one of the reasons for learners not to report bullies, noted by The Bark Team (2017), which is fear of retaliation by bullies. Moreover, learners’ enthusiasm for being vengeful may result in them fighting and injuring others inside school premises. Black, Weinles and Washington (2010) noted that learners fought back as they thought that was the most effective strategy to end bullying.

Anti-social learners and defensive parents

Some learners avoid talking with others, especially when trying to discover their behavior’s roots. Participants stated that bullies exhibit weird reactions when they try to converse with them. Participants articulated that:

LM3: *“Someone who is bullied by anger can happen that he/she does not want to talk to share feelings or thoughts, so that can be very hard to participate with him or her. Some can be very silly so you may get angry.”*

LM5: *“Bullies do not cooperate when I am trying to talk to them, they just laugh at me and call me names like I am Mr. Serious.”*

TF1: *“Some parents still stand for their children and blame the school for not teaching them morals, although education starts at home.”*

The above extracts divulge that bullies do not consider communicating their personal problems and sharing feelings with other learners, although behavior that emerges from those problems affects other learners. This is according to LM3, who stated that engaging learners with anger issues in a conversation is difficult as some of them are puerile and can make comments and reactions that trigger anger. Similarly, LM5 stated that when trying to talk to bullies, they show no willingness to engage in the conversation but call him names. On the other hand, parents deny that

their children can bully others in a school setting. Some blame teachers for not offering learners moral education. This analysis arises from the statement by TF1, who mentioned that parents stand for their children and blame teachers for their children's immorality.

As emerged from the analysis, bullies lack socialization skills. Hence, they do not understand how their behavior may affect their victims and themselves in the long run. These findings confirm Filipenko et al. (2022) assertion that bullies are characterized by a low level of communication skills and difficulty in building relationships with others, which leads them to encapsulate their feelings and anger that tends to transform into aggression. It has also emerged that some parents condone bullying unknowingly since they assume that their children cannot engage in bullying behavior.

Community crime

Communities at which schools are located are crowded with opportunistic criminals. TF3 brought to attention that:

“We cannot even detain them because we might be putting them at risk of being attacked or raped by community criminals.”

Community criminals pose a stumbling block in school stakeholders' attempts to manage bullying as they make it difficult for teachers to detain learners since they fear what criminals may do to learners during the period of detention. This analysis is based on TF3's assertion that teachers cannot detain learners since community criminals will attack them when they are alone at school. Based on the above analysis, community criminals limit teachers' methods of disciplining learners since they will take advantage of learners left in detention and perform criminal acts on them. Fear of exposing learners to unsafe situations divulges teachers' caring nature as Mayisela (2021) found that teachers are responsible for learners' safety within the school environment. Consequences of this may not be felt by learners and their parents but by teachers since they will be held accountable for whatever may happen to learners left in detention.

Solutions to the Challenges

This theme presents participants' recommendations on how to overcome the challenges they face when attempting to manage bullying among senior phase learners. Researchers identified several

subthemes, such as protection of victims, law adjustment, socialization, creating awareness, as well as parental involvement.

Protection of victims

Participants placed their concern on the sanity, safety, and well-being of the victims. They recommended numerous ways in which victims can be protected and can protect themselves from the perpetrators. Below are the statements of the participants regarding the protection of victims:

TF3: *"...a learner with more than one bullying cases must be suspended from school for at least a week for the sake of other's sanity and to make an example so others will be afraid to engage in bullying."*

LF1: *"The bullies must be suspended for some time and come back when they are ready to learn."*

LM2: *"Teachers must report to the police because some of the bullies carry knives and sharp scissors at school, and we are afraid of them. Maybe the police will scare them."*

TF3: *"To maintain a safe environment for all learners and teachers, at least one police officer must be placed in a school. Learners will be afraid to even use intoxicating substances and bring weapons inside the school."*

LM4: *"There must be security guards or police at school so that learners will be scared to bully others at school."*

LF3: *"Schools must have securities because some learners don't go to school because they are scared of being bullied and start to be mentally disturbed."*

TM: *"School patrolling will also help us to stop bullying because the patrollers will recognize it and stop it immediately."*

LF5: *"Teachers must patrol during break time so that they will see bullying for themselves."*

LF3: *"...bully must go to jail and leave the school...the victim must open protection order... Bullies must be arrested."*

Participants suggested suspending bullies from school as SASA Act of (1996) stipulates that students guilty of serious delinquency must be suspended or expelled. This is according to the suggestions made by TF3 that learners with numerous bullying cases must be suspended so other learners will not be motivated to engage in bullying acts. This suggestion was supported by LF1,

who similarly suggested that learners must be suspended. To preserve safe teaching and learning environment, several participants proposed the involvement of law enforcement since other learners turned out to be in possession of lethal weapons such as knives and sharp scissors as well as intoxicating substances inside school walls. LM2 suggested that bullying cases must be escalated to the police since other learners carry knives and scissors at school.

Some participants recommended the placement of police officers and security guards so to maintain order in the school setting. They believe that learners will fear engaging in inhuman behaviors in their presence. TF3 suggested that at least one police officer must be placed in a school so learners will refrain from bringing drugs and weapons to school. In order for bullying to be manipulated and for bullies to protect themselves, Participants also brought to attention that patrolling, especially during break time, will aid bullying because it will be easily recognized and stopped. This is based on the suggestion made by TM that in the presence of patrollers, bullying will not go further since they will stop it immediately. Furthermore, patrollers will witness bullying themselves so that they will not underestimate the extent of bullying among learners, as LF5 said teachers must patrol during break times to witness bullying by themselves. Learners suggested that for the sake of their safety, bullies must be charged for their actions; hence the Child Justice Act 75 acknowledges the criminal element in bullying and calls for a separate criminal justice system for learners according to their age. This analysis is according to LF3, who suggested that bullies must be imprisoned or given a restraining order.

According to researchers' analysis, findings unfolded that to combat bullying among senior phase learners, schools have to priorities learner's safety and security by placing police officers and security guards and ordering patrol so that learners will not take into school weapons and drugs, which are believed to foster learners to engage in unacceptable behavior. These findings are compatible with the views of Steyn and Singh (2017), who suggested that external stakeholders such as the police can be consulted to help bullies understand the severity of their actions and the need for them to undergo correctional supervision. Moreover, Findings also suggested that learners must be given a protection order, which is also legalized by the Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011, that victims of bullying can apply for a protection order against a child bully (Lass and Boezaart, 2014).

Socialization

Socialization essentially represents the whole process of learning throughout the life course and is a central influence on behavior, beliefs, and actions. Participants believe that if bullies can engage in social life and express their feelings, their fury and hunger to extend it to innocent victims can be bettered. Participants suggested that:

LM5: *“Bullies must make friends so they will have someone to talk to.”*

LM3: *“You can ask someone who has anger to get forgiveness and peace.”*

TF2: *“Social workers must be involved in the instances of bullying and even employed for schools. They need to speak with learners about ways of life; some may help provide for those from disadvantaged backgrounds to avoid stealing from others.”*

TM: *“Social workers can help learners by encouraging them to talk about issues that do not make them happy at school and at home because we do not have enough time to talk to them, most of the time, we focus on academics.”*

Data elicited from participants indicated that if bullies can make friends to vent on, they will gradually find peace and learn to forgive instead of seeking justice. LM5 proposed that bullies must make friends to have people to talk to should they need to. Reversely, LM3 fostered others to speak to bullies about the goodness of adjusting to a forgiving nature and tranquility. He stated that bullies could be talked down to forgive others and be at peace with them instead of holding onto grudges that will cause them to reposit anger into their hearts. Teachers hope that by involving social workers in the process of managing bullying will result in a remarkable transformation in bullies' lifestyles and behavior. TF2 suggested that social workers must be employed for schools so learners will have access to help associated with ways of living peacefully with other learners as well as providing for the needy to avoid the trend of taking and stealing from others. TM also mentioned that social workers could encourage learners to open up about issues that make them unhappy at school and at home since they only focus on academics.

Based on the above analysis, findings unveiled that having a consistent social life can solve as many problems as possible, especially emotionally and psychologically related problems as Umberson and Montez (2010) state that “social ties foster psychological well-being and better health habits throughout the life course”. Having trusted friends to talk to or having venting sessions with social workers will remedy bully's inherited behavior and anger. Moreover, social

workers can support those who suffer from social status problems. These findings resonate with Masilo's (2018) suggestion that social workers must be operational in the school setting, render services to both the bully and the bullied, and work towards preventing and addressing bullying via educational and empowerment services.

Parental involvement

According to the perceptions of participants, building a consistent relationship with learners' parents or guardians will result in mutual trust between the school and parents and will enable them to explore possible ways to combat bullying among learners. Some participants recommended that the school principal must request parents' audience to both have a word with the learner who bully others into identifying reasons for bullying and discussing ways to approach them. In their statements, they said:

LF2: *"School principals must call bully's parents to talk with their kids..."*

LF4: *"The principal will have to call the parents to come with their children and talk with them to stop bullying other childrens."*

TF1: *"...a stable relationship and the unity between teachers and parents can aid bullying amongst learners because when they trust each other, it will be easy for them to discuss matters concerning learner behavior."*

TF2: *"Parents need to be taught about bullying so that they will understand it and its severity. They need to be encouraged to talk their children out of it and stop taking it for granted."*

In the above extracts, participants hope that bullying among learners can be remedied if schools can involve parents. They believe that bullying will be combated if the principal talks to parents and orders them to talk to their children out of bullying. This is according to the suggestions made by LF2 and LF4 that principals must normalize calling bully's parents and ask them to talk to their children to stop bullying others. TF1 raised the issue of trust and unity between teachers and parents. She stated that if they are united, they can easily converse and conclude methods that will right learners' behavior. Parental education about bullying is also required so they will be aware of what is considered bullying. This statement originates from TF2, who stated that parents need to be enlightened about bullying so that they will understand the severity of its effects.

Based on the above analysis, this study found that parental involvement is one of the vital methods a school can utilize in the process of managing bullying among learners. These findings confirm the Kolbert, Schultz and Crothers (2014) study, stating that “parental involvement that addresses child bullying behaviors is seen as important in helping to prevent bullying behavior in school systems”. It has also emerged that parents need to engage in hearty communication with their children to advise them to stop victimizing others in a school setting. These findings are compatible with those of Lester et al. (2017), unveiling that parent intervention can have a positive impact on parent-child communication about bullying.

Offering sexuality education

According to Zambon (2022), sexuality or sexual orientation has to do with whom a person is, or is not, attracted to either sexually or romantically. Nowadays, homosexuality has become so popular, especially among adolescents. That’s the reason TM suggested that learners must be gradually taught about sexuality, not to encourage them to adopt a certain kind of sexuality but to accept and love those who belong to those sexualities. He stated that:

“As much as learners are aware of sexuality complications which they learn about on televisions and social media, it is wise to teach them and encourage them to accept the LGBTI group because calling them by names only drains them emotionally.”

This statement proposed that teachers must include sex education in their lessons and encourage learners to treat those who are in the LGBTI group as they treat all other learners and to avoid unnecessary distressing labelling. This analysis surfaces from the proposal by TM stating that sex education must be offered so that learners will not call the LGBTI group names since it affects their emotional state.

According to the above analysis, offering sexuality education assists learners to better understand, accept, and love learners whose sexuality does not conform to the traditional gender norms and minimizing unnecessary misjudgments of LGBTI learners. This finding supports Mijatovic (2020), who stated that sexuality education must include helping children to understand sexual orientation, gender identity, misconceptions, and stereotypes about LGBTI. These findings also relate to the emphasis made by Bloom et al. (2022) that exposure to sex education shows promise in preventing sexual violence and sexual harassment perpetration and victimisation, and it supports survivors.

Offering moral education

Moral education is defined as helping children and young individuals attain a set of beliefs and values regarding what is right and wrong. This set of beliefs guides their intentions, attitudes and behaviors towards others and their environment. Attainment of moral education may instill appropriate behaviors in learners' mindsets. Moral education includes teaching learners not to respect only elders but everyone. Participants argued that learners must be taught to respect others and those who follow suit must be rewarded, which talks to self-efficacy whereby a learner engages in acceptable behavior because she/he knows that good behavior is rewarded.

TF2: *"Maybe I can say morals because morals deal with the right and the wrong but if do the wrong, the right must be accompanied with good something and the wrong also must be accompanied with punishment so that you know when you have done wrong that it is not acceptable."*

LM4: *"Principal must call parents and tell them to teach their children respect."*

LM3: *"You can talk to someone who is disrespectful to respect others."*

Participants believe that teaching learners morals appears to be one of the significant methods to free schools from frequently facing bullying. When exposing learners to moral education, both acceptable and unacceptable behaviors must be demonstrated so that learners will be able to distinguish between right and wrong TF2 stated that morals deal with the right, which must be rewarded and the wrong, which must be punished. LM4 suggested that principals must encourage parents to familiarize their children with respect. On a similar vein, LM3 also suggested that disrespectful learners must be encouraged to respect others.

Based on this analysis, these findings revealed that when learners are taught and encouraged to adopt acceptable morals, they will learn to respect others and refrain from bullying behaviors as Dardiri (2020) acknowledges the importance of moral education and states that the earlier learners are taught about morals, the easier they become moral people and refrain from bullying behaviors.

Creating awareness

P suggested that teachers must ensure that learners are aware of bullying by including it in the syllabus. P affirmed that:

"Awareness must be there, case studies maybe class teachers must also take some topics maybe and then read them in classes and then engage the class on that particular

topic so that may also assist in trying to maintain or minimize the bullying part in the school...the best way ever is to engage cause you know in our syllabus the LO subject talks about bullying. So teacher that is teaching this LO must try to pick up this bullying and deal more with it in the classroom as it appears in the Lo subject so they must try to talk about it. Also sometimes engage learners with life skills we must engage them, and you know, once learners are engaged, trying to prove some of them.”

Bullying can be manipulated by creating awareness. Teachers can address bullying by emphasizing chapters that talk about it in Life orientation and giving learners assessments such as case studies that will be more practical on ways to address bullying. This analysis arises from the suggestion made by P that Life orientation teachers must ensure that they address bullying in classrooms by engaging learners through case studies.

According to researchers’ analysis, teacher’s intervention in managing bullying is significant; hence teachers interact with learners more often. Emphasizing on bullying topics in the curriculum is one of the methods to manage bullying because teachers will enlighten learners about behaviors that are considered as bullying, its causes, its effects, and ways in which bullying can be prevented. These findings are compatible with the clarification of Luca et al. (2019) that teachers can intervene in bullying actions by including bullying in the curriculum and discussing a positive class climate with the learners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study unfolded that regardless of internal school stakeholders’ endeavors to manage bullying, it remains impossible for bullying and its ramifications to be addressed by an individual stakeholder. However, it requires robust collaboration with the government and external stakeholders such as social workers and law enforcement. Apart from that, this study recommended that it is imperative for schools to protect learners. This can be done by placing security guards at school and searching for each learner to ensure no one enters school premises with drugs and weapons. The safety of learners is also validated by Section 8 of the South African constitution, as it highlights that a learner must be protected from any kind of maltreatment and degradation.

For schools to foster socialization, social workers must be placed at school to offer venting sessions since learners suffer from psychological problems that arise from their home experiences and

probably have no one to talk to. School needs to engage with parents and build a strong relationship to discuss matters concerning their children's behavior and to be informed about the effects of bullying that their children may face should they refuse to partner with the school. Parents and teachers must thoroughly teach learners morals to help them in maturing knowing acceptable and unacceptable conduct since it has emerged that absence of respect can drive learners to victimize others. Learners must be taken through sexuality education for in-depth comprehension so that they will accept and love other learners whose sexual orientation do not conform to their gender norms. Furthermore, managing bullying requires schools to talk about bullying more often, whether by engaging learners in practical activities that aim to diminish bullying or focusing more on bullying topics that appear in their Life Orientation Curriculum.

Implication for future research

This study divulged that one of the methods that can help school stakeholders to manage bullying among senior phase learners is offering sexuality education that will address gender diversity. Based on this finding, teacher's fist-tightness in offering sexuality education in their respective schools escalates bullying towards learners whose gender is not in line with their birth sex. Therefore, future research can focus on teachers' limitations in offering sexuality education in schools and solutions for the limitations to contain the prejudice and bias-based bullying towards homosexual learners.

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