Original Paper

The Ramifications of Bullying in Lesotho Schools

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Abstract

This paper is based on a bigger study undertaken in 2017. It focuses on the ramifications of bullying in Lesotho schools. A qualitative research design was adopted to probe for in-depth information about consequences of bullying in schools. The methodology employed was the case study approach in two high schools in the Roma Valley. The population of the study was all teachers and students in the two high schools in Roma valley, while the sample comprised six teachers and eight students, who were purposively selected.

The study found out that bullying has negative consequences to all parties; perpetrators, victims and bystanders. The finding of the study revealed that bullying contributes to depression and low self-esteem, which can lead to poor school performance and suicidal tendencies amongst the victims and bystanders. The study therefore recommends that Lesotho government should come up with a policy to eliminate bullying in schools and establish programmes directed at teaching learners attitudes, knowledge and skills which they can use to circumvent bullying.

Keywords

Ramifications, Bullying, Schools, Lesotho, Bully, Victim, Bystander

1. Introduction

Bullying has been identified by many scholars as a worldwide problem (Tattum, 1993; Meyer, 2008) as a result learner safety in schools has become a current academic concern. United Nation Charter (2016) asserts that children have a right to safe and secure environment; free of fear, harm and humiliation. Bullying, therefore, violates children's rights to human dignity, privacy, freedom and security. In this regard, Coloroso (2002) has observed that bullying deprives children of their rightful entitlement to go to school in a safe, just, and caring environment as mandated by the United Nations Charter. Bullying prevents students to learn in a harmonious way or sometimes it can lead learners, particularly those who bully, to engage in antisocial or delinquent behaviour such as vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and

drug as a way of proofing their roughness or toughness (Coloroso, 2007). Therefore, absence of bullying in schools can promote a learner friendly and safe school. For example, some studies carried out in Africa show that bullying and other forms of violence are real issues of concern in schools. Liang (2007) found that; out that of 5074 Grade 8 and 11 students surveyed in the educational system in South Africa, 19.3 percent were victims of bullying, while Makafane and Khalanyane (2018) found out that there are several forms of bullying in Lesotho schools some of which are physical, verbal and cyber related.

This is testimony that bullying is a worldwide problem in schools; and thus regarded as a form of low level violence that can escalate and become physical and even lethal (Olafsen & Viemero, 2012). Porteus (1999) avers that the existence of bullying in schools is a worldwide phenomenon, and a problem that can create a negative impact/s for the general school atmosphere and for the rights of students to learn in a safe environment and to learn without fear. While Liang (2007) observed that some students end up hating school as they do not want to meet the bullies. On the one hand, Jimerson, Swearer and Epspelage (2013) describe bullying as a type of violence that has serious social and health consequences for victims who are repeatedly bullied. Thus, these effects can have lifelong negative consequences to the victim, perpetrator and to the bystander. Some scholars, such as Garrett (2003), view bullying as comparable to sexual harassment, and as a matter of social justice, and by this nature demanding special attention. The consequences of bullying are far reaching beyond the school environment. This is supported by Coloroso (2007) who points out that in adulthood, bullying is an affront to democracy and to democratic institutions.

Usually, bullying affects both the bully and victim in a negative way. The victims of bullying experience serious and negative consequences such as developing psychological problems, which might even lead to suicide (Paquette & Underwood, 2012). According to Ladd and Ladd (2001) the emotional effect of being a perpetrator or a victim of bullying may stay with a person for many years and often determine their self-concepts. Victims of bullying typically are very sad learners who suffer from fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem because of bullying, they may try to avoid school or drop out of school, or avoid social interaction with their peers in an effort to escape bullying, and some victims are so distressed that they commit, or attempt to commit suicide. The studies of bullying suggest that there are short and long-term for both the perpetrator and the victims of violence and bullying (Limber & Nation, 1998). There were several instances of bullied boys committing suicide in Norway in the early 1980's. These tragic events mobilised the country to begin a nation-wide anti-bullying programme (Oweus, 1993).

1.1 Research Questions

In order to understand the impact and effects of bullying in schools in Lesotho, the question the study was attempted to answer was; what are the ramifications/consequences of bullying?

1.2 Research Design and Methodology

The research design that was employed for the study was the qualitative approach. It involved studying

things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The general purpose of qualitative research methods is to examine human behaviour as it occurs in its social, cultural and political contexts. A case study approach was used to gain in depth understanding replete with meaning rather than conformation. The case study used in this study used question such as "how' and "what", and it helped to enable the researcher to gain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) assert that case studies involve looking at a case or phenomenon at its real-life context by employing many types of data. The sample of the study consisted of fourteen informants from two high schools in Roma Valley that were purposively sampled. The study encompassed both teachers and students of two schools in Roma valley, Data was analysed thematically and the following themes emerged; school dropout, depression, poor school performance, suicidal tendencies, self-esteem and revenge.

1.3 Results

The results of the study are presented in line with the themes captured above.

1.3.1 School Dropout

Dropout is any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school (Bonneau, 2017). Dropout in schools is a major problem that has called for attention by school stakeholders. Wise (2012, p. 18) holds a view that high school dropout has been a crisis in the whole world and it seems to be continuously increasing. The researcher found out that bullying is playing vital role in school dropout of learners who fear for their lives.

Informants said bullying lead to school dropouts while others said they actually withdraw from school for some days as they didn't find it to be conducive place for learning. Anything that makes a student to withdraw from school set a bad precedence for the coming generation, one of the central finding of this study is that the respondents felt like school was hostile place where people do not take care of others' feelings. The issue of giving excuses for not going to school emerged when the respondent said she had to lie to her mother for not going to school. This is how student one put it:

> *I felt bad and I stopped coming to school for two days and I said to my mum I wasn't feeling good in the intestine (S. 8).*

The fact that a learner can lie about the sickness shows how serious bullying is, schools are supposed to be friendly environment where one can learn without any intimidation or victimisation, but respondents said they were feeling safer outside school especially when they are at home. It is very disturbing because learners spend most of their time at school if they start school around 7.00am am to 4:30pm. It says they spent most of their lives in school environment. Teasing and bullying at high school level is a noteworthy problem that is associated with the most serious negative outcome-failure to graduate (Daniels, 2017). Student one and three also in verbatim:

> *I feel sad and sometimes I feel like I could withdraw from school, It also makes me feel depressed to extent that I look at the world as not safe place for me (S. 1).*

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I feel bored, I feel like I can go to home. In school there is no much bullying but in the boarding there is a lot of it (S. 3).

1.3.2 Depression

Depression is a state of feeling sad, anger and anxiety. According to Lembeck (2010) depression is a psychoneurotic or psychotic disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness, and sometimes suicidal tendencies. Form this definition it's understandable that a person who is depressed can either drop out of school due to withdrawal caused by bullying, commit suicide or perform badly at school.

There are some responses which indicate that informants felt depressed when they were being bullied. Due to stress that the victim undergoes every minute trying to find ways in which she/he can overcome or avoid bullying, they end up being depressed. This is supported by Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela and Rantanen (1999) who have observed an increase of depression and suicidal ideation among victims and bullies among adolescents is Finland. The respondents who were victims of bullying said they did not feel safe and they felt like they did not belong to school, this how student five and student six put it in their words:

It is actually one of the saddest things in life, I feel very sad when someone is bullying me to extend that I wish I can withdraw from school. It also makes me feel depressed to extend that I can commit suicide (S. 5).

I felt sad, I felt isolated, and I felt like I was not a human being like others (S. 6).

The respondents disclosed that they had experienced bullying some years back but they still felt depressed whenever they thought about it. The bullies too acknowledged that whenever they thought about how they used to bully others they became depressed. In contrary to Garret in CNN (2014) when he says bullying causes problems only in the short term, in this study the researcher discovered that even after when people were transitioning into adulthood, they still have some emotional marks as a result of bullying that happened a decade ago.

1.3.3 Poor School Performance

The informants were further asked on how bullying affect students' performance achievement, the teacher's informants said in all cases bullying affect students' performance negatively. Some cited reasons like some students do not feel free and takes most of his or her time thinking of how he can overcome bullying, some said bullied student withdraw from class groups as a result they miss lots of group work, the reason why a victim would spend time outside school was tabled by respondents as time the victim will be dodging away from the bully. When asked how bullying affect student performances this is how teacher three, five and six put it in their own words:

It has got negative impact because student focus more on the enemy time than school work (T. 3).

It affects student performance badly to extend that other students fail and they are expelled from the school (T. 5).

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The student academic life deteriorates and performance also deteriorates (T. 6).

Out of the two schools on which the research was conducted, there is imbalance of results from Examination Council of Lesotho, the other school with high prevalence of bullying has actually poor results than the other school with low prevalence of bullying. The findings therefore predict that bullying might be the reason for such school's performance. Cornell (2011) confirms that schools with high level of reported bullying had lower passing rates by an average of 3% to 6% across the tests, when compared with schools with less reported bullying.

1.3.4 Self-esteem

Bullying has been found to be a source of low self-esteem. Banks (2007) found out that victims of bullying lose self-esteem, feel shame, suffer anxiety and come to dislike school and play truant to avoid victimisation. One respondent said ever since she became a victim of bullying, that is when she became valueless and she could not face people or debate with other students because she felt like a useless member of the community. The freedom that she was supposed to feel at school no longer existed. This is how the student put it;

> *It is wrong thing because it makes others feel sad, it hurt others and some students don't feel free at school, I am also one of them who do not feel free at school, my self-esteem has deteriorated (S. 4).*

Makafane and Khalanyane (2018) posit that children who are bullied are more likely to suffer from disorder such as depression. Learners who have low self-esteem do not have any hope, like the student said. The bullied learners have a positive outlook of themselves, as result they view themselves as worthless or not good enough. Suicidal feeling develop in them due to crushed self-esteem. Students had this to say;

> *Bullying is a bad thing; it makes others to have low self-esteem (S. 8).*
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> *It is bad, I am victim of it (he cried). I was locked in the classroom by one person and he was beating me saying that I said funny things about him on Facebook, I just wrote on Facebook that other students like to eat other people's food at school. Ever since that incident I feel like I have got low self-esteem, sometimes I even hate to log on to my Facebook account (S. 4).*

Unnever, Dewey and Cornell (2014) assert that bully's hurtful behaviour has more to do with the emotion of shame and less to do with their self-esteem. Shame has to do with how one thinks of himself or herself and it results from not living to one's own personal standards. Asked on their perceptions on why some people bully others in the school, some students responded thus;

> *People bully others because they are seeking for attention, they know that if they bully others, teachers will always send them to staff room so that they can stand in from of the assembly and they can be easily recognised by others (S. 5).*
>
> *They bully others because they are angry students who do not have love so they just want recognition because their self-esteem is low (T. 4).*

While a teacher answered;

> *For us here it is because it's one gender so the one who comes first thinks he owns the place, it is*

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sort of a culture and the other thing is low self-esteem because most of them stay in the boarding
school and there is no parental attention (T. 3).

1.3.5 Suicidal Tendencies

The above ramifications of bullying like low self-esteem, depression and poor school performance all come before suicidal ideation. A learner may decide to commit suicide as a result of bullying. This is confirmed by Sourander (2016) who asserts that previous studies in bullying have found a link between bullying and higher risk of mental problems during childhood, such as low self-esteem, poor school performance, depression and increased risk of suicide.

All three kinds of bullying being physical bullying, verbal bullying and cyber bullying have been reported by some informants as a push factor to suicide. This study found out that some of the bullying victims felt that death was better than being bullied. For them bullying already is part of death and its only that it prolong the process of death itself. Respondent's responses show they almost committed suicide as a way of getting away with bullying. This is strengthened by literature review, According to Alexandra and Krans (2015) more than ten thousand students committed suicide in USA as a result of bullying. Student four and five gave testimony to this is by saying:

I feel sad and feel like it would be better if I were dead (S. 4).

It is actually one of the saddest things in life, I feel very sad when someone is bullying me to extend
that I wish I can withdraw from school, It also makes me feel depressed to extend that I can commit
suicide (S. 5).

1.3.6 Revenge

Informants view bullying activities as a way of revenge by the bullies since most schools in Lesotho indirectly allow ill-treatment of newly arriving students (Maama, 2016). Sometimes treatment can be too harsh for one to take it, the same person can reorganise himself or herself and start bullying others when he or she is used to environment. The informants said they bully others because they were once bullied by other. This is how the students said;

It is culture, it has always been done and we do it to other arriving students as a form of revenge
because we were also bullied when we were arriving here (S. 3).

Students bully others at school because they want revenge, It might have happened to them in early
life maybe in their families and now they want to show others what they went through and that they
are now powerful (S. 6).

One teacher also articulated the issue of revenge thus;

I think people bully others in schools especially here because they want revenge, there might have
been a lot which happened to student, either societal rejection, family rejection or friends rejection
so such victims will bully others because they just want to revenge, this problem will even go
outside school where you will see such a victim as violent at community level even after school (T.
5).

student, before we expel or suspend that student we communicate together with student's parents

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the offences and the judgement (T. 6).

2. Conclusions

The findings depict that bystander are aware of negative consequences of bullying even though they still encourage and give a bully more energy and power. These findings also show that bystanders normally get almost same punishment with the perpetrators because they also bite big steak as well.

The findings portray that there are only negative impacts and ramifications of bullying. There are numerous ramifications but there are those which stand up to the worst ones like school dropouts, students do dropout of school because they do not want to face bullying activities, some miss school for days as a result of running away from the bully. It is through these findings that some students even have to lie to their parents and teachers if they missed school. The findings further outlined that bullying in schools also causes depression for the victim, the depression that is caused by bullying can easily lead to poor school performance. Some students have poor grades as a result of bullying because they do not concentrate in class as they take most of their time thinking of their bully and how bystanders are going to laugh at them.

From the findings, it can also be deduced that bullying can take life of someone in two ways, it can either be by suicidal or violence that lead to death of the other student. It is through these findings that one student said he carries away a knife as a form of security, it is clear and forward how dangerous knife is and how many lives it has caused. The second way on how life can be taken by bullying is trough suicide, some students reported how they almost committed suicide after they were bullied, and reason being they were ashamed to face their peers and how their self-worth was emptied.

Additionally, the findings depict that there are several sour ramifications for bullying. Consequences such as revenge is one of the main one by the respondents, they said people do bully because at one stage they have been bullied by the family member, community member, school mate or even at societies. The victim later falls into a bully to revenge or compensate what he or she has been going through. From the finding it is deduced that some students become bullies as a result of compensating his or her low self-esteem, some students do bully others as a way of calling attention so that they can be recognised by either other students or teachers.

3. Recommendations

On the basis of findings of the study it is recommended that: Firstly, Lesotho government should come up with policy to regulate bullying in schools. Article 28(a) of Lesotho constitution screed about violence and opposes it. The constitution is silent about violence in schools, the ministry of education is silent about bullying activities in school, the researcher therefore recommends that there should be a clear school policy which will advocate for victims, which will assist on the counselling of the perpetrators and victims and which will also make bystanders aware that they are subjected to perpetrators if they do not take responsibilities if they see bullying activities.

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Secondly, it can also be recommended that schools establish programmes directed at teaching learners attitudes, knowledge and skills to reduce their involvement in bullying. The ministry of education has already introduced subject that can address this problem and it is called Life Skills but the subject is not taught in all schools and on the taught school, it is not compulsory. It is therefore recommended that subject be compulsory in all schools and should have end of level objectives which include bullying and violence in schools at large. The researcher also recommends that the programme should start as early as in primary so that students have clear understanding on definition of bullying.

Lastly, schools should have their own policy on the issue of punishment for the offenders of bullying so that they can apply almost same punishment to block the students believe that punishment is not consistent and some get lighter punishment because they are affiliated to teachers.

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