

Bullying in Botswana Schools: A Review

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Abstract

Although there is an increase in the prevalence of bullying in school settings in Botswana, research on the problem is very limited. In order to refine our understanding of bullying in school settings, we need to equally explore the extent of bullying in schools located in urban and rural areas, factors that are linked to bullying and students' and the school staff's knowledge and perceptions of bullying. Such an investigation will aid in generation of interventions that holistically address the problem. This paper reviews research on bullying that has been done thus far in Botswana and offers recommendations for interventions and future research.

Key words: bullying, students, prevalence, school settings, Botswana

INTRODUCTION

Background

Bullying is an old widespread phenomenon (Olweus, 1995) which has received a lot of attention from researchers. Research on bullying is and has been mostly conducted among students (Monks et al., 2009) since most bullying occurs in school settings (see Batstche, 1997; Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Moswela, 2005; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt 2001). According to Olweus (1993), "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (p. 9). Further, bullying usually involves an imbalance of power; the bully is normally considered to have more physical or psychological power than the victim (Pereira, Mendonça, Neto, Valente, & Smith, 2004; Rivers & Smith, 1994).

A wide range of behaviours have been reported as bullying (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001) and these behaviours can be direct or indirect (Baldry, 2004; Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Bullying can take many forms such as physical, verbal and relational bullying (Monks & Smith, 2006) and according to Olweus (1994) physical and verbal aggression are classified as direct bullying and the later as indirect form of bullying. Physical bullying includes behaviours such as pushing, hitting and kicking the victim (Wang, Ronald, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009) and has been identified as the most common type of bullying (i.e in Kepenekci & Çinkır, 2006; Moswela, 2005; Olweus, 1993; Shehu, 2009). Verbal bullying on one end involves continuous derogatory name calling or making negative comments about the victim (Stassen Berger, 2007). As for relational bullying, it is characterized by social alienation, social isolation, gossiping and spreading rumours (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1993) and the intentions of the perpetrators of this type of bullying is to dent the victims feelings of acceptance (Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012). Non direct bullying tends to be the most difficult to identify (Elinoff, Chafoules & Sassu, 2004) because perpetrators conceal the way they inflict pain to victims so that it does not appear as though they have intentions to cause harm (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992).

Of note is the non traditional form of bullying that is gaining popularity among students which occurs through the use of electronic devices such as the internet and cell phones (Smith et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2009). Bullying through electronic means is termed cyber bullying (Slonje, & Smith, 2008). The prevalence of this form of bullying is precipitated by communication technology advancements (Li, 2006). Cyber bullying includes sending derogatory messages about a target/victim to other people, resending confidential correspondences to other people who the messages were not intended for and sending threatening correspondence to the victim using the internet or cell phone (Campbell, 2005). According to Yilmaz, (2011), cyber bullying is more common among adolescents in developed countries where internet is easily accessed.

Bullying, Gender & Age

The degree and form of bullying differs according to gender and age and this is evident across different setting (Monks et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2008). In school settings, vast research findings have shown that regardless of the form of bullying the majority of victims and bullies are male students (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010; Carlyle, & Steinman, 2007; Egbochuku, 2007; Kepenekci & Çinkır, 2006; Li, 2006; Mangope et al., 2012; Olweus, 2003; Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann & Jugert, 2006). Boys are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of physical bullying compared to girls (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Nansel et al., 2001) whereas most victims of indirect bullying such as relational and emotional bullying are females (Baldry, 2004; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012; Olweus, 1993, Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Furthermore, some studies have also revealed that perpetrators of indirect bullying are more likely to be older children (see Pateraki, & Houndoumadi, 2001; Rivers & Smith, 1994). However, it appears that bullying is more prevalent among younger children but declines as students progress through school (see Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Landau, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Österman, & Gideon, 2002; Nansel et al., 2001; Seals, & Young, 2002; Kumpulainen, K., Räsänen, E., & Henttonen, 1999).

Impact of bullying

Findings from numerous studies have revealed that bullying has emotional and behavioural consequences (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010). Important to highlight is that bullying adversely affects the victims, perpetrators (see De Wet, 2005; Egbochuku, 2007; Nansel et al., 2001; Smokowski, & Kopasz, 2005) and observers as well (see Vartia, 2001). Victims of bullying generally exhibit behaviours such as bed wetting and sleep problems (De Wet, 2005; Monks et al., 2009) depressive symptoms, low self esteem, high levels of anxiety (Elinoff et al., 2004; Dawkins, 1995; Olweus, 1995; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012), low academic performance, school absenteeism, social alienation (Mangope et al., 2012). Furthermore, bullying can result in physical and psychosomatic health problems (Baldry, 2004; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield & Karstadt, 2001) and suicide (De Wet, 2005; Mangope et al., 2012). As for students who bully others, they tend to abuse drugs (Berthold, & Hoover, 2000; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, & Rimpela, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001), perform poorly in school, are at times socially alienated and they eventually drop out of school (Mangope et al., 2012). Bullying is also a risk factor of delinquent behaviour (Van der Wal, De Wit, & Hirasing, 2003) and adult criminal behaviour (Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Further, some studies have demonstrated that observing others being bullied can result in high levels of stress (e.g. Vartia, 2001)

Bullying in Botswana schools

Although bullying among students is well documented in other countries, the same is not true in Botswana. It is only of recent, that researchers are focusing on the topic (e.g. Moswela, 2005; Shehu, 2009; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012). This gap in research might be due to the fact some people believed that bullying was a childhood ritual and therefore trivialized its occurrence and at times overlooked its occurrence (Elinoff, Chafouleas & Sassu, 2004). In addition, in Botswana some people still identify bullying as a masculine trait and view being victimized as a sign of weakness (Mangope et al., 2012). Mangope and colleagues highlight that such beliefs propagates bullying behaviour particularly if bullies are not reprimanded for their behaviour. Even though some people still trivialize bullying, anecdotal data from different local newspapers has highlighted the adverse impact of bullying in schools. For instance a report in Mmegi (2004) as cited by Hulela & Matsolo (2011) highlighted that in one school nine students died and some became blind after other students forced them to drink methanol. Additionally, empirical evidence from existent studies does highlight the prevalence and impact of bullying in primary, junior and secondary schools in Botswana (e.g. Hulela & Matsolo, 2011; Mangope et al., 2012; Moswela, 2005; Shehu, 2009)

Botswana Students and School staff experiences of bullying

Both students and school personnel have acknowledged the occurrence of bullying among students in Botswana school settings (Hulelai & Matsolo, 2011; Mangope et al., 2012; Moswela, 2005; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012) although some of the findings indicate that its occurrence is minimal in some schools. For instance, in Tjavanga & Jotia (2012) study conducted at Oodima Secondary school, which consisted of 60 students in form 1, 2 and 3 and 10 staff members, 53% of the students research participants reported to have been victims of bullying and reported to have been bullied at most twice, suggesting that the frequency of such behaviour is minimal. Similarly, in Mangope et al. (2012) study, both the teachers and the students reported the occurrence of bullying as being rare but what is interesting is that the students viewed bullying as part of the school culture which implies that its occurrence is accepted. The same view was noted in Moswela (2005) study which showed that 56% of the research participants did not view bullying as a problem. On the contrary, Shehu (2009) study showed that the majority of students reported to have been bullied (90 % of the girls and 96% of the boys) and that bullying incidents were frequent in schools.

Studies have also revealed that bullying occurs both in school and outside school premises. In Mangope et al. (2012) study which consisted of both day and boarding schools from rural and urban areas, respondents from day schools indicated that bullying occurs outside school premises whereas the opposite was reported by students in boarding schools. Mangope and colleagues highlight that this finding is to be expected given that in boarding schools students spend the majority of their time during school term away from their families. Similarly, at Oodima secondary school which is a day school, more than half (60%) of the student research participants indicated that the majority of bullying incidents occur outside the school premises

(Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012). However, the majority of Oodima's school personnel indicated that bullying occurs mainly at the playgrounds and in the classrooms. The occurrence of bullying at the playgrounds has also been reported by physical students in Shehu (2009) study. Further, available research findings indicate that the majority of victims of bullying and perpetrators are boys (Mangope et al., 2012; Moswela, 2005) and this is consistent with findings elsewhere. However, of interest is that in Shehu's study, the majority of the physical education students who reported being victims were female students and this finding was also observed in Tjavanga & Jotia (2012) study. In addition, Tjavanga & Jotia study also revealed that most victims were female students in form two and three which is contrary to most research findings that show that bullying tends to decline as students progress through school. Shehu attributes the above noted finding to gender discrimination and sexism given that most students in physical education classes are male students. Other risk factors linked to victimization in Botswana school settings are; having a small physical structure, being new in the school (Mangope et al., 2012) and socioeconomic status (Moswela, 2005). On the other end, factors such as witnessing bullying at home, intoxication and being under the influence of drugs (Moswela, 2005), lack of parental guidance, lack of self esteem and family discord (Hulela & Matsolo, 2011) have been attributed to students' bullying behaviour. With regards to the impact of bullying, findings from studies conducted in Botswana are consistent with other studies elsewhere. Victims of bullying perform poorly in school, alienate themselves from peers and develop low self esteem (see Moswela, 2005; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012) and the same has been observed with bullies (Mangope et al., 2012).

Interventions used to address Bullying

Findings from the existent research show that there are limited interventions or measures used to address bullying in some schools. According to Mangope et al. (2012), the available and most common strategy used to address bullying is school's disciplinary policy and it appears that most of the research participants in different studies are in support of this type of intervention. The majority of research participants in prior studies viewed corporal punishment as a deterrent of bullying (in Moswela, 2005; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012). However, Mangope and colleagues highlight that the intervention has proved to be ineffective. Of note, is that the head of departments in Mangope et al. (2012) study illuminated that in conjunction with disciplinary measures, the schools invite other stakeholders such as the police department and local councillors to talk to students about bullying. The research participants also pointed out that the Guidance and Counselling teachers offer counselling sessions to the victims as well as the bullies. Some research participants were of the view that bullying interventions should encompass suspension and expulsion of bullies, encouragement of students to report incidents of bullying to the school authority and parents and enforcement of schools' bullying policies (Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012). Further, one of the three parents who participated in Mangope et al. (2012) study suggested that the schools should build a close working relationship with stakeholders outside the schools to holistically address that problem. The parent also pointed that the Guidance and Counselling division should play an active role in addressing bullying in schools in order to heighten the public's and students' awareness of bullying in schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is empirical evidence that indicates that bullying is a problem among students in Botswana and existent studies have identified risk factors linked to bullying however prior studies have marginally examined the extent of bullying in schools in rural areas. For instance in Moswela (2005) study, only three secondary schools in the rural area were included in the study as compared to nine that were selected from urban areas. As for Mangope et al. (2012) study, the researchers utilized a small sample size which consisted of one junior secondary school in the rural area and one located in a semi urban area. Important to note is that the above stated problem might have been addressed by Shehu (2009) study which comprised of 20 co-educational junior secondary schools in Northern, Central and South Central districts of Botswana, but the author did not explicitly categorize the schools by type of location. Additionally, although Shehu's study utilized a large pool of students as compared of other studies (e.g Moswela, 2005; Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012), the sample consisted of only physical education students and therefore the results cannot be generalized to entire Botswana student population and hence more studies are needed to fill in this research gap. Such studies may provide sufficient comparative data on bullying in schools located in urban, semi urban and rural areas. Another area that has been neglected is the investigation of the prevalence of bullying among students in private schools and universities; there is virtually no empirical evidence on this population. Additionally, information on cyber bullying among students in Botswana is also nonexistent. Such information can aid in developing interventions that will cater for the specific needs of the students in Botswana.

As noted earlier, in Botswana more emphasis is placed on reactive approaches such disciplinary policies which have proved to less effective (Mangope et al., 2012). In addition, schools also provide

counselling to victims and perpetrators and encourage students to report bullying incidents of (Tjavanga & Jotia, 2012). Noteworthy, is that it appears there is less emphasis put on preventative measures in Botswana schools which according to Elinoff, Chafoules & Sassu (2004) is the best strategy in addressing bullying in schools. Preventative strategies can help address some of the noted negative consequences of bullying among Botswana students as such approaches are proactive. To prevent bullying in schools, Moswela (2005) suggests that teachers should fully engage students since being idle result in bullying. Teachers should also create a safe and supportive environment (Egbochuku, 2007; Olweus, 1995) as this will also enable and encourage students to report bullying incidents. Students reporting will consequently address the underestimation of the problem observed among some teachers.

There is also a need to train more school personnel who will provide interventions in light of the fact some school teachers minimize the occurrence and impact of bullying in their schools. Additionally, some people are still of the belief that bullying is a rite of passage and therefore it is crucial to explore teachers' knowledge and attitude about bullying in order to come up with training programs that address teachers' knowledge gap and skills to combat bullying in schools. As highlighted by Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic (1999), preventive and intervention strategies should be informed by empirical evidence and hence more research is needed to inform bullying strategies that are used in Botswana school settings. In sum, more research is needed to explore the extent of the prevalence of bullying among students and more attention should be given to the investigation of students, parents and teachers knowledge of bullying in order to come up with holistic effective strategies of addressing bullying in school settings.

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