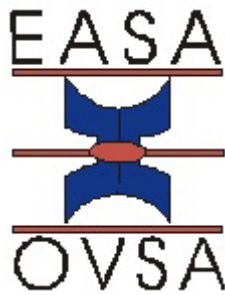


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Official publication of the Education
Association of South Africa
<http://www.sajournalofeducation.co.za>

The nature and extent of bullying in a developing country context

South African Journal of Education
Volume 38(2), April 2018

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Bullying is a widespread phenomenon (Huggins, 2016) and is one of the most underestimated problems, which have far-reaching consequences, both in the immediate, as well as long-term (Bradshaw, 2015; Naser, Ladikos & Prinsloo, 2004). The renewed focus on bullying is perhaps not surprising, as there seems to be an increase in the occurrence of bullying as an indication of societal changes (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). This is partly due to the hidden nature of bullying within a culture of violence that ultimately contributes to different manifestations of violence within societies (Naser et al., 2004). In the past, bullying has been viewed as harmless, or as a phase some children go through, thus downplaying the serious implications of bullying behaviour on the well-being of both bully and victim (Du Plessis & Conley, 2007).

The fact remains however, that bullying is a reality in the daily lives of the many learners (Naser et al., 2004), the consequences of which can be devastating. On the part of the victim, physical and psychological stress is prevalent which lead to the inability to maintain successful relationships, in addition to depression, and the development of negative self-esteem. Children who bully have a tendency to develop maladaptive social skills that result in poor adult adjustment and are likely to transmit poor social skills to the next generation (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). Furthermore, within this cycle of violence, academic performance also suffers (Cross, Monks, Hall, Shaw, Pintabona, Erceg, Hamilton, Roberts, Waters & Lester, 2011).

What is essential to understand is the ambit of bullying, such that we might come to grips with how stakeholders, researchers, learners, teachers and principals define bullying (Frisén, Jonsson & Persson, 2007). Furthermore, in order to prevent bullying, it is essential to develop effective programmes that will lead to a reduction in the prevalence of bullying behaviour (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). Thus, it is crucial to have information on who is involved in bullying behaviour, the location of where bullying occurs, and the frequency of bullying, but also on what the response to bullying has been. Without appropriate intervention, bullying behaviour tends to increase which negatively influences the school environment. The intervention programme, however, has to be sensitive towards culture, society and home (Bauer, Lozano & Rivara, 2007).

Within South Africa, and the developing world, there seems to be a dearth of research focusing on bullying, especially in light of the adequate measurement of bullying, and how these measures can inform intervention strategies not only to provide a healthy school climate, but also to secure healthy psychosocial development outcomes. Further research in the area of bullying is required, that takes advantage of developments in research methodology, such as more qualitative studies as well as mixed methods studies (Naser et al., 2004). Perhaps more importantly, however, is that the existing research indicates that interventions and strategies significantly reduce bullying behaviour in schools (Smit, 2003). As a result, it is imperative that strategies and programmes are put on the table to address this issue, especially in light of the fact that schools continue to be one of the important settings for preventing behavioural and health problems (Bradshaw, 2015).

This issue encourages articles that focus on practice, as well as on papers that are conceptual and theoretical in nature, which can shed light on how bullying can be addressed within a developing world context. The challenge is forwarded to emphasise the theories underpinning the way in which bullying can be addressed, and what initiatives of this kind exist. Researchers from developing countries in particular are invited to submit articles for inclusion in this special issue.

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Closing date for submissions: 31 August 2017