

**THE NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF BULLYING
DURING THE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL PHASE**

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by

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Declaration

I declare that this article hereby submitted by me for the Master of Arts (Counselling Psychology) degree at the University of the Free State is my own work and has not been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of this article in favour of the University of the Free State.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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SUMMARY

This study was conducted to acquire descriptive information regarding the nature and prevalence of school bullying in the intermediate school phase. To achieve this, the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ) was used as a self-report measure to investigate bullying across five different dimensions: exposure to various forms of bullying/harassment; forms of bullying behaviour; where bullying occurs; characteristics of the bullies and whether the social environment had been informed about the bullying. The total sample comprised 360 grade four to six learners from English-medium, single-sex schools in Bloemfontein. To ensure a more homogeneous sample the grade (grades four to six) and race (black and white) of the participants were controlled. All statistical analyses were done by means of frequencies and cross-tabulations using the chi-square statistical test with grade, gender and ethnicity as independent variables. The results were generally similar to those reported by most international studies of school bullying, namely: that self-reported bullying decreases with advancement in grades; that the most prevalent form of bullying is verbal bullying; that boys reported experiencing direct physical bullying more than girls did and that the most likely location for bullying to occur is the playground. Furthermore, boys generally reported being made fun of and teased in a hurtful way, as well as being kicked, hit and pushed more frequently than girls. It was also found that black learners reported experiencing racial bullying significantly more than white learners. Black boys reported experiencing racist bullying more than black girls did. Both girls and boys indicated being bullied most by learners in their own class, with boys also being bullied by learners from higher grades. White learners indicated being bullied most by learners in the same class, whereas black learners reported being bullied equally by learners from the same class and learners from a higher grade. The study also yielded a much higher rate of bullying (56,4%) than those cited in previous South African as well as international research. The high rate of bullying revealed in the study makes it necessary to conduct future research into bullying, as ways need to be found to lessen the deleterious effects of bullying on learners' school careers, both of the bullies and their victims.

Key terms: *nature and prevalence of school bullying, intermediate school phase, Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ), self-report measure, English medium, single sex schools, grade, gender, ethnicity, chi-square statistical test.*

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie is onderneem om beskrywende inligting in te samel aangaande die wese en voorkoms van skoolafknouery in die intermediêre skoolfase. Ten einde dit vas te stel, is daar gebruik gemaak van die Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ). Hierdie vraelys is as 'n beskrywingsvraelys gebruik om afknouery volgens vyf verskillende dimensies te ondersoek naamlik: die blootstelling aan verskeie vorms van afknouery / treitering; verskeie vorms van afknougedrag; waar die afknouery plaasvind; die eienskappe van die afknouers en of die sosiale omgewing aangaande die afknouery ingelig is. Die steekproef het uit 'n totaal van 360 graad vier tot ses leerders van Engels-medium, enkelgeslag skole in Bloemfontein bestaan. Om 'n meer homogene steekproef te verseker, is die graad en kultuur van die deelnemers gekontroleer deurdat slegs leerlinge in graad vier tot ses en slegs swart en wit leerders by die steekproef ingesluit is. Alle statistiese bewerkings is deur middel van frekwensies en kruis-tabulering gedoen volgens die chikwadraat statistiese toets met graad, geslag en kultuur as onafhanklike veranderlikes. Die resultate het oor die algemeen ooreengestem met die neiging van die meeste internasionale studies wat skoolafknouery ondersoek het, naamlik dat die self-gemelde teenwoordigheid van afknouery afneem met vordering in skoolgraad; dat seuns meer dikwels as meisies gemeld het dat hulle direkte fisiese afknouery ervaar het; en dat die speelterrein die mees waarskynlike plek is waar afknouery plaasvind. Voorts is gevind dat seuns oor die algemeen meer as meisies melding gemaak het dat daar met hulle die spot gedryf word en op 'n kwetsende wyse geterg, word, sowel as geskop, geslaan en rond gestamp word. Die resultate het ook aangedui dat swart leerders beduidend meer dikwels as wit leerders melding gemaak het van hul ervaring van rassitiese afknouery. Verder het swart seuns aangedui dat hulle meer rassitiese afknouery ervaar as swart meisies. Beide meisies en seuns het aangedui dat hulle meestal deur leerders in hul eie klas afgeknou word. Die seuns het verder aangedui dat hulle ook deur leerders in hoër grade afgeknou word. Wit leerders het aangedui dat hulle oor die algemeen deur leerders in hul eie klas afgeknou word, terwyl swart leerders meestal gemeld het dat hulle deur leerders in hul eie klas, sowel as deur leerders in hoër grade afgeknou word. Hierdie studie het 'n veel hoër voorkoms van afknouery (56,4%) rapporteer as dié waarvan melding gemaak is in vorige Suid Afrikaanse, sowel as internasionale, studies. Die hoë voorkoms van afknouery wat deur die studie onthul is, noodsaak verdere navorsing oor afknouery en die skadelike effek daarvan op leerders se skoolloopbane met verwysing na beide die afknouers en hul slagoffers.

Sleuteltermes: *natuur en voorkoms van skoolafknouery, intermediêre skoolfase, Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ), self-meldings meetinstrument, Engelse medium, enkelgeslag skole, graad, geslag, kultuur, chikwadraat statistiese toets.*

THE NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF BULLYING DURING THE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL PHASE

INTRODUCTION

Bullying among school children is not a new phenomenon, as it has been described in fictional works for centuries (MacDougall, 1993). However, the subject only started receiving research attention in the early 1970's when Dan Olweus, a Norwegian researcher, started studying this area of human behaviour. At the time, a strong societal interest in bully/victim problems emerged in Scandinavia, where bullying was known as "mobbing" or "mobbing". Olweus's 1978 study investigating aggression in schools is considered a landmark as the first systematic study of the phenomenon of bullying. However, school officials in Scandinavia did not take serious action against bullying until a newspaper report in 1982 stated that three early adolescent boys from Norway had committed suicide because of severe bullying by peers (Olweus, 1993). This event triggered a nationwide campaign against bully/victim problems and data was obtained from 140,000 learners in 715 schools (Olweus, 1987).

Most adults can remember incidents of bullying in which they were the bullies or the intended victims. In fact, the common perception among the majority of societies around the world, as with the Scandinavian school officials, has been that bullying is a relatively normal and harmless experience most children go through as part of growing up. Research on bullying in schools has increased dramatically in recent years and makes a convincing case for the negative social, academic, psychological and physical impact school bullying has on learners. Exposure to bullying by peers has been found to be related to increased dropout rates, lower self esteem, fewer friends, declining grades and increased illness (Ballard, Argus & Remley, 1999; Rigby, 1999; Sagarese & Gianetti, 1999). Furthermore, studies have also shown that peer victimisation is significantly associated with suicidal ideation (Rigby, 2003). Being the bully on the other hand, also carries its negative effects. In a much-cited study of Norwegian learners, the research indicated that children identified as bullies in grades five to nine, were four times more likely to appear in court on delinquency charges (Olweus, 1993).

Traditionally, bullying has been accepted as a single act of aggressive teasing or fighting. Current definitions of bullying behaviour stem from the original research conducted with Norwegian and Swedish learners by Dan Olweus (1987). He defined bullying by stating that a learner is bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other learners. These negative actions are considered to be when someone

purposefully inflicts, or tries to inflict, injury or discomfort on another person. Negative actions may further be defined as verbal (e.g. threatening, degrading, teasing) and non-verbal (e.g. hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing, vandalizing property, rude gestures and making faces) (Olweus, 1993). It should be noted that this definition requires that negative actions should be carried out *repeatedly* and *intentionally* to constitute bullying, which exclude occasional and less serious negative actions (Yates & Smith, 1988). In order to be considered bullying, there should also be an actual or perceived power imbalance; the person experiencing the negative actions has trouble defending him/herself and is helpless, to some degree, against the harassing person or persons (Rigby, 1993). Bullying behaviours have been further classified as either direct or indirect, with direct bullying characterised by open attacks and indirect bullying characterised by social isolation, exclusion from the group, or non-selection (Bosworth, Espelage & Simon, 1999).

Research on the prevalence of school bullying has occurred in diverse settings, including Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Spain, Italy, England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, Japan, Canada, South Africa and the United States. The prevalence of victimisation in grades one to five varies from a low of 11,3 percent in a sample of learners in Finland (Olafsen & Viemrö, 2000) to a high of 49,8 percent in a nationwide sample in Ireland (Dake, Price & Telljohann, 2003). In Zimbabwe, Zindi (1994) reported that 16 percent of learners were bullied *now and then*, and 18 percent were bullied *weekly or more often*. Researchers in Canada indicate that one in twenty (5%) boys were victimised by others *sometimes or very often*. According to the same research findings, one in fourteen girls is victimised (7%) (Craig, Peters & Konarski, 1999). In a 1990 South African study of 1073 grade one and two learners, researchers found that 38 percent of learners were being bullied by peers (Richter, Palmary & de Wet, 2000).

Bullying is a behaviour that requires two or more participants. There are those who bully and then there are those who are bullied. From the perspective of those who bully, research indicates prevalence rates that range between 4,1 percent in a sample of 510 learners from Finland (Olafsen et al., 2000) to 49,7 percent in the aforementioned study in Ireland (Dake et al., 2003). In a Canadian study, researchers found that, in Canada, about one in seven boys and approximately one in eleven girls bully others (Craig et al., 1999).

These prevalence rates generally served as motivation for the creation and implementing of various anti-bullying programs through the years. Although these programs yielded positive results, they mostly targeted direct physical bullying, believed to be performed by boys, and neglected to focus on girls. The reason for this was that for decades, males have been considered to be the more

aggressive sex. Traditional literature generated in the past also supported the notion that boys were more likely to bully than girls (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Hazler, Hoover & Oliver, 1992; Hoover, Oliver & Thomson, 1993; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989). Past studies of bullying among learners often excluded girls from sample groups (Crick & Rose, 2001) and have defined bullying as being overtly physical or verbal, but have failed to consider more subtle, covert forms of bullying.

More recent research challenges these general beliefs surrounding the gender of bullies. The literature confirms that boys are more likely than girls to be involved in direct physical bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001; Natvig, Albrektse n & Qvarnstrom, 2001; Sourander, Helstelä, Helenius & Piha, 2000) and that boys and girls are equally involved in direct verbal bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2000). However, the latest research on the gender of school bullies suggests that there is little consensus regarding the gender of perpetrators of indirect bullying such as social exclusion and subject of rumours (Nansel et al., 2001; Natvig et al., 2001; Sourander et al., 2000).

Similarly, studies investigating the gender of victims of bullying have yielded the same contradictory results. Some researchers reported that girls and boys were equally harassed regarding severity and prevalence (Graham, 1998 in Lerner & Lerner, 2001), while others have found that boys are victims of more direct forms of bullying and girls were more likely to be victims of indirect or relational bullying (van der Wal, de Wit & Hirasing, 2003; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield & Karstadt, 2001).

In both genders, the most frequent type of bullying was reported to be teasing and name calling, followed by hitting and kicking and other threats (Richter et al., 2000; Seals & Young, 2003; Zindi, 1994). While verbal means of harassment are the most common forms of bullying for both boys and girls, Olweus (1995) observed that boys are generally more violent and destructive (overtly aggressive) in their bullying than girls are, making greater use of direct physical means of bullying. Common physical traits of bullying include the following: actions causing physical injury (hitting, kicking, punching, tripping); taking money, lunch or homework; taking or damaging belongings of others and engaging in extortion (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

Girls tend to use more indirect and subtle forms of harassment, including rumour-spreading, malicious gossip, manipulation of friendships (e.g. depriving another girl of her best friend), name-calling and social exclusion (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). This type of bullying has been termed *relational aggression* and is defined by behaviours that are intended to significantly damage another

child's friendships or feelings of inclusion by the peer group (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Although this form of bullying has been widely accepted to be more prevalent among girls (Crick, 1996; Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), Rys and Bear (1997), replicating Crick and Grotpeter's 1995 study of relational aggression, found that, even though boys were more overtly aggressive than girls, and girls were more prosocial than boys, no sex differences on relational aggression were found. No literature has been located that investigates differences in the nature of bullying behaviours among various ethnic groups.

These contradictory conclusions found in studies relating to the gender of bullies as well as bully victims, means that, up until recently, researchers have been unable to generalise research results. This limited the extent to which findings of studies could be compared to one another, hampering the task of addressing and preventing bullying globally. One explanation for these incoherent results among studies may be the fact that the schools used to obtain sample groups from, did not have the same demographic make up in terms of gender.

For the sake of comparing research findings, researchers have turned to other more controllable ways to investigate and compare bullying behaviours. These studies focus on the grade level that bullies and victims find themselves in, and compare bullying behaviours across grades. Bullies tend most often to bully learners who are the same age (grade) as they are, followed by younger learners (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997; Seals & Young, 2003). Zindi (1994) noted that most bullies were in the same grade, as well as the same class as the victims, followed by the same grade and a different class, and lastly, in a higher grade. Bullies were generally peers of the victim. Borg (1998) reported that the prevalence of bullying not only appears to decline as learners mature; it actually changes from aggressive, physical forms to more passive, verbal forms.

Identifying victims of bullying and creating a victim profile has been a controversial subject as throughout literature researchers often differ in their methods of gathering data. The bulk of research, based on self-reports, indicates a marked decline in victimisation as learners grow older and advance to higher grades (Salmivalli, 2002; Seals & Young, 2003; Selekman & Vessey, 2004). However, Salmivalli's study challenged these results when neither peer, nor teacher reports confirmed the self-reported victimisation figures her study had found earlier. These contradictory findings supported those by Juvonen, Nishina and Graham (2001), and Schuster (1999) whose studies were based on classifying learners into groups of self-identified victims, peer-identified victims, self-peer-identified victims and non victims and found that what actually decreased as a function of age (advancement of grades) was the frequency of self-identified victims, that is,

learners who themselves reported being bullied but who did not have the reputational status of being victims among their peers.

In an earlier study, Leff, Kupersmidt, Patterson and Power (1999) contributed to the dispute by suggesting that younger learners are not capable of making accurate observations about the social world around them. Being more egocentric, they are more concentrated on what happens to themselves. For this reason, in lower grades of primary school, the peers (class mates) might not be as aware of bullying going on in their class, and therefore do not report as much bullying taking place as what self-reported victims report.

However, although the research findings regarding the age of the victims of bully differ somewhat, the bulk of these studies still suggests that bully victimisation decreases with age. Victimization was found to peak during primary school, specifically in the intermediate phase (grades four to six), and to decrease thereafter in early high school (Juvonen et al., 2001; Salmivalli, 2002; Seals & Young, 2003; Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

When comparing the prevalence of bullying or victimisation amongst different racial or ethnic groups, studies in the United Kingdom found no significant differences (Dake et al., 2003). Craig and Pepler's (1997) study found that learners who bully do not discriminate between ethnic groups. In 59 percent of the episodes, learners who bullied and learners who were bullied were from the same ethnic group, and in 41 percent of the episodes they were from different ethnic groups. Two of the largest national studies done on bullying in the United States supported these findings and found no significant differences in the prevalence of victimisation or bullying behaviours among white, Hispanic and African American learners (Nansel et al., 2001). However, a third study done in the United States yielded contradictory results. This study, conducted in California, investigated bullying in a school where the minority of learners were white and the majority African American. The results of a study conducted by Graham and Juvonen in 2002 indicated that White students were significantly more likely than African American learners to be victimised (Dake et al., 2003). In support of this, a cross-sectional study with both German and English learners found a significant relationship between ethnicity and bullying in that learners whom belonged to ethnic minorities were more likely to become victims of bullying than learners who belonged to the ethnic majority (Wolke et al., 2001).

Until 1978 it was commonly accepted that bullying behaviour took place outside the school premises. Since then, various authors have noted that there is much more bullying in school than

there is on the way to and from school (Olweus, 1978; Rivers & Smith, 1994; Wolke, Woods, Stanford & Schultz, 2001; Ziegler & Rosenstein-Manner, 1991). Within the school grounds, the playground has been indicated by most studies to be the common setting for bullying, followed by the classroom, hallways, dining halls and toilets (Seals & Young, 2003; Smith & Shu, 2000; Wolke et al., 2001). Mellor's (1997) study of Scottish secondary school learners largely supports these findings in that she too found that bullying was most likely to take place on the playground. However, Mellor's study found that in Scottish schools the second most likely place for bullying to take place is outside the school boundaries. In a residential school, Zindi (1994) found that the dormitory was the most common location of bullying, followed closely by the playground, with the toilets rated third and the classroom rated last.

Although the literature on bullying has grown significantly over the last decade, limited research has been published in this area from a South African perspective. Today, the bulk of the research still originates in Europe, with a large amount of work also being done in Australia and the United States of America. Therefore, the proposed study aims to investigate the nature and prevalence of bullying behaviour in middle-upper class, single sex, English medium, primary schools in Bloemfontein, on the basis of grade, gender and ethnic group. The study further aims to identify the nature, frequency, location and the perpetrators of the bullying and if the victims disclose incidents of bullying to others. These results will then be compared according to the three independent variables of grade, gender and ethnic group. Lastly, these results would be weighed against international research findings.

Method

Permission to conduct the research in the Bloemfontein Metropolis was obtained from the Free State Department of Education after which the researcher approached the principals of four English medium primary schools to obtain their permission to conduct the research in their schools. The researcher purposively selected classes in each grade that were approximately equal in terms of black and white learner numbers. Letters were sent to the parents of these grade four to six learners from the four schools which were willing to participate in the study, requesting their children's participation in the study.

Participants

A total of 444 learners' parents granted permission for their participation in the study and all 444 grade four to six learners from the four participating schools were tested.

In constituting the sample, the researcher controlled for: ethnicity (white and black), and grade (four to six). In the quest to obtain a homogenous sample the researcher used well-known middle-upper class schools to control for socio-economic status. However, there was no measure to control for this variable, and the findings can thus not be extrapolated to the broader socio-economic population.

In order to avoid ethnic variability, all Indian, Asian and Coloured learners were excluded from the sample, which led to a remainder of 417 black and white learners. From this remaining group 30 participants of both genders, in each grade, and from each ethnic background were randomly selected to form part of the research study. The final sample of 360 learners consisted of 120 learners from each grade, 60 of whom were white (30 boys and 30 girls) and 60 black (30 boys and 30 girls).

The sample composition and frequency distribution according to the participants' grade, gender and ethnicity are reflected in table 1.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the participants according to grade, gender and ethnicity.

<i>Biographical variable</i>	N	%
Grade:		
Four	120	33,3
Five	120	33,3
Six	120	33,3
Gender:		
Male	180	50,0
Female	180	50,0
Ethnicity:		
Black	180	50,0
White	180	50,0

The demographic composition of the sample group was equal in terms of grade, gender and ethnicity.

Instruments

The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ) (Olweus, 1996) assesses various aspects of bully/victim problems according to five different dimensions. These dimensions are as follows: amount of exposure to various forms of bullying/harassment such as physical, verbal, indirect, racial, or sexual bullying; various forms of bullying as defined by the learners; where bullying occurs; pro-bully and pro-victim attitudes; whether and how the social environment (teachers, peers, parents) is informed about and reacts to bullying. The R-OBVQ was used to acquire descriptive information about the nature and prevalence of bullying from the intermediate learner's perspective, with specific reference to its existence within the South African context and, if it does occur, the frequency of its occurrence, various types of bullying as defined by the learners, where bullying occurs and whether or not victims report being bullied.

The R-OBVQ is an anonymous self-report instrument and consists of 40 group administered paper-and-pencil items. There are two versions of the questionnaire: the junior version for use with grade three, four and five learners, and the senior version intended for learners in grades six to ten or higher. For the purpose of investigating bullying in the intermediate phase of schooling (grades four to six), the junior version was used.

As far as the psychometric properties of the R-OBVQ were concerned, satisfactory results with regard to its reliability and validity have been obtained for grades three to twelve. At the individual

level (with individual subjects as the unit of analysis), combinations of items for being victimised or for bullying others, respectively, have typically yielded internal consistency reliabilities in the 0,80's or higher, depending on the number of items included in the scales, as determined by means of Cronbach's alpha. Often, however, the school is the natural unit of analysis in which case the reliabilities are even higher, typically in the 0,90's (Olweus, 1996). Both individuals and schools can thus be very well differentiated with the questionnaire.

Regard to the validity of the R-OBVQ on variables pertaining to bully/victim problems, Olweus (1994) reported that results of composites of three to five self-report items on being bullied or bullying and attacking others, respectively, correlated in the 0,40 to 0,60 range (Pearson correlations) in early Swedish studies (Olweus, 1978) with reliable peer ratings on related dimensions (Olweus, 1978). Similarly, in 1988 Perry, Kusel and Perry (Olweus, 1994) reported a correlation of 0,42 between a self-report scale of three victimization items and a reliable measure of peer nominations of victimization in elementary school children. In the intervention study it was also found that class-aggregated student rating estimates of the number of learners in the class who were bullied or bullied others during the reference period, to be highly correlated with class-aggregated estimates derived from the learners' own reports of being bullied or bullying others. Correlations were within the range 0,60 to 0,70.

A biographical questionnaire was also used to include items pertaining to the participants' grade, gender and ethnicity.

Statistical analyses

Due to the nature of the items in the instrument, which were all measured on a nominal scale, it was decided to employ the χ^2 -test for homogeneity. All statistical analyses were done with the assistance of the SAS computer programme (SAS Institute, 2001) and analysed by means of frequencies and cross-tabulations using the chi-square statistical test. Accepted levels of significance reported in this study are as follows: The five percent level of significance includes all chi-square values where $p = 0,05$. Secondly, the one percent level of significance covers all chi-square values where $p = 0,01$.

Results

The study investigated the nature and prevalence of bullying from the intermediate learner's perspective, with specific reference to its existence within the South African context. In accordance with this primary focus of the research, the researcher firstly had to investigate whether bullying

occurs in the participating schools or not and, if it does occur, investigate the frequency of its occurrence, the type of bullying as defined by the learners, where bullying occurs and if victims disclosed being bullied.

Prevalence

The results reflected that 203 of the 360 learners (56,4%) who were tested had indeed experienced some form of bullying since the beginning of the academic year. The prevalence of bullying was investigated further with regard to possible differences among participants pertaining to the three grades, the gender of the participants and their ethnicity.

These results are indicated in tables 2, 3 and 4.

Grade

The information concerning the three grades appears in table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of the three grades in terms of self-reported presence / absence of bullying.

Bullying	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
No	45	37,5	52	43,3	60	50,0
Yes	75	62,5	68	56,7	60	50,0
Row total:	120	33,3	120	33,3	120	33,3
$\chi^2 = 3,82$						
$p = 0,1482$						
$df = 2$						

The chi-square value of 3,82 indicates that there is no significant difference in the proportion of learners who have experienced some form of bullying since the beginning of the academic year with specific reference to the learner's grade. Thus, the grade that the intermediate phase learner is in does not have a significant impact on the prevalence of bullying and no significant differences were found between grade four, five or six learners.

Gender

The results of the comparison between the two gender groups appear in table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of the two genders with regard to the presence / absence of bullying.

Bullying	Girls		Boys	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
No	87	48,3	70	38,9
Yes	93	51,7	110	61,1
Raw total:	180	50,0	180	50,0
$\chi^2 = 3,26$				
$p = 0,0708$				
$\phi = 1$				

The results of the comparison between girls and boys with reference to the presence or absence of bullying indicate that gender does not impact significantly on the prevalence of bullying. The chi-square value of 3,26 indicates that there is no significant difference between the proportion of boys and girls who have experienced some form of bullying since the beginning of the academic year. However, it is clearly reflected, although not significantly so, that a greater percentage of boys (61,1%) than girls (51,7%) have indeed experienced some form of bullying.

Ethnicity

The result of the comparison of the two ethnic groups with regard to presence or absence of bullying appears in table 4.

Table 4: Comparison of the two ethnicity groups with regard to the presence / absence of bullying.

Bullying	White		Black	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
No	78	43,3	79	43,9
Yes	102	56,7	101	56,1
Raw total:	180	50,0	180	50,0
$\chi^2 = 0,01$				
$p = 0,9154$				
$\phi = 1$				

The chi-square value of 0,01 reflected in table 4 indicates that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of bullying between white and black learners. Thus, there is no significant difference between the proportion of learners from each of the two ethnic groups who have experienced some form of bullying since the beginning of the academic year. It appears as though the two ethnic groups experience the presence or absence of bullying to the same extent.

The analyses that follow were only performed with respect to learners that reported being bullied since the beginning of the academic year. With reference to these 203 learners who did indeed experience some form of bullying in general, further investigation was conducted to determine the

frequency in which incidents of bullying occurred. Thus, the focus was on the frequency in which these incidents occurred and whether it differed for the three variables, namely grade, gender and ethnicity. A significant result was only obtained with regard to the grade variable. These results are reflected in table 5.

Table 5: Comparison of the grades with regard to the frequency of bullying incidents.

Bullying	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Once or twice	43	57,3	46	67,7	36	60,0
2 to 3 times a month	19	25,3	2	2,9	6	10,0
Once a week	5	6,7	6	8,8	13	21,7
Several times a week	8	10,7	14	20,6	5	8,3
Row total:	75	100	68	100	60	100
$\chi^2 = 26,13$						
$p = 0,0002$						
$k = 6$						

The greatest proportion in each grade indicated being bullied only *once or twice*. However the results in table 5 also indicate that there is a difference in the proportion of bullying incidents (measured by self reports) for learners from the three grades which is significant at the 1%-level of significance. A greater proportion of grade five than grade four and grade six learners experienced bullying *several times a week*. However, a greater proportion of grade six learners than grade four and grade five learners experienced bullying *once a week* while a greater proportion of grade four than grade five and six learners experienced bullying *two or three times a month*. Thus it appears as though it is grade five learners who are most frequently exposed to bullying.

Accordingly, the type of bullying, as well as the frequency in which it occurs for the group, was investigated.

Type of bullying

The type of bullying behaviour was investigated. In this instance the following scale was utilised to describe the frequency of the type of behaviour:

- 1 = it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months (past academic year)
- 2 = only once or twice
- 3 = 2 or 3 times a month
- 4 = about once a week
- 5 = several times a week

In order to make the result more manageable, only the χ^2 -value per type of behaviour for the three independent variables is indicated. In the case of a significant value, the results were explored further. This information appears in table 6.

Table 6: Comparison of the grades, genders and ethnic groups with regard to the type of bullying behaviour which occurs.

Types of bullying	Grade		Gender		Ethnicity	
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Mean names, made fun of, teased in hurtful way	16,98*	0,0304	12,44*	0,0144	3,20	0,5251
Excluded me from group on purpose, ignored me	12,29	0,1386	7,56	0,1091	5,36	0,2519
Hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around or locked indoors	7,87	0,4459	14,86**	0,0050	4,14	0,3873
Spread false rumours about me, tried others to dislike me	15,15	0,0562	2,93	0,5699	0,84	0,9334
Money or other things taken away from me or damaged	10,08	0,2597	4,61	0,3302	8,67	0,0699
Forced to do things I didn't want to do	14,30	0,0744	4,43	0,3510	1,78	0,7764
Comments about my ethnicity	13,08	0,1092	19,56**	0,0006	19,56**	0,0006
Comments, or gestures with a sexual meaning	10,24	0,2488	4,18	0,3823	3,43	0,4881

** $p = 0,01$

* $p = 0,05$

With reference to the three grades as well as to the two genders, it is clear that there are significant differences at the 5% -level regarding the occurrence of bullying in the form of *mean names, made fun of, teased in a hurtful way*. As far as the grades are concerned, it appears as though a greater proportion of grade four learners (70,0%) than grade five (52,5%) and grade six learners (53,3%) are exposed to this type of bullying. Furthermore, where the gender of the learners is concerned, it seems that a greater proportion of boys (65,0%) than girls (52,2%) experienced this type of bullying behaviour. Nineteen of the boys (10,6%) indicated that they are exposed to this type of bullying several times a week, while only five girls (2,8%) indicated exposure to bullying in the form of *mean names, made fun of, teased in a hurtful way* several times a week.

It is also evident that differences occur regarding gender in the proportion of learners who experience bullying in the form of being *hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around or locked indoors*. A greater proportion of boys (40,0%) than girls (23,9%) is exposed to this type of bullying behaviour. Fifteen of the boys (8,3%) also indicated that they were exposed to bullying behaviour in the form

of being *hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around or locked indoors* once a week or more (several times per week) while only four (2,2%) of the girls indicated experiencing this form of bullying this frequently. These gender differences are significant at the 1% -level of significance.

Significant differences at the 1% -level were also found regarding *comments about my ethnicity* for both the variables of gender and ethnicity. As far as gender is concerned, a greater proportion of boys (45,6%) than girls (31,7%) indicated that they are exposed to this type of bullying. Eighteen boys (10,0%) also indicated that they are exposed to this once a week or more (several times a week) while only three girls (1,6%) indicated this. Furthermore, a greater proportion of black (45,6%) than white learners (31,7%) indicated that they are exposed to comments about their ethnicity. Eighteen of the black learners (10,0%) also indicated that they experienced this type of bullying once a week or more (several times per week) while only three (1,6%) of the white learners indicated exposure to this extent.

Who the person(s) who bullies is (are) was investigated further.

The bully (ies)

To investigate who it is who bullies, *only the responses of learners who indicated that they had been bullied were taken into account.*

The χ^2 -value per item is indicated for the three independent variables in table 7. In the case of a significant value, further analyses followed.

Table 7: Comparison of grade, gender and ethnicity regarding the bully(ies).

The bully(ies)	Grade		Gender		Ethnicity	
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
In which class is the learner that bullies you?	11,33	0,1840	9,50*	0,0497	21,30**	0,0003
By how many learners have you usually been bullied?	11,52	0,1738	4,26	0,3719	4,03	0,4022
How long has the bullying lasted?	7,27	0,5078	4,19	0,3811	1,34	0,8548

** $p = 0,01$

* $p = 0,05$

No significant differences in proportions regarding any items were found for the three grades. However, a significant difference was found (at 5% -level) for gender in the proportion on one item (*In which class is the learner that bullies you?*). Furthermore, a significant difference (at 1% -level)

occurred with respect to the same item (*In which class is the learner that bullies you?*) for the two ethnic groups.

The results for the first item, *In which class is the learner that bullies you?*, will be discussed further for gender and ethnicity. The results for both gender and ethnicity are reflected in table 8.

Table 8: Frequency distribution of the two genders as well as two ethnic groups regarding the class the bully is in.

Class	Girls		Boys		White		Black	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
In my class	37	47,4	42	43,8	54	61,4	25	29,1
In different class but same grade	15	19,2	12	12,5	9	10,2	18	20,9
In a higher grade	12	15,4	32	33,3	19	21,6	25	29,1
In a lower grade	1	1,3	2	2,1	0	0,0	3	3,5
In different grades (higher & lower)	13	16,7	8	8,3	6	6,8	15	17,4

Firstly, a greater proportion of girls (19,2%) than boys (12,5%) indicated that they are being bullied by learners from other classes but from the same grade. A greater proportion of girls (16,7%) than boys (8,3%) also indicated that they are being bullied by learners from other grades (both higher and lower). A greater proportion of boys (33,3%) than girls (15,4%) indicated that they were being bullied by a learner in a grade higher than their own. Furthermore, a greater proportion of girls (47,4%) than boys (43,8%) indicated that they are being bullied by learners in their own class. Although very small, a greater proportion of boys (2,1%) than girls (1,3%) indicated that they were bullied by learners in a lower grade than themselves.

A greater proportion of white learners (61,4%) than black learners (29,1%) indicated that they were being bullied by a learner in their own class. Furthermore, a greater proportion of black (20,9%) than white learners (10,2%) indicated that they were being bullied by learners from other classes but from the same grade. Also, a greater proportion of black learners (17,4%) than white learners (6,8%) indicated that they are being bullied by learners from different grades. A greater proportion of black (29,1%) than white learners (21,6%) also indicated that they were being bullied by learners in a higher grade.

Where the bullying takes place

To investigate where the bullying takes place, *only the responses of learners who had indicated that they had been bullied were taken into account*. Table 9 indicates the frequencies and percentages in which bullying take place in different locations.

Table 9: Frequencies and percentages of bullying in specific locations.

Place of bullying / Bullying location		
	<i>f</i>	%
Playground/athletics field (during recess)	141	69,5
Hallways/stairwells	71	35
Class (teacher present)	41	20,2
Class (teacher absent)	77	38,12
Bathroom	25	12,32
Gym class/locker room/shower	25	12,32
Lunch room	26	12,81
On the way to and from school	38	18,72
Bus stop	11	5,42
On school bus	24	11,82

It is clear from the results in table 9 that the most likely location to be bullied in, is the *playground/athletics field (during recess)*, followed by *in class (teacher absent)* and thirdly by *hallways/stairwells*.

The χ^2 -value per bullying location is indicated for the three independent variables in table 10. In the case of a significant value, further investigation follows.

Table 10: Comparison of grade, gender and ethnicity regarding the location where bullying takes place.

Place of bullying / Bullying location	Grade		Gender		Ethnicity	
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Playground/athletic field (during recess)	2,71	0,2570	1,21	0,2714	0,43	0,5118
Hallways/stairwells	4,17	0,1240	1,75	0,1864	0,01	0,9238
Class (teacher present)	17,37**	0,0002	0,18	0,6694	0,83	0,3631
Class (teacher absent)	10,42**	0,0055	6,75**	0,0094	0,001	0,9725
Bathroom	1,31	0,5173	0,44	0,5073	0,38	0,5389
Gym class/locker room/shower	0,30	0,8609	2,31	0,1284	0,04	0,8514
Lunch room	0,33	0,8466	6,59*	0,0103	0,20	0,6549
On the way to and from school	5,07	0,0793	0,26	0,6109	0,57	0,4512
Bus stop	0,81	0,6665	1,49	0,2225	0,90	0,3437
On school bus	1,87	0,3919	3,04	0,0813	0,80	0,3707

** $p = 0,01$

* $p = 0,05$

With respect to grade, significant differences at the 1% -level were found regarding two places where bullying takes place, namely *in class (teacher present)* and *in class (teacher absent)*. As far as gender is concerned, significant differences occurred with reference to *class (teacher absent)* and *lunch room* (at the 1%- and 5%-level of significance respectively), while no significant differences were found with respect to any of the locations for the two ethnic groups.

The significant results regarding grade will now be indicated and discussed.

Table 11: Frequency distribution of the three grades regarding bullying in class when the teacher is present/absent.

In class (teacher present)	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
No	71	94,7	46	67,7	45	75,0
Yes	4	5,3	33	32,2	15	25,0
In class (teacher absent)						
No	57	76,0	38	55,9	30	50,9
Yes	18	24,0	30	44,1	29	49,1

It is clear from the results in table 11 that a greater proportion of both grade five and six learners than grade four learners are being bullied when the teacher is present. As in the case of bullying taking place when the teacher is present, the results reflected in table 11 indicate that a greater proportion of grade five and six than grade four learners are being bullied when the teacher is absent.

The results of the two gender groups regarding bullying in class and lunch room are reflected in table 12.

Table 12: Frequency distribution of the two gender groups regarding bullying in class when the teacher is absent and bullying in the lunch room.

In class (teacher absent)	Girls		Boys	
	f	%	f	%
No	48	52,2	77	70,0
Yes	44	47,8	33	30,0
Lunch room				
No	75	80,7	102	92,7
Yes	18	19,3	8	7,3

A greater proportion of girls (47,8%) than boys (30,0%) indicated that they are being bullied when the teacher is not in the classroom. Although considerably less than what was found when the

teacher was not present, a larger proportion of girls (19,3%) than boys (7,3%) further indicated that they are being bullied in the lunch room.

Finally, it was investigated whether learners who are being bullied do in fact tell someone about it. These results appear in the following paragraph.

Disclosure of bullying

Lastly, it was investigated whether, in terms of the three independent variables, the learners who had in fact been bullied told someone about the incident(s). With regard to grade ($\chi^2 = 3,84; p = 0,1465$) and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 2,65; p = 0,2662$), no significant results were found. However, the results were significant for the gender variable ($\chi^2 = 7,93; p = 0,0049$) as indicated in table 13.

Table 13: Frequency distribution of the two genders regarding the reporting of bullying behaviour.

Told someone about bullying behaviour	Girls		Boys	
	f	%	f	%
No	22	29,0	13	12,3
Yes	54	71,0	93	87,7

Although the majority of girls and boys did indeed tell someone about the bullying behaviour, a greater proportion of boys (87,7%) than girls (71,0%) indicated that they told someone about the incidents.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study was prompted by the void in research findings pertaining to the nature and prevalence of bullying in South African schools. With the bulk of international studies indicating the negative effect that school bullying has on its victims, as well as the long-term effects it has on the bullies, research in this field is crucial to serve as a database for further studies.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and prevalence of school bullying in the intermediate school phase (grades four to six) and to investigate possible grade level, gender and ethnic group differences in this regard.

Overall, the results of this study create a profile of school bullying in South Africa that is to some extent similar to international research findings in this area. It was found that 56,4 percent of

learners indicated that they had been bullied since the beginning of the current academic year. This percentage is higher than those described in international literature as well as in previous South African studies (Craig, Peters, & Konarski, 1999; Dake et al., 2003; Olafsen & Viemrö, 2000; Richter et al., 2000). There are various possible explanations for this high incidence of self-reported victimisation. One of these reasons could pertain to the methodology that was employed to investigate the nature and prevalence of bullying in the sample. This sample consisted only of participants from single-sex schools, which could have led to a higher incidence of reported bullying, as the environment in a single-sex school might be more conducive to bullying than co-educational schools. However, this assumption needs further investigation. Another reason could be that the current study only utilised self-report questionnaires to gather information. There has been a long-standing dispute in the literature regarding the advantages and disadvantages of self-report measures. Some regard self-report measures as being too subjective (Salmivalli, 2002) and lacking any collateral validation, whereas others (Leff et al., 1999) regard peer reports at a young age to be unreliable as young learners are not capable of making accurate observations about the social world around them. Being more egocentric, young learners are more concerned with what happens to themselves. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that learners may be exposed, either directly or indirectly, to the high levels of violence and crime current in South Africa, and therefore exhibit more aggressive and victimising behaviour in schools. In this regard, Farrington (1993) found that violent homes are among the highest risk factors for the development of antisocial behaviour such as bullying. Whatever the reason, the incidence of bullying identified in the current study is higher than international trends, and this necessitates further investigation.

The reported prevalence of bullying in terms of three independent variables, namely grade, gender and ethnicity, was further investigated. No significant differences were found for these variables as measured by self-reports. However, the study yielded a similar trend to that found by Selekmán and Vessey (2004) as well as Seals and Young (2003), whose studies indicated a steady decline in self-reported experiences of bullying with the advancement in grade levels. Furthermore, boys reported being bullied more frequently than girls, although not significantly. Black and white learners reported being bullied to the same extent, which is in agreement with research done by Dake et al. (2003), who found that there were no significant differences in bullying rates among ethnic groups.

By investigating the frequency of bullying in general, 203 learners indicated by means of self-reports that they had experienced some form of bullying. A greater proportion of grade five learners indicated that they had been bullied than grade four and six learners. More alarmingly, the research indicated that 20,6 percent of these grade five learners had reported being bullied *several times a*

week. These findings contrast sharply with two different themes in literature. Selekman and Vessey (2004) and Seals and Young (2003) indicated that the frequency of bullying decreased with age and, subsequently, with grade, whereas Salmivalli (2002) maintained that the decrease in frequency with age was true only for studies using self-report measures. Her study found that peer and teacher reports indicated that the number of identified victims decreased, but the frequency of bullying actually increased with age (grade). It should, however, be noted that the present study employed only self-report measures to obtain data, and therefore the possibility exists that results for these participants could differ when other measures are employed.

Having discovered a very high incidence of bullying in the research sample, the attention of the research was directed to the specific types of bullying, with particular reference to the three independent variables. Significant differences were obtained for both grade and gender for learners reporting being called *mean names, made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way*. In terms of grade level, more grade four than grade five and six learners reported experiencing this type of bullying. Furthermore, and very interestingly, a greater proportion of boys reported that they had experienced this type of bullying than their female counterparts. This is in contrast to traditional studies that have reported that girls are more likely to experience this kind of bullying than boys. Only recently Rys and Bear (1997) found that there were no gender differences in terms of indirect bullying behaviours.

In addition to these findings, the study yielded similar results to those found in the overriding majority of research, that boys (40%) reported experiencing more direct and physical forms of bullying such as being *hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, and locked indoors* than girls (23,9%). The literature suggests that a possible explanation for the higher incidence of this type of bullying among boys could be that they need to establish their dominance within social groups. The easiest way for them to do so is by using physical strength (Baldry & Farrington, 2000).

The study indicated a significant and very important difference in the way in which gender and ethnicity impacted on how learners reported being bullied with regard to *comments about race and colour*. It was found that boys (45,6%) were significantly more subjected to this kind of bullying than girls (31,7%). Secondly, the results indicated that black learners (45,6%) reported being significantly more subjected to bullying that involved *comments about race and colour*. A possible explanation for the latter significant difference could be that racism within the schools that were tested still exists, and therefore learners of different ethnic backgrounds still experience racist

bullying. These results should serve as an indication to the schools involved in the study, that racist bullying within the respective schools has not yet been eradicated.

Research indicates a strong link between bully victimisation and poor academic performance, poor social adjustment and poor psychological well being. The negative consequences of school bullying affect all victims and, therefore, further research on this topic should be conducted in South Africa. The high prevalence of bullying also serves as a warning to school educators that their bullying prevention strategies might not be as effective as hoped.

In view of these findings, it would have been unthinkable not to investigate the identity of the perpetrators of the bullying. It should be noted that only the responses of the learners in grades four, five and six who reported that they had been bullied since the beginning of the academic year were taken into account for further investigation. The results indicated that the greatest proportion of learners (both boys and girls) reported being bullied by learners in their own classes. A possible explanation for this finding could be that, because learners are in closer proximity to one another in class, there is greater opportunity for them to engage in bullying. However, more boys than girls reported being bullied by learners in a higher grade. This could be because research has often found male bullies to be physically bigger and stronger than their peers. These bullies tend to have a high need to dominate others and therefore bully children that are smaller, younger and weaker (Olweus, 1993). However, the study found that girls were more likely to be bullied by learners from the same grade (different class) or by learners in different grades (both higher and lower) than boys were.

Despite the fact that both black and white learners reported being bullied most frequently by learners in either the same class or a higher grade, a greater proportion of white learners than black learners reported being bullied by learners in the same class. As was the case with gender, the same phenomenon may be explained by learners being in closer proximity and, therefore, there being greater opportunity for bullying to take place. The black learners reported being bullied to the same extent by learners in the same class as learners from higher grades. However, a greater proportion of black than white learners reported being bullied by learners from higher grades. This phenomenon calls for further investigation.

The findings of the present study are consistent with the literature indicating that bullies tend to bully their victims most on the playground, followed by the classroom (Wolke et al, 2001; Smith & Shu, 2000; Seals & Young, 2003). It was further found that a greater proportion of grade five and six than grade four learners reported being bullied in class – both while the teachers were present and in their absence. A possible hypothesis for this result may be that younger children are more

intimidated by the classroom environment than the older children in higher grades. Furthermore, girls reported being bullied more frequently in the classroom while the teacher was absent and in the lunchroom than their male counterparts.

Finally, 80,8 percent of students that reported being bullied disclosed the incident(s). A significantly greater proportion of boys than girls reported being bullied. This may possibly be because boys had reported a higher frequency of exposure to bullying than their female counterparts. The higher incidence of bullying amongst male learners may therefore be the reason for higher frequencies in disclosure. Although the percentages are quite high for both genders, the reported incidents of bullying in the intermediate school phase are numerous, which could be an indication that those people who are told about the bullying either do not intervene, or their intervention strategies do not work.

A limitation to the study was that the research sample consisted only of single-sex school participants. Thus the effect that boys and girls would have on one another in a co-educational school, in terms of the nature and prevalence of bullying in the intermediate school phase, could not be determined. Furthermore, due to the size and language of education of the research sample, it was impossible to extrapolate these findings to the greater South African population. The fact that only a self-report measure was used to obtain data further limited generalisations and comparisons with other research.

In conclusion, most of the findings of the present study were similar or somewhat similar to international literature regarding the topic of bullying. However, some of the findings were in sharp contrast to what has been found elsewhere in the world, and should be taken note of. These results should, however, serve as a foundation for future studies on bullying in South Africa. The current study has contributed to the under-explored field of school bullying in a South African context. The findings may be employed as base-line data for future research in the field. They could also serve as supplementary information for psychologists, school counsellors and teachers to assist them in understanding the problems learners may experience at school. Finally, they may also be used to construct and/or adjust programmes aimed at reducing and preventing school bullying to lessen the deleterious effects of bullying on the learners' school careers, both of the bullies and their victims.

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