

**THE ROLE OF SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND CLASSROOM PEER RELATIONS IN SESOTHO
SPEAKING HIV/AIDS ORPHANS**

By

Amanda De Gouveia

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Supervisor: Dr R.B.I. Beukes

Co-supervisor: Prof K.G.F. Esterhuyse

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation hereby handed in for the M.A. Psychology degree at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at/in another university/faculty.

I further concede copyright to the University of the Free State.

Amanda De Gouveia

Bloemfontein

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Article 1

The relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations in Sesotho speaking
HIV/AIDS orphans

Amanda De Gouveia

University of the Free State

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Abstract

It is estimated that at present there are 4.253 million orphans in South Africa, comprising 23% of children in this country. In the Free State, 27% of the province's children are orphaned. At the commencement of this study it was estimated that there were 3.95 million orphans in South Africa, comprising 21% of children in this country, while 26% of children in the Free State children were orphaned. From these statistics it is apparent that South Africa is still experiencing an ever increasing magnitude of orphans, all of whom must be absorbed within the school system. Despite many developmental risk factors associated with orphan-hood in South Africa, a study among primary school HIV/AIDS orphans in Mangaung in the Free State, found high scores of positive development and normal childhood functioning, namely pro-social behaviour and good classroom peer relations. Data analysis of the raw scores, by means of the Pearson product moment correlation, established a coefficient of 0.291 on the 1% level of significance between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations in a sample of 234 Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans. This outcome is in line with international studies, but is noteworthy within the South African childhood context of HIV/AIDS and poverty, where the risk factors that potentially compromise developmental outcomes for HIV/AIDS orphans are rampant and robust.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, orphans, poverty, middle childhood, classroom, pro-social behaviour, peer relations, protective factors, positive psychology, South Africa.

Abstrak

Tans word beraam dat ongeveer 4.253 miljoen weeskinders in Suid-Afrika is, wat 23% van die totale kinderspopulasie uitmaak. In die Vrystaat is 27% van die provinsie se kinders wees. By die

aanvang van hierdie studie is bereken dat daar 3.95 miljoen weeskinders in Suid-Afrika was, wat 21% van die land se kinderpopulasie uitgemaak het. In die Vrystaat was 26% van die kinders wees. Hierdie syfers dui daarop dat Suid-Afrika steeds 'n toenemende groei in die aantal weeskinders ondervind wat almal mettertyd in die skoolstelsel opgeneem moet word. Ten spyte van vele risiko faktore ten opsigte van optimal ontwikkeling vir weeskinders in Suid-Afrika, toon 'n studie onder laerskool MIV/VIGS weeskinders in Mangaung in die Vrystaat, die teenwoordigheid van positiewe ontwikkeling en normale kindergedrag, naamlik pro-sosiale optrede and goeie portuurverhoudinge in die klaskamer. Die verband tussen die 234 Sesotho MIV/VIGS weeskinders se telling rakende pro-sosiale optrede en portuurverhoudinge in die klaskamer is met behulp van Pearson se produkmomentkorrelasiekoëffisiënt bereken. 'n Koëffisiënt van 0.291, wat op die 1% - peil beduidend is, is verkry. Hierdie bevinding is in lyn met internasionale studies. Gesien in die konteks van die Suid-Afrikaanse kinderlewe van MIV/VIGS en armoede, en die gepaardgaande risiko faktore wat MIV/VIGS wesies se ontwikkeling negatief kan beïnvloed, is hierdie 'n noemenswaardige bevinding.

Sleutelwoorde: MIV/VIGS, weeskinders, armoede, middel kinderjare, klaskamer, pro-sosiale optrede, portuurverhoudinge, beskermingsfaktore, positiewe sielkunde, Suid-Afrika.

It is estimated that at present there are 4.253 million orphans in South Africa, comprising 23% of children in this country. In the Free State, 27% of the province's children are orphaned (Meintjies & Hall, 2011). Within the South African context, numerous factors contribute towards vulnerability among orphans. These include poverty, silence and fear around HIV/AIDS; the diminishing capacity of existing households to care for orphans that is forcing boys into crime and girls into survival sex; substance abuse by both carers and children; overcrowding; the potential for neglect and abuse, as well as a lack of basic necessities for a child, such as school uniforms, regular meals and individual care. These factors contribute towards vulnerability in children because they overlap and compound, thereby becoming an obstacle for children in the development of coping strategies (Skinner & Davids, 2006).

There are also particular South African cultural norms to consider. Talking about death and dying with children is considered a cultural taboo. In her study regarding death and dying in the context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, Marcus (1999, p.29) quoted one of the research participants as saying: "We don't discuss death with children. It is only us elderly who talk about it", while another participant succinctly acknowledged that: "It is better for a child to see for itself when the coffin arrives what is going on, rather than to tell her that her mother is dying". The emotional distress and anxiety that are suffered by these children may therefore never be addressed. Conditions conducive to resolving the trauma of losing a parent via dialogue are not created, as the child cannot openly discuss his/her loss and may never find psychological closure. This already existing trauma is aggravated by the social isolation, bullying and shame caused by the stigma and secrecy that still surrounds an AIDS death in South Africa (Cluver & Gardner, 2006).

Some children, however, seem to cope despite growing up within the adverse conditions brought about by the context of HIV/AIDS and poverty (Pienaar, 2007). Preliminary findings, from a study currently being conducted by the University of Houston, Texas, in Mangaung township, Bloemfontein, regarding psychological functioning among orphans and vulnerable children aged 7 to 11 years, show moderate to high scores of behaviours that indicate normal childhood functioning. These include engaging in pro-social behaviour and having good classroom peer relations (Sharp et al., 2012).

The aim of this study is therefore to investigate the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations among the above sample of HIV/AIDS orphans within the South African childhood context of HIV/AIDS, poverty and an increasing magnitude of orphans in the school system. The main variables for this research are pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations.

Pro-social behaviour

Weir and Duveen (1981, p.357) define pro-social behaviour as “an umbrella term for a number of interpersonal behaviours (e.g. helping, sharing, giving, co-operating, responding to distress) whose common theme is concern for others”. Hay (1994) defines the construct as any action that benefits others and/or promotes harmonious relationships with others. These seminal definitions are still relevant today and are underscored by Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy and Shepard (2005), who note that pro-social behaviour is valued by most cultures, as it enhances harmonious human relationships. Taylor, Peplau and Sears (2006) write that pro-social behaviour is distinct from altruism, with the latter being defined as helping behaviour without

any expectation of reward, while pro-social behaviour is defined as a broader concept that includes any helping behaviour, irrespective of the helper's motivation.

Research among non-Western cultures found pro-social behaviour to be mediated by the cultural context and social environment (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). It has been noted that certain characteristics are shared by cultures that score high on pro-social behaviour. Common characteristics among such cultures include living together in extended families, women contributing extensively toward the family financial status, work being less specialized and government being less centralized. Within these cultures children are assigned chores at an early age, share the responsibility for family welfare, and group acknowledgement was found to be prevalent within the classroom context (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

The quality of children's moral reasoning and subsequent motivation for pro-social behaviour are facilitated by the cultural norms of the social context. Endogenous motivation for pro-social action was found to be highly valued among Western cultures, while traditional cultures value motivation based on other-orientated needs and reciprocal obligation (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Pro-social behaviour is also motivated by emotional responses such as empathy and sympathy (Eisenberg, Eggum, & Di Giunta, 2010). In their meta-analysis regarding pro-social behaviour and positive development in schools, Spinrad and Eisenberg (2009) write that pro-social behaviour among children increases as they grow older. This can be attributed to perspective taking skills that improve as children progress in their development, not only in

chronological age, but also in cognitive maturity, which in turn augment other-orientated awareness, empathy and sympathy. Children who are reported to be more skilled in emotional perspective taking are also reported by teachers to elicit more pro-social responses from their peers (Cassidy, Werner, Rourke, & Zubernis, 2003). Pro-social behaviour is a social skill and research found that children who engage in such behaviour tend to have thriving peer relations. These children are reported to be more popular and sociable (Wentzel, 2003), as well as being involved in more supportive peer relationships (Sebanc, 2003; Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2009). They respond to social problems with more constructive solutions when compared to their less pro-social peers and they show greater awareness of the possible consequences of their actions (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). Externalising behaviour such as aggression and bullying are negatively associated with pro-social behaviour (Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003; Peters, Cillessen, Riksen-Walraven, & Haselager, 2010; Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2009).

The significance of pro-social behaviour during middle childhood cannot be underestimated, as this attribute is associated with successful outcomes in many components of a regular day at school. Learners who display well developed pro-social skills tend to receive better helping responses from teachers, as they are perceived to be more cooperative and well behaved in the classroom (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2009). Pro-social behaviour among learners is associated with a succession of desired outcomes within the school context including academic-, social- and self regulatory efficacy (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001); emergent language and reading skills (Doctoroff, Greer, & Arnold, 2006); literacy achievement (Miles & Stipek, 2006), as well as peer social preference and academic marks (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000).

The next section will explore peer relations within the context of middle childhood.

Peer relations

Peer relations are an important part of childhood and have particular significance during middle childhood, which is a period of transition from early childhood to adolescence. During this period children's social needs change accordingly; from the need for peer acceptance at the beginning of middle childhood to the intimate dyadic friendships of pre-adolescence (Nangle, Erdley, Newman, Mason, & Carpenter, 2003). Successful peer relations enhance interpersonal competence and directly affect long-term outcomes in adulthood, while poor peer relations have implications for later life social problems and deviance (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). Peer relations are influenced by factors such as peer acceptance, rejection, victimization and friendship.

Peer acceptance. As one of the developmental milestones of middle childhood, positive peer experiences have been transactionally linked to other developmental tasks. Véronneau, Vitaro, Brendgen, Dishion and Tremblay (2010) found academic achievement to be a predictor of peer acceptance. Peer acceptance during middle childhood also facilitates pro-social behaviour. Criss, Shaw, Moilanen, Hitchings and Ingoldsby (2009) found peer relationships to have a stronger influence on social skills when compared to family factors. Kingery and Erdley (2007) noted that once peer acceptance has been established, it tends to be stable over time. Their study found that peer acceptance uniquely predicted loneliness and school involvement. Peer acceptance can mediate the relationship between early childhood adverse family circumstances and the risk of later externalizing behaviour (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002).

Peer rejection. Strained peer relations cause emotional distress and have a cascade effect on learners' psychological well-being and developmental outcomes, which is already evident at the kindergarten stage. A Dutch study found conduct problems and internalizing problems to be linked via the experience of peer rejection. As peer rejection was found to be stable over the two years of the study, they concluded that "children receive their social position swiftly and, once poorly accepted, remain poorly accepted by peers, implying that chronic peer rejection may emerge early in life" (Gooren, Van Lier, Stegge, Terwogt, & Koot, 2011, p. 251). This draws attention to an earlier longitudinal study which found the continuity of poor peer experiences, such as rejection, victimization and friendlessness, to serve as a "cross-over" mechanism between initial externalizing problems and later internalizing problems (Van Lier & Koot, 2010). These findings underscore a study that found that early disruptive behaviour and early social withdrawal at ages 6 to 7 years were linked to early adolescent loneliness via the path of peer rejection during the middle childhood years of 8 to 11 (Pederson, Vitaro, Barker, & Borge, 2007). Klima and Repetti (2008) observed that low levels of peer acceptance preceded later internalizing problems, while externalizing problems increased as time progressed. Véronneau et al. (2010) found a reciprocal link between peer rejection and low academic achievement, with the latter predicting initial peer rejection, which in turn predicted a later decrease in academic outcomes.

Peer victimisation. Maltreatment, bullying, abuse and exclusion are salient expressions of children's dislike towards a peer and are precursors of declining academic achievement, deteriorating classroom participation and eventual school disengagement (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Such outcomes are also reflected within the South African context. A study among high

school learners in Cape Town found that learners, who reported bullying victimization at the beginning of the study, were also likely to have dropped out of school by the end of the study. It was noted that 43% of girls who dropped out were bullied, while 57% of the drop-out boys were exposed to bullying victimization (Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008).

Greeff and Grobler (2008) found that 56% of a sample of Bloemfontein primary school learners reported bullying experiences. This prevalence rate was higher than in other international studies and equally pervasive among both black and white learners. These results underscore an earlier study among high school learners in Bloemfontein in which 49% and 69% of boys reported being victims of physical and verbal forms of peer abuse respectively. In stark contrast, 18% of girls reported being physically abused. However, verbal abuse was more prevalent among girls, at 73% (De Wet, 2005).

Friendship. An American study that explored the interaction between peer relations and academic achievement during middle childhood found that low academic achievement predicted depressive symptoms among learners who had few friends, when compared to their peers who had low grade point averages, but reported having many friends (Schwartz, Gorman, Duong, & Nakamoto, 2008). Learners with few friends reported depressive symptoms when they also had low academic achievement, but not when they had numerous friends. This study concluded that competencies in one domain of development can act as a buffer against adversity in another domain and that success in either domain protects against possible vulnerability, such as symptoms of depression. On the other hand, Kingery and Erdley (2007) found that during the transition period to early adolescence, the quality of friendship correlates with school involvement more so than the number of friends. Pederson et al. (2007) reported that peer

rejection facilitates later friendships or the lack thereof. They proposed that when rejected children are socially excluded by peers, they do not have access to opportunities that hone the interpersonal skills required for making friends, thereby maintaining a chronic pattern of rejection perpetuating rejection and friendlessness perpetuating friendlessness.

Taking the above description into account, it is apparent that positive peer relations are more than a developmental milestone of middle childhood; it is a resource that fortifies resilience. Flourishing peer relations culminate in the fulfilment of one of the most basic human needs, namely the need for love and belonging, and in the domain of childhood development – the need to care and be cared for.

The subsequent section investigates the theoretical relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations.

The theoretical relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations

In their meta-analysis regarding the development of pro-social behaviour in children, Eisenberg et al. (2006) found that peer relations provide children with the opportunity to engage in concern for others and in turn experience concern from others.

Pro-social behaviour may be founded in the milieu of home and the parent-child-sibling relationship, but peers provide the context for refining this attribute. Eisenberg et al. (2006) write that there are differences in the children's motivation when responding to the needs of adults and peers. When considering the requests of adults, young children tend to be motivated by authority

and the prospect of punishment. However, when considering the requests of peers, motivation is based on the nature of the peer relationship, with qualities such as friendship and liking being taken into account. As they grow older, children's motivation for pro-social behaviour towards adults evolves on a continuum from mere compliance to actual concern. Eisenberg et al. (2006) note that this gradual development of concern towards adults and individuals outside the immediate family, may be facilitated by the other-orientated context of peer relations. Peers potentially serve as models of pro-social behaviour, as well as to reinforce and motivate pro-social behaviour (Barry & Wentzel, 2006). In a succinct illustration of the proverbial "birds of a feather flock together", researchers noted a phenomenon referred to as pro-social segregation. They found that children with respective high and low scores of pro-social behaviour rarely interact (Eisenberg et al., 2006). However, it was also found that children with low levels of pro-social behaviour become increasingly more pro-social as they are exposed to peers with high pro-social tendencies.

It is essential to conceptualise these variables (pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations) against the background of middle childhood within the South African context.

Middle childhood, HIV/AIDS and poverty within the South African context

According to Erikson (Sigelman & Rider, 2009), middle childhood - the time when South African children find themselves in primary school - is the time of keeping up with peers. Middle childhood is the development stage at which children need to resolve the psychosocial conflict between industry and inferiority. During this time, they need to acquire a sense of industry by mastering important social and academic skills within the school context. Cordial interpersonal

relationships at school are therefore an indication that a learner is successfully navigating the developmental challenges of middle childhood. Within the current and more relevant context of HIV/AIDS, the Children on the Brink 2004 report (UNAIDS, Unicef, & USAID, 2004 p.16) extends middle childhood developmental tasks to include “continued physical growth; developing understanding of rules and responsibility; developing healthy peer relations and family identity; developing skills for numeracy and literacy; increasing ability to express feelings; improving problem solving skills”. From both a historical, as well as a current perspective of middle childhood development, it is therefore apparent that school and peers facilitate optimum developmental outcomes during this time in children’s development.

It is estimated that there are currently 5.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. This figure constitutes 11% of the population (S.A. Dep. of Health, 2010). Within the South African context, HIV/AIDS is mostly transmitted via heterosexual activity. This phenomenon becomes particularly apparent when one considers the national HIV prevalence rate of 29% among pregnant women within the child bearing demographic of 15 to 49 years old. In the Free State province, this figure is 33% (S.A. Dep. of Health, 2010). The lifespan of a person diagnosed with HIV is 7 to 10 years. It is therefore apparent that young children, who are born and/or raised in a family where one or both parents are HIV positive, will most likely, be orphaned sometime before or during their primary school years. The seminal Children on the Brink Report (USAID, 1997) noted numerous risk factors that may adversely affect developmental outcomes for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. These risk factors include loss of family, depression, malnutrition, no immunization, no access to health care, child labour, no schooling, loss of inheritance, forced migration, homelessness, vagrancy, starvation, crime and

exposure to HIV/AIDS. The Children on the Brink 2004 report (UNAIDS, Unicef, & USAID, 2004, p.16) was extended to include age specific developmental risk factors. With regard to middle childhood development, the following risk factors were noted: “Inappropriate demanding of attention; withdrawal; destructive behaviour to self and others; lack of sense of morality and rules; difficulty learning.”

Within the South African context, Cluver and Gardner (2007) identified various risk factors that specifically impact the psychological well-being of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, thereby resulting in emotional and behavioural difficulties. Factors such as bereavement, harmful care giving, abuse, poverty, school and peer problems, crime, stigma and gossip all compromise the psychological well-being of HIV/AIDS orphans. However, their study also identified a number of protective factors that enhance psychological well-being, such as supportive care giving, supportive friends, attending school, feeling physically safe, as well as “comforting activities” such as sport, homework, library visits, reading, singing, music, dancing and having somebody that they can trust. These “comforting activities” were identified by all parties who participated in the study including children, caregivers and social care professionals. It is immediately apparent that such activities are all facilitated by the context of school and peers.

South African children are among the fortunate ones on the African continent who have their rights protected by the Constitution. However, poverty deprives many children of their most basic childhood rights. The following statistics succinctly underscore the current state of affairs: 64% of children are living in households that are afflicted by income poverty, as measured by a monthly household per capita income of R569.00 (Hall, 2010b); 17% of children live in extreme

poverty, as measured by an income of US\$1 per day (Hall & Wright, 2010); 23% of children are not living with either parent (Hall & Wright, 2010), yet only 2.5% of children receive the Foster Child Grant (Hall, 2010b); 18% of children live in households afflicted by child hunger (Berry, Hall, & Hendricks, 2010); 18% of children aged 1-9 years are afflicted by chronic under-nutrition, as indicated by stunted growth (Berry, Hall, & Hendricks, 2010), and 30% of children live in overcrowded households (Hall, 2010a). All of the above indicators are facilitated by poverty and it is therefore clear that poverty is rife and robust within the South African childhood context.

Growing up in poverty is associated with an abundance of adverse outcomes in all domains of childhood development. Such compromised outcomes are most severe for children who are raised in the context of chronic, long-term poverty (Brooks-Gunn, & Duncan, 1997). Extensive, national surveys in the United States of America during the 1980s show that such children are more likely to suffer stunted physical growth, have lower IQ scores, be afflicted with learning disabilities such as difficulty with reading, writing and mathematics, repeat grades, be expelled or suspended from school, have low school achievement scores, display more externalizing behavioural problems such as hyperactivity, headstrong behaviour and peer conflict, as well as display more internalizing problems such as dependence and anxiety (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). From their study it is evident that chronic childhood poverty negatively impacts on two significant domains of middle childhood development, namely school and peers.

From the above literature it is clear that HIV/AIDS and poverty are significant risk factors that can compromise childhood development. However, the literature also illustrates the potential

of the school context as a protective factor. Pro-social behaviour and positive peer relations within the classroom environment can protect against vulnerability and these protective qualities should therefore be explored, nurtured and encouraged within the South African context of HIV/AIDS, poverty and an increasing magnitude of orphans within the school system. Previous research has long established the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations (Criss et al., 2009; Hay, 1994; Ladd, 1999). However, this relationship has not yet been investigated within the South African context of HIV/AIDS, poverty and an ever growing number of orphans in the school system – a demographic group much in need of the protective qualities of pro-social behaviour and positive peer relations.

In terms of the aim of this study, the following research question can be asked:

Is there a relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations among HIV/AIDS orphans, aged 7 to 11 years?

To answer this question, the following method was used.

Method

Sample

For the purpose of the following study, 234 HIV/AIDS orphans were purposively selected from the original sample of orphans. This final sample consisted of 116 boys and 118 girls, with an average age of 9.12 years and a standard deviation of 1.2 years. The sampling process was facilitated by several NGO's who deliver services in the area, such as distributing food parcels, providing after school care and referrals to social workers.

Fieldworkers explained the purpose of the study to the care givers in Sesotho and enquired whether they wished to participate in the research. Those care givers who agreed to participate in the study were also asked for consent for the orphan in their care to participate in the study, as well as for consent to contact the orphan's class teacher for participation.

Ethical considerations

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of the Free State. The ETOVS number is 05/2010. Informed and written consent (in Sesotho) was obtained from care givers who agreed to participate in the study. This includes consent for the orphan to participate in the study, as well as consent that the child's class teacher may be asked to participate in the study.

Procedure for data collection

In order to collect the data for this study, four fieldworkers contacted and met with 187 teachers from 35 primary schools in the Mangaung area. Teachers were asked to complete the SDQT4-16 measuring instrument (Goodman, 1999, 2001, 2005) pertaining to the 234 respective HIV/AIDS orphans who were in their classes at school. Data was collected over a 20 month time period from September 2010 to April 2012.

Measuring instrument

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1999, 2001, 2005). The design of the first *Pro-social Behaviour Questionnaire* (PBQ) (Weir, Stevenson, & Graham, 1980) was facilitated by the naturally occurring classroom behaviour of 8 year old learners, as observed and

reported by their teachers. Attention was paid to actions such as being helpful, generous, considerate and cooperative. The development of this questionnaire reflected the shift in focus from psychology as a domain of pathology to a domain that includes positive functioning and individual strengths.

This need for a more holistic approach to child behaviour led Goodman (1994) to augment Rutter's original *Children's Behaviour Questionnaire* (1967), which focussed on children's difficulties, with the PBQ of Weir et al. The amalgamation of these two assessments was modified by means of factor analysis, thereby creating the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire*.

In order to obtain measurements on pro-social behaviour and peer relations, the Pro-Social Behaviour and Peer Problems sub scales of the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire T4-16* (SDQ) were used. Both sub scales consist of five questions (see Annexure A) that are measured on a 3-point Likert scale, namely "Not true", "Somewhat true" and "Pretty much true". Internal consistency and retest reliability have been established as 0.81 and 0.73 respectively for measures completed by teachers (Goodman, 2001).

For the measure of pro-social behaviour, the sample group had high total scores on all five questions, which are indicative of optimum levels of pro-social behaviour, as all five questions measure desired components of pro-social behaviour such as being caring of others' feelings, sharing, being helpful, being kind to little children and volunteering to help out. Table 1 shows

that for the sub scale of pro-social behaviour 36.3% and 51.7% of the sample group scored “*Somewhat true*” and “*Certainly true*” respectively, while 12.0% scored “*Not true*”.

Table 1: Total scores for pro-social behaviour

	n	%
Not true	28	12.0
Somewhat true	8536.3	
Certainly true	121	51.7
Total	234	100.0

The sub scale of classroom peer relation also shows high total scores of desired behaviours such as having a good friend and being popular, while low total scores of negative peer relations such as being solitary, being bullied and being best with adults, were measured. The total scores for classroom peer relationships are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Total scores for classroom peer relations

	Peer – solitary n %	Peer - has a good friend n %	Peer – popular n %	Peer – bullied n %	Peer - best with adults n %
Not true	168 71.8	49 20.9	14 6.0	146 62.4	9239.3
Somewhat true	39 16.7	47 20.1	58 24.8	54 23.1	97 41.5
Certainly true	27 11.5	138 59.0	162 69.2	3414.5	45 19.2

Total	234	100.0	234	100.0	234	100.0	234	100.0	234	100.0
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From Table 1 and Table 2 it is clear that the sample group had high total scores of positive functioning for both the variables of pro-social behaviour and peer relations. For the purpose of this study, raw scores instead of standardised scores were used for both the variables of pro-social behaviour and class room peer relations.

Statistical procedure

A correlation design was used to investigate the research question. The relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations in the sample of 234 HIV/AIDS orphans was calculated by means of the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient.

A correlation coefficient of $r_{(232)} = .291, p < .01$ was obtained. This outcome points towards a relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations in Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans aged 7 to 11 years old and this relationship is significant on the 1% level.

Discussion of results

The above outcome is in line with previous studies which found a relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations among school children, such as Hay (1994), who found that pro-social children make friends more easily and Ladd (1999) who noted that pro-social behaviour is linked to social competence and therefore, by extension, it is linked to peer relations. These studies are all underscored by Criss et al., (2009) who found peer relations to be

a predictor of social skills, while peer group acceptance was found to be a predictor of pro-social behaviour.

The outcome of the current study becomes profound when the socio-economic context of the sample group is considered. A demographic group, notorious for being highly susceptible to the developmental risk factors associated with the context of HIV/AIDS and poverty, displayed behavioural traits associated with children who are less exposed to adversity, children raised in amore fortunate socio-economic context; indeed traits associated with children who are growing up in a regular, nurturing environment.

A probable explanation could be provided by the cultural context of the orphans. Eisenberg et al. (2006) found that cultural norms can facilitate pro-social behaviour. The traditionally collectivist culture of the Sesotho speaking population could therefore be a platform that motivates other-orientated behaviour and pro-social actions. In turn, pro-social behaviour facilitates sociability and thriving peer relations (Wentzel, 2003). Pro-social behaviour can therefore be transactional, not only in a child being an eminent friend, but also in a child making eminent friends. On the other hand, good peer relations facilitate improved social skills such as pro-social behaviour (Criss et al., 2009). This rationalization is in line with a correlation design, where the determined relationship between variables is associated, while causality is ambiguous (Salkind, 2008).

Limitations

This study was based on a single point in time correlation design. The sample was therefore tested once for scores on the two variables of pro-social behaviour and class room peer relations.

However, middle childhood is a dynamic development phase characterised by steady growth, and the refinement of motor skills, cognitive skills, as well as social skills (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Children begin to nurture relationships beyond the one with their primary caregiver and outside the realm of the immediate family. It is also the time when gender differences in development start to emerge, with boys travelling in packs and girls preferring dyads (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). A longitudinal design, in which data was collected at different intervals during the development phase of the sample group, may have been more appropriate to investigate the dynamic nature and emerging gender differences of middle childhood development, particularly with regard to the development of social relationships.

Suggestions

In his overview of pro-social development from infancy to childhood, Hay (1994, p.63) wrote that “the contribution of children’s close personal relationships, particularly their attachment relationships and close friendships, to pro-social behaviours, deserves increased attention”. This view was expressed in a time before the HIV/AIDS orphan phenomenon came to the world’s collective attention.

In light of the continuous and consistently bleak outcomes reported for these children, constructs that facilitate belonging, emotional well-being and succour, such as pro-social behaviour and peer relations, deserve more attention. In line with a renewed focus on positive functioning and individual strengths in the domain of psychology, the outcomes of research on “normal” childhood behaviour among samples of children who are growing in the context of socio-economic adversity such as HIV/AIDS, orphan-hood and poverty, should not only be acknowledged and nurtured, but should also be celebrated and embraced.

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Article 2

The role of school connectedness in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations in Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans

Amanda De Gouveia

University of the Free State

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Abstract

Among the many risk factors to be navigated by HIV/AIDS orphans in South Africa, is the risk regarding attainment of educational outcomes. In the South African context, orphans are the demographic group most likely not to complete their education. Yet, there are protective factors that can help orphans to manage some of the risk factors that they face daily. One such a protective factor is school connectedness. A study among a sample of 234 primary school HIV/AIDS orphans, aged 7-11 years, in Mangaung in the Free State, found high scores of school connectedness among the selected sample of learners. Product term regression analysis of the data shows that school connectedness plays a moderator role in a previously established relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations among the same sample of orphaned learners. This study concludes that there is indeed a need to foster and research school connectedness among orphans and other vulnerable children in South African schools, as the protective qualities of this construct could counteract some of the risk factors regarding educational outcomes, not only for HIV/AIDS orphans, but for all children growing up in the context of adversity.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, orphans, poverty, middle childhood, school connectedness, pro-social behaviour, peer relations, protective factors, positive psychology, South Africa.

Abstrak

Onder die vele risiko faktore wat MIV/VIGS weeskinders in Suid-Afrika ondervind, is die bereiking van bepaalde onderwys uitkomst. In die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks is weeskinders die groep met die grootste risiko om nie hulle skoolopleiding te voltooi nie. Daar is egter

beskermingsfaktore wat weeskinders kan help om die daaglikse risiko faktore te oorkom. Een so 'n beskermingsfaktor is skoolverbondenheid. 'n Studie onder 'n groep van 234 HIV/VIGS weeskinders, ouderdom 7-11 jaar, in Mangaung in die Vrystaat, toon hoë tellings van skoolverbondenheid onder die groep kinders aan. Die resultate van 'n produktermregressie-ontleding toon aan dat skoolverbondenheid as 'n moderator in die reeds bestaande verband tussen pro-sosiale optrede en klaskamer portuurverhoudinge onder dié groep leerders, geïdentifiseer kon word. 'n Uitvloeisel van hierdie studie is om die belang van skoolverbondenheid onder weeskinders en ander kwesbare kinders in SuidAfrika verder te bevorder en na te vors. Die beskermingskwaliteite van skoolverbondenheid kan die risiko fakore ten opsigte van skoolopleiding teëwerk. Dit is nie slegs van toepassing op HIV/VIGS weeskinders nie, maar op alle kinders wie binne ongunstige omstandighede groot word.

Slutelwoorde: HIV/VIGS, weeskinders, armoede, middle kinderjare, skoolverbondenheid, pro-sosiale optrede, portuurverhoudinge, beskermingsfaktore, positiewe sielkunde, Suid-Afrika.

“There is nothing more central to positive psychology than positive development, and schools are the major societal organisations that guide this development” (Diener & Diener, 2009, p. xii). A statement such as this is particularly profound within the South African context of HIV/AIDS, poverty and a growing number of orphans in the school system; where the list of risk factors influencing optimum childhood development for HIV/AIDS orphans is as long as the proverbial arm; and where HIV/AIDS orphans are more likely than any other population group to forfeit their school education (Ardington & Leibbrandt, 2010). According to the Department of Basic Education, more than 110 000 children, from the compulsory school-going age group of 7 to 15 years old, did not attend school in 2011 (Govender, 2012). The Department reported that this problem was particularly linked to issues such as poverty and children being orphaned. The children themselves were more articulate and mentioned outstanding school fees and being teased by peers, as some of the reasons for not returning to school.

The themes of poverty, risk to educational outcomes and victimisation associated with the stigma of HIV/AIDS are reported in studies regarding HIV/AIDS orphans (Jamieson, Bray, Viviers, Lake, Pendlebury, & Smith, 2011; Kibel, Lake, Pendlebury, & Smith, 2010). It therefore becomes apparent that there is a need for some measure of restorative justice within the South African school system, particularly for learners from the adverse socio-economic environment of HIV/AIDS and poverty.

School connectedness is a concept that has been linked to restorative justice within the school system, as connectedness to the school community could more effectively address systemic power imbalances between learners (Morrison, 2005). Morrison advocates that

restorative justice in schools means “empowerment through building relationships”. By extension, school connectedness could therefore also address issues within South African schools, such as the HIV/AIDS stigma, socio-economic inequality due to poverty and the associated risk to educational outcomes.

Australia and the United States of America have addressed the issue of school connectedness by means of extensive research, as well as the introduction of intervention programmes that enhance connectedness within the school milieu. See in this regard the Gatehouse project in Australia (Bond, Glover, Godfrey, Butler, & Patton, 2001; Bond, Patton, Glover, Carlin, Butler, Thomas, & Bowes, 2004; Patton, Glover, Bond, Butler, Godfrey, Di Pietro, & Bowes, 2000;) the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the USA (Resnick et al., 1997; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002), and the California Healthy Kids Survey (Hanson & Kim, 2007).

This study investigates the role of school connectedness in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations within the South African school system, among Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans, between the ages of 7 and 11. The main variables for this study are therefore school connectedness, pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations.

School connectedness (MV)

The Wingspread Declaration (2004) states that school connectedness is the belief of learners that adults in the school care about their learning, as well as about them as individuals. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centres for Disease Control and

Prevention (2009) extended this definition to include school-ground relationships with adults, as well as with peers. Resnick et al. (1997) follow a holistic approach and include the outcome of an individual's interaction with the school environment in their description of school connectedness, while Rowe, Stewart and Patterson (2007) view school connectedness as a form of social capital that encompasses the level of cohesiveness between different social groups in the learner's life, such as the bonds between students, family and school staff. Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming and Hawkins (2004) hold that school connectedness derives from control theory and divide it into the two components of attachment and commitment. Thompson, Iachan, Overpeck, Ross and Gross (2006) use indicators such as liking school, a sense of belonging and positive relations with teachers and friends, in their definition. Their outlook is in line with McNeely and Falci (2004), who emphasise the dimensions of teacher support and social belonging, and Libbey (2004), who defines it as a student's relationship to school. From the above descriptions it is clear that school connectedness denotes many things to many people. However, the common denominator is salient: like peer relations, school connectedness is deeply rooted in the most basic human need - that is the need to belong.

Children's lives are embedded within the family, the school and the community. These frameworks unavoidably expose them to multiple developmental risks. A number of studies underscore the protective qualities of school connectedness as a buffer against a number of risk factors that learners inevitably encounter during the different stages of childhood development.

Most studies regarding school connectedness have focused on outcomes for adolescents. The seminal National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the USA (Resnick et al., 1997)

found school connectedness to be a protective factor against the four main domains of adolescent health risk behaviours, namely emotional distress and suicidality, involvement in violence, substance abuse and sexual disbehaviours. The outcomes of Resnick's study were underscored by the findings of McNeely and Falci (2004). During adolescence, high levels of school connectedness can ameliorate the impact of poor family relations, such as a lack of trust or togetherness (Loukas, Roalson, & Herrera, 2010). School connectedness can also solve the development of conduct problems (Loukas, Roalson, & Herrera, 2010; Loukas, Ripperger-Suhler, & Horton, 2009; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Wilson 2004); encourage more productive coping strategies, and a sense of well-being (Frydenburg, Care, Freeman, & Chan, 2009). There is a relationship between school connectedness and academic achievement (Battistich et al., 2004). Learners, who have high scores of school connectedness, have reported fewer experiences of victimisation at school (Battistich et al., 2004; You, Furlong, Felix, Sharkey &, Tanigwa, 2008; Wilson, 2004). School connectedness has also been reported to correlate with positive mental health outcomes (Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006).

Research regarding school connectedness in South Africa is limited; however, outcomes of studies by Peltzer (2003) and Naser (2007) are similar to international studies and underscore the protective qualities of the construct in South African schools. School connectedness mediated health risk behaviours (Peltzer, 2003) and peer victimisation (Naser, 2007). Both studies included both black and white learners and therefore accommodated the multicultural South African education system.

Not many studies have investigated school connectedness during middle childhood. Rice, Kang, Weaver, & Howell (2008) hold that school connectedness during middle childhood can be associated with coping resources like social confidence and behaviour control. They also report that school connectedness was negatively correlated with perceived stress, trait anger and anger-out anger expression. One study of pre-adolescents is that of Svavarsdottir (2008), who found that learners who reported bullying victimization also reported lower school connectedness (Svavarsdottir, 2008). School connectedness has also been significantly associated with perceived health related quality of life (HRQOL) among American elementary school learners (Mansour, Kotagal, Rose, Ho, Brewer, Roy-Chaudhury, ... DeWitt, 2003). The outcome of this study is noteworthy as HRQOL included a psychosocial subscale that measured self-reported emotional, social and school functioning.

The combination of social connectedness with peers and school connectedness is associated with optimum later life outcomes for learners, including a higher probability of completing school and a lowered risk for substance use and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Bond et al., 2007).

The protective qualities of school connectedness are embedded in children's functioning on an internal level, which is measured by their subjective feelings towards school (Resnick et al., 1997; McNeely et al., 2002). It is also embedded on an external level, which is measured by their experience of support from adults/teachers in the school (Hanson & Kim, 2007).

The internal scale of school connectedness and the way children feel about school, encompasses two major protective factors for school-going children, namely caring and connectedness (Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993). Feeling connected to school supersedes family connectedness as a protective factor against acting out behaviour among school-going children. Resnick et al. (1993) propose that this is due to the fact that schools provide children with a unique sense of belonging, as it allows opportunities for mastering new and diverse competencies such as work-study, technical skills, arts and culture and sports. For children from a background of HIV/AIDS and poverty, a school can therefore be a place where they can function and flourish, unencumbered by the burden of an adverse socio-economic home environment.

The external scale of school connectedness and the experience of adult/teacher support is a measure of a child's environmental assets (Hanson & Kim, 2007). The experience of adult/teacher support in school provides a child with the protective qualities of a caring relationship, accompanied by the high expectations of someone who wants the best for the child (Hanson & Kim, 2007). Such systems of support and opportunity are linked to the development of resilience in children (WestEd, 2011).

It can be concluded that school connectedness is a pivotal mechanism for accommodating the developmental needs of children within the school social system, as the protective qualities of this construct promote resilience and counteract potential vulnerability. It is particularly significant in the South African context of poverty, HIV/AIDS and an increasing number of orphans in the school system.

Pro-social behaviour

Pro-social behaviour allows children to respond to their peers in an appropriate way (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2009). Whether those peers are distressed, unhappy and worried, at peace, happy and relaxed, or any behaviour, emotion and thought in between, children need to respond with empathy and/or sympathy to their peers. The significance of pro-social behaviour in the classroom and school environment is evident from the number of school-based empathy related intervention programmes that have been introduced since the 1980s. The Empathy Training Programme (Feshbach, 1983) included affect identification and role playing, thereby teaching children how to assume the perspective of others. The Child Development Project (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000) focused on developing a “caring community of learners”. Children who participated in this project not only showed pro-social gains, but also increased academic achievement and personal wellbeing. The development of children’s social skills was a component of the Fast Track Programme (The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2002), while the Social Aggression Prevention Programme (Capella & Weinstein; 2006) emphasised social problem solving. The common denominator among these intervention programmes is the emphasis on fostering the “positive, empathetic, caring aspects of social transaction” (Feshbach, 1983, p. 270). The programmes not only resulted in gains for the children, but also for the teachers, with increased attachment reported between the children and their educators.

Peer relations

Peer relations are part and parcel of the school environment and middle childhood development; and positive peer relations are associated with both academic and social

competence among learners. Socio-metric status, belonging to a peer group and dyadic friendship all relate to academic performance. This is because children naturally select themselves into groups of peers who have similar motivation toward school and academic pursuits. Good quality peer relations therefore not only facilitate in the formation of children's identity and self concept, but also serve as motivation for learners to pursue academic goals and school engagement. Moreover, reciprocal friendships and good socio- metric status are associated with increased engagement in pro-social behaviour among children (Wentzel, 2003; Wentzel 2005; Wentzel, Baker & Russell, 2009).

Cooperative learning, where children collaborate to work toward academic outcomes in larger groups of peers, has also received much attention and interest. Research shows that when children engage in structured interactions such as active discussions, feedback and problem solving, the outcomes are associated with academic gains, as well as gains in cognitive development (Wentzel et al., 2009).

The plethora of positive outcomes associated with good quality peer relations at school has led to renewed awareness of this dimension of childhood development. The association between classroom peer relations and academic performance has resulted in the introduction of classroom-based peer assisted learning interventions in schools across the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia (Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo, & Miller, 2003; Noaks & Noaks, 2009; McGrath & Noble, 2010,). In the United States these interventions have been particularly effective among children from at risk demographic groups, such as those living in the context of urban poverty and those belonging to minority groups. This is because positive

classroom peer relations counteract academic disengagement, thereby improving motivation and learning, which in turn results in academic achievement for these children (Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo, & Miller, 2003). In the United Kingdom the focus has been on social inclusion within the school system by means of peer mediation as a component of their On Track programme (Noaks & Noaks, 2009), while the Australian whole-school approach focuses on creating a caring and inclusive school culture by means of peer support structures such as counselling, mediation and mentoring by peers (McGrath & Noble, 2010).

The theoretical role of school connectedness in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations

School connectedness, pro-social behaviour and peer relations are uniquely and intricately intra-dependent. This theoretical relationship between school connectedness, pro-social behaviour and peer relations is shown in Figure 1.

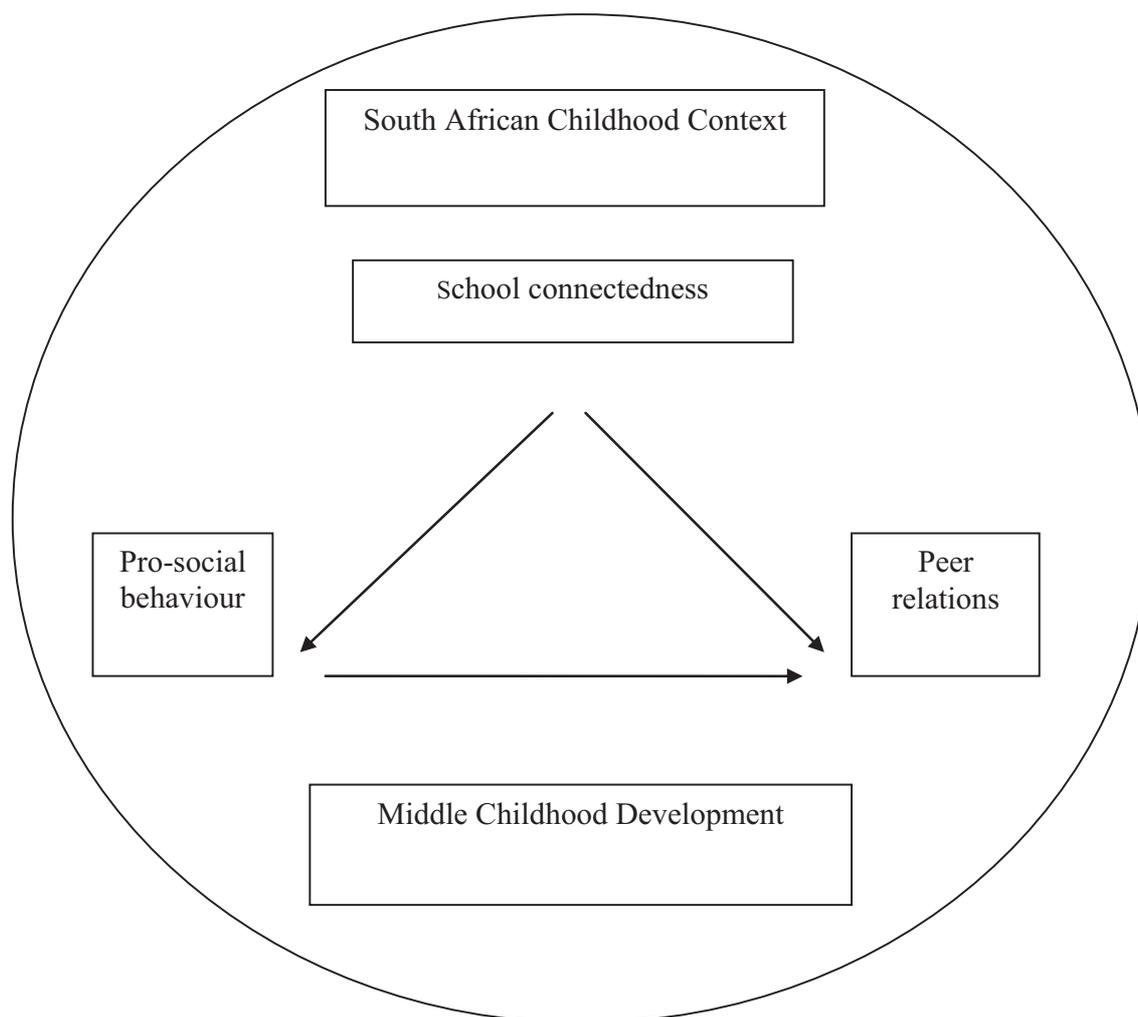


Figure 1: The theoretical role of school connectedness in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations

In the South African context of HIV/AIDS, poverty and growing number of orphans in the school system, a sample of HIV/AIDS orphaned primary school learners from Mangaung Township outside Bloemfontein, have measured high scores for school connectedness, pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations. Further investigation has shown a relationship between two of the variables, namely pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations for this sample of orphans (De Gouveia, 2012). This relationship can be enhanced when learners feel more

connected to school. Children who feel connected to school behave more pro-socially (McNeely et al., 2002). Such children are less likely to be truant from school, are more likely to engage in opportunities for relatedness to other students, to participate in extracurricular activities and to have better peer relations. McNeely et al. (2002) also propose that children are more likely to experience school connectedness when their developmental needs are met. Middle childhood is the time when children begin to nurture relationships beyond the one with their primary caregiver and outside the realm of the immediate family (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Thriving peer relations are an indication that a child is on par with the age specific developmental needs of this particular childhood phase, which in turn enhances school connectedness.

The South African childhood context

Orphan-hood is a reality for many South African children, with the “terrible twins” of HIV/AIDS and poverty reigning supreme. The South African Child Gauge 2010/2011 estimates that there are now 4.253 million orphans in South Africa. That is 23% of the child population. In the Free State, 27% of the province’s children are orphaned (Meintjies & Hall, 2011). Risk factors that may compromise developmental outcomes for orphans within the context of HIV/AIDS are well documented (USAID, 1997; UNAIDS, Unicef, & USAID, 2002; UNAIDS, Unicef, & USAID, 2004; Sherr, 2005; World Vision, 2005; Richter, Foster, & Sherr, 2006). In South Africa, Cluver’s extensive series of studies among orphans in Cape Town (Cluver & Gardner, 2006; Cluver & Gardner, 2007; Cluver, Gardner, & Operario, 2007; Cluver, Gardner, & Operario, 2008), brought numerous risk factors to the fore that specifically impact the psychological well-being of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, thereby resulting in emotional and behavioural difficulties. Skinner and Davids (2006) reiterate that such risk factors contribute

towards vulnerability in children, because they overlap and compound, thereby becoming an obstacle for children in the development of coping strategies.

The deprivation of orphan-hood is aggravated by poverty. A battery of socio-economic indicators shows that a large proportion of South African children are living in poverty (Hall, 2010a; Hall, 2010b; Hall & Wright, 2010; Berry, Hall & Hendricks, 2010). Cluver and Orkin (2009) report that the combination of poverty and the stigma related to HIV/AIDS results in a robust mediator for internalising disorders among teenagers living in deprivation. The same study reports a similar outcome for the interaction of orphan status and bullying, with HIV/AIDS-orphans significantly more at risk of internalising disorders as a result of such an interaction, when compared to other-orphans and non-orphans.

Poverty leads to behaviour problems among school going children. This is not as a result of the poverty, but rather the conditions caused by poverty (Wadesango, Chabaya, Rembe, & Muhuro, 2011). Factors such as overcrowding, which results in family members of different ages and genders sharing the same room, living with grandparents while parents seek employment elsewhere, high rates of unemployment, substance abuse among parents and guardians, lack of responsibility among parents and guardians and poor parental and guardian involvement, are all conducive to low school performance, fighting in and out of school, acts of bullying and lack of respect for teaching staff among learners from poverty-stricken backgrounds. They note that such behavioural problems violate learners', within a poverty stricken milieu, basic right to an education.

However, there are also many factors that can protect children and strengthen resilience within the environment of HIV/AIDS and poverty. Attending school and interacting with friends are activities that are particularly cherished by these children. When access to school and friends is compromised, it causes distress and anger (Cluver & Gardner, 2007). Within the school system, there are activities that have been found to improve general well-being and bring comfort and succour. Such activities include sport, playing, outings, singing, music, dancing, homework, library visits and reading (Cluver & Gardner, 2007). Access to school and education “assists young children to grow up with the capacity to develop out of poverty” (Ratele, 2007, p. 224).

Despite experiencing one of the highest growth rates in orphan-hood in Africa, South Africa also has one of the highest school enrolment rates on the continent. However, the system is marred by inequalities, a high rate of grade repetition, with many learners never completing their secondary school education. Orphans are most likely to succumb to these deficits in educational attainment (Ardington & Leibbrandt, 2010).

The discussion thus far points to poverty and HIV/AIDS as factors of vulnerability compromising developmental outcomes for many South African children. Yet, protective factors exist. These can moderate risk factors, thereby enhancing resilience and coping among potentially vulnerable children. School connectedness, pro-social behaviour and thriving peer relations have been found to be such protective factors.

According to the aim of this study, the following research question can be asked:

Does school connectedness play a role in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations among Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans aged 7 to 11 years?

To answer this question, the following method was used.

Method

Sample

A sample of 234 orphans who had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS, were purposively selected from a population of OVCs in Mangaung Township, Bloemfontein. The average age was 9.12 years with a standard deviation of 1.2 years. The sample consisted of 118 male orphans and 116 female orphans. All participants had Sesotho as their mother tongue.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of the Free State. Informed consent (in Sesotho) was obtained from caregivers who agreed to participate in the study. This included consent for the orphans to participate in the study, as well as consent that the child's class teacher may be contacted for participation. Orphans, who participated in the study with their caregiver's consent, were also asked for written assent. Teachers, who were recruited with the consent of care givers, were required to give written consent for their participation as well.

Procedure for data collection

Four fieldworkers administered the above measuring instruments to the sample of 234 HIV/AIDS orphans and their teachers. The orphans were visited in their homes, where they completed the questionnaires. Most teachers agreed to meet with the fieldworkers after class at the school, where they completed the questionnaires for teachers, while a few could only find time to participate during the school holidays. These teachers were met at a location of their choice, where they then completed the measuring instruments.

Measuring instruments

For the purpose of this study, three measuring instruments were used. Internal school connectedness was measured by the School Connectedness Scale (SSS) (Resnick et al., 1997), while external school connectedness was measured by the School Support Scale (SCS) (Hanson & Kim, 2007). Goodman's Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire T4-16 (1999, 2001, 2005) was used to measure pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations among the sample. The questions on both school connectedness scales were translated into Sesotho and then re-translated into English. The orphans answered these questionnaires in Sesotho. Their teachers answered the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires in English. Total (summated) raw scores were used for data analysis of both the SCS and the SSS, as well as the pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations sub scales of the SDQ.

Internal scale - School Connectedness Scale. Orphans' internal feelings about school were measured by the School Connectedness Scale. This measure consists of five statements that are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, in which respondents have to indicate the extent to

which they agree or disagree with the statements. The lowest measure was “*Strongly disagree*” at a measure of 0, while “*Strongly agree*” was the highest measure at 4. Children had to respond to the following statements: *I feel close to people at school; I am happy to be at this school; I feel like I am part of this school; The teachers at this school treat students fairly; I feel safe in my school*(See Annexure B).The sample had very high scores for all five questions on this measure, with an average of 71.1% of students choosing the “*Strongly agree*” options – an indication of very high subjective feelings of school connectedness.

External scale - School Support Scale. The sample’s experience of external support from adults in the school was measured by the School Support Scale. This measure consists of six statements, of which three statements focus on a caring adult/teacher relationship component(*At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who cares about me; At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who notices when I’m not there; At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who listens to me when I have something to say*) and three statements focus on a high adult expectations component (*At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who tells me when I do a good job; At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who wants me to do my best; At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who believes that I will be a success*) (see Annexure B).

The statements were once again measured on a Likert-type scale (4-point), in which the orphans could indicate the extent to which the statements were true or not. The lowest score is 0 for “*Not at all true*”, while the highest score is 3 for “*Very true*”. An average of 67.3% of

orphans indicated that the statements were “*Very true*” – the highest indication of external school connectedness.

The concurrent validity coefficient between the SCS and the SSS was calculated as 0.50 (Furlong, O’Brennan, & You, n.d.). Reliability was measured with Cronbach’s Alpha and found to be 0.83 for the SCS and 0.91 for the SSS (Furlong, O’Brennan, & You, n.d.).

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire T4-16. In order to obtain a measurement of pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations, the Pro-Social Behaviour and Peer Problems sub scales of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire T4-16 were used. Both sub scales consist of five questions (see Annexure A) that were measured on a 3-point Likert-type scale. Internal consistency and retest reliability were established as 0.81 and 0.73 for measuring instruments completed by teachers (Goodman, 2001).

Reliability of the different scales was examined by means of Cronbach’s α -coefficient and calculated on SPSS computer software (SPSS Incorporated, 2011). All four scales exhibited acceptable levels of internal consistency and were therefore used for data analysis in this study. Pro-social behaviour showed an α -coefficient of 0.713, classroom peer relations measured 0.711, while the SCS and the SSS computed α -coefficients of 0.652 and 0.772.

Statistical procedure

In the following hierarchical regression analysis, pro-social behaviour is the independent variable and classroom peer relations is the dependent variable. The role of school connectedness

(with two measures, namely the SCS internal measure and the SSS external measure) in the relationship between these two variables is investigated. In order to achieve this outcome, regression analysis is conducted in three steps. In the first step, the single variables are analysed: pro-social behaviour is added to the regression analysis in order to ascertain its unique contribution and, thereafter, school connectedness (one scale at a time) is added in order to measure the unique contribution of this variable. In the second step, both the independent variable and the mediator/ moderator variable are added to the equation, to establish the significant *proportional* contribution of these two predictor variables to the criterion variable (peer relations). In the third step, the *product* of the independent variable (pro-social behaviour) and school connectedness (one scale at a time) in the prediction of peer relations is investigated. When working with the product between two variables, it becomes imperative to avoid multicollinearity. Therefore, the deviation score of the two applicable variables is calculated first, and thereafter, the product between the two sets of deviations is calculated. The data analysis will now be discussed in more detail.

Step one determines whether pro-social behaviour and one of the school connectedness scales (e.g. SCS), have a significant relationship with the peer relations of HIV/AIDS orphans. When the variables are thereafter added to the equation, the following conclusions can be made:

- If the calculated *Beta*-coefficient of pro-social behaviour in step one is significant, but insignificant in step two (when school connectedness -SCS is added), it can be concluded that SCS is indeed a mediator variable in this relationship (between pro-social behaviour and peer relations). The mediator variable is the third variable, to the extent that it

clarifies the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

- If the *Beta*-coefficient calculated for the SCS in step one is significant, but insignificant in step two, it indicates the entanglement of variables (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000).
- If the *Beta*-coefficient calculated for the product term (step three) is significant, it can be concluded that there is a significant interaction, which then indicates a moderator effect (Huysamen, 1983).
- A moderator variable influences the direction and/or strength of the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable (Barron & Kenny, 1986).

All analyses were done on SPSS software (SPSS Institute, 2011) and both the 1%- and the 5%-levels of significance were used.

Before the potential role of the two school connectedness scales in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations among Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans is investigated, the correlation between the four scales is calculated and summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between pro-social behaviour, classroom peer relations and school connectedness

Variable	PR	SCS	SSS
Pro-social behaviour (PB)	0,291**	0,105	0,062
Peer relations (PR)	–	0,054	0,016

Internal school connectedness: SCS	–	0,520**
External school connectedness: SSS		–

** p ≤ 0,01

Table 1 clearly shows a correlation on the 1%-level of significance, between pro-social behaviour and peer relations for Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans. The study therefore proceeds to investigate the mediator-moderator effect of school connectedness in this regard.

Results

The role of the SCS in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations

This role is tested by means of product-term analysis and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Hierarchical regression analysis with pro-social behaviour as independent variable, peer relations as dependent variable and the SCS as intervening variable.

Model	Independent variable	Standardised Beta	p
1 _a	Pro-social behaviour (PB)	0,291	0,000
1 _b	<i>Internal school connectedness (SCS)</i>	0,054	0,414
2	Pro-social behaviour (PB)	0,289	0,000
	<i>External school connectedness (SSS)</i>	0,027	0,667
3	PBxSCS	-0,135	0,042*

** p ≤ 0,01

* p ≤ 0,05

With the addition of the SCS (step 2), the effect of pro-social behaviour on peer relations is still significant. It can therefore be concluded that the SCS is not a mediator between pro-social

behaviour and peer relations. Further investigation shows a significant Beta-coefficient in the interaction between pro-social behaviour and the SCS, indicating that the SCS is indeed a moderator in this specific relationship. SCS (as internal school connectedness) therefore plays an important role in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations in Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans. The nature of this moderator effect is investigated by calculating the relationship between pro-social behaviour and the criterion (classroom peer relations), for those participants with respectively low and high scores of the moderator variable (SCS). For this purpose, two separate regression lines are calculated – one for participants who score high in SCS (higher than the 66th percentile, N = 95; a score of 20 or higher) and one for those participants who score low in SCS (lower than the 33rd percentile, N = 90, a score of 16 or lower). Figure 2 shows these two regression lines.

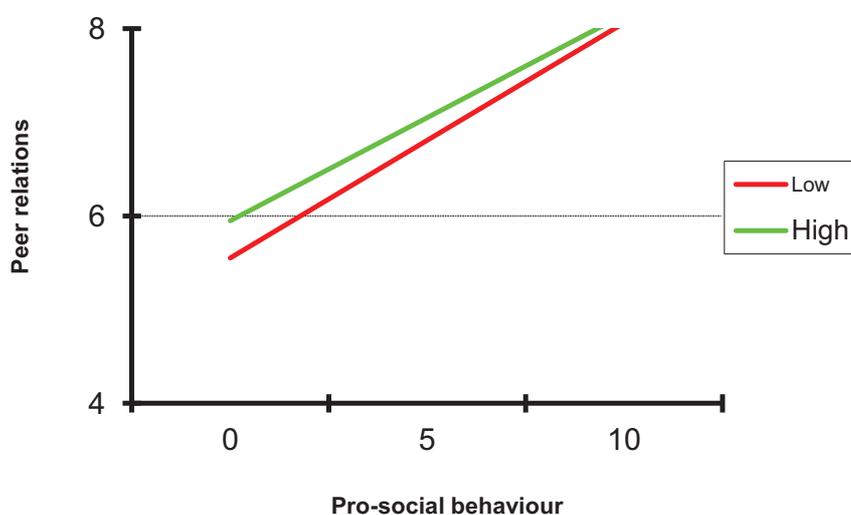


Figure 2: Regression lines of low and high SCS with pro-social behaviour as predictor of classroom peer relations in Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans

Figure 2 clearly shows that Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans with high levels of SCS also experience higher levels of peer relations, than those orphans with low levels of school

connectedness. This trend is particularly obvious when low levels of pro-social behaviour are present. As pro-social behaviour increases, the difference in the experience of peer relations becomes smaller between the two (high and low SCS) groups. This effect of subjective feelings about school, as measured by the SCS, is of particular concern where HIV/AIDS orphans are experiencing low levels of pro-social behaviour.

Subsequently, the role of external school connectedness (SSS) in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations will be investigated.

The role of the SSS in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations

This role is also tested by means of product-term analysis, with the results shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Hierarchical regression analysis with pro-social behaviour as independent variable, peer relations as dependent variable and the SSS as intervening variable

Model	Independent variable	Standardised Beta	<i>p</i>
1 _a	Pro-social behaviour (PB)	0,291	0,000
1 _b	<i>Internal school connectedness (SCS)</i>	-0,016	0,808
2	Pro-social behaviour (PB)	0,293	0,000
	<i>External school connectedness (SSS)</i>	-0,030	0,634
3	PBxSSS	-0,004	0,949

With the addition of the SSS, the effect of pro-social behaviour on peer relations remained significant. It can therefore be concluded that the SSS is not a mediator in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations. Further analysis also shows no significant Beta-coefficient for the interaction between pro-social behaviour and the SSS, indicating that the SSS

does not play a moderator role in the above relationship. Perceived adult/teacher support combined with high adult expectation (SSS), therefore does not play an important role in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and peer relations in Sesotho speaking HIV/AIDS orphans.

Discussion of results

The outcomes of this data analysis reiterate international research on school connectedness, as well as local studies. The very high scores for both the internal and the external scales of school connectedness enforce the research of Cluver and Gardner (2007), who recorded that HIV/AIDS orphans particularly cherish school and friends, as these restores a sense of “normality”, succour and well-being. The internal scale of school connectedness as a moderator in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations is in line with the studies of McNeely et al. (2002) which hold that internal school connectedness, as measured by the SCS, fosters pro-social behaviour, which is in turn associated with better peer relations.

Cluver and Gardner’s (2007) conclusions could be a probable explanation for the difference between the SCS and the SSS as intervening variable in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations. The SCS measures the subjective dimension of school and friends, with statements like: *I feel close to people at school, I am happy to be at this school, I feel like I am part of this school, The teachers at this school treat students fairly, I feel safe in my school-* all of which compound to feelings of caring, connectedness and ultimately, a sense of belonging for HIV/AIDS orphans.

Even though the SSS did not play a significant role in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations, the caring adult/teacher relationship component, combined with the high adult expectations component of the SSS, as appose to the SCS's more holistic dimension of belonging, could account for individual differences in scoring among the sample of HIV/AIDS orphans.

Limitations

This study used the summated raw scores of all four scales for the data analysis. However, the SSS consists of two components, namely, a caring adult/teacher relationship and high adult expectations. The separate contribution of these two components of the SSS, as intervening variables in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations, should be investigated, particularly as the high adult expectations component points toward a possible nuisance factor in this data analysis. This conclusion is made in the light of the moderating effect of the SCS in the relationship between pro-social behaviour and classroom peer relations among the sample, in which the more holistic "belonging" dimension of the SCS seems to be more instrumental in positive outcomes for the learners. Resnick et al. (1993, p.S3) propose that "interventions for youth at-risk must critically examine ways in which opportunities for a sense of belonging may be fostered, particularly among youth who do not report any significant caring relationship in their lives".

In South Africa, education is compulsory for children from ages 7 to 15 years. High school is therefore a time of optimum risk, when orphans and vulnerable children are most at risk to forfeit their education. A longitudinal study, that follows the learners from primary

school through to high school and eventual graduation, would be ideal to research the protective qualities of school connectedness over the long term and for the whole duration of the learners' school careers. By means of a longitudinal study, the real benefits of school connectedness for South African children, and particularly those who are growing up in the context of poverty, HIV/AIDS and socio-economic adversity, can be ascertained.

Suggestions

“Schools, as microcosms of society, are dynamic, not static. Our society, over the past half century, has changed much more quickly than our schools. Our schools have been left behind, economically, culturally and socially; as a result, human and social capital is suffering” (Morrison, 2005, p.109). These ominous words were written with reference to the Australian school system, but are every bit as applicable to the South African school context of poverty, HIV/AIDS and ever growing number of orphans in the school system. The inequality in our society is reflected in our school system. Yet, orphans and vulnerable children do not have to resign themselves to despondency, as the status quo could be equalised by the restorative quality of school connectedness.

Even though international research regarding the positive outcomes of school connectedness abounds, a literature search found hardly any studies with regard to this construct in the South African context. Future research, regarding school connectedness as a protective factor in South African schools, should therefore be encouraged. The positive outcomes regarding school connectedness transcends the plight of HIV/AIDS orphans, as the outcomes could be generalised to all children growing up in adversity, which is in line with a global and

more holistic focus on helping vulnerable communities to help vulnerable families to help vulnerable children.

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Annexure A

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

T4-16

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months or this school year.

Child's Name

Male/Female

Date of Birth.....

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many worries, often seems worried	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has at least one good friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often fights with other children or bullies them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally liked by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often lies or cheats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picked on or bullied by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinks things out before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets on better with adults than with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many fears, easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

Please turn over - there are a few more questions on the other side

Overall, do you think that this child has difficulties in one or more of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people?

	No	Yes- minor difficulties	Yes- definite difficulties	Yes- severe difficulties
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered "Yes", please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

- How long have these difficulties been present?

	Less than a month	1-5 months	6-12 months	Over a year
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties upset or distress the child?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties interfere with the child's everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
PEER RELATIONSHIPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CLASSROOM LEARNING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the class as a whole?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature

Date

Class Teacher/Form Tutor/Head of Year/Other (please specify:)

Thank you very much for your help

Annexure B

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS CHILD REPORT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school? For each question, please show with a cross mark (X) your answer. For example:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel happy at school					X
2. I feel sad at school		X			

Now it is your turn!

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel close to people at school					
2. I am happy to be at this school					
3. I feel like I am part of this school					
4. The teachers at this school treat student fairly					
5. I feel safe in my school					

And a few more questions!

	Not at all true	A little true	Pretty much true	Very true
1. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who really cares about me				
2. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who tells me when I do a good job				
3. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who notices when I'm not there				
4. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who always wants me to do my best				
5. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who listens to me when I have something to say				
6. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who believes that I will be a success				

YOU ARE ALL DONE! THANK YOU FOR ANSWERING ALL THESE QUESTIONS!!!