# THE IMPACT OF BULLYING ON TEACHING AND LEARNING: A CASE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF MAMELODI, GAUTENG PROVINCE

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## Abstract

*This article investigated the impact, causes, types of bullying and the measures employed by primary schools to curb bullying in the Tshwane South District in Mamelodi Township, Gauteng Province. The researchers wanted to learn more about the effects of bullying in underprivileged communities. Three schools took part in the study, which used a qualitative methodology. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with instructors, learners, and school principals were used to gather data. There were fifteen participants in the study. The goal of the study was to learn more about the effects of bullying in underprivileged communities. Three schools took part in the study, which used a qualitative methodology. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with instructors, learners, and school principals were used to gather data. Fifteen people participated in the study. The authors found that primary schools are challenged by the negative impact of bullying and that there are factors that cause bullying in primary schools. However, we conclude that there are several measures that can be used to curb bullying in primary schools.*

## Introduction

Studies reveal that bullying is a systematic problem and has a negative impact on teachers and learners. A safe and supportive school environment is crucial for quality of teaching and learning. However, bullying has a negative impact on the environment, which is conducive to effective teaching and learning. Bullying causes feelings of anxiety, fear and distress about feeling excluded and treated with contempt, with negative consequences on learner performance (Dunlop, 2016). Bullying is defined as repetitive, deliberate, and hostile behaviours committed by a group or an individual against a victim who is unable to protect themselves (Farrington, 2016). Bullying is a behaviour that is frequently acquired as a reaction to the difficulties in the bully's environment. Anxiety about one's appearance, unsupportive peer networks, low academic achievement, and strained parental relationships are a few examples of these stressors. Insecurities motivate the actions of bullies (Farrington, 2016). Bullying affects both the perpetrator and the victim, and the school management together with teachers. The school management and the teachers need to know and understand the impact of bullying and measures to curb the scourge of bullying. Research on bullying shows that several elements contribute to bullying in elementary schools, these factors were of assistance when investigating the phenomenon of bullying and were also of assistance in coming up with measures or strategies to curb bullying that learners can have conducive or healthier and positive learning environment.

## Literature Review
### Causes of bullying

According to the current literature, the various factors that perpetuate bullying in primary schools include, environmental influences, familial influences and social expectations (Tidy, 2021). Coyne and Monks (2011), point that learners who witness domestic violence between adults at

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homes, plays a vital role in perpetuating bullying among learners at school. Children can learn to bully from incidents they observe.

According to Gordon (2021), several key factors can contribute to bullying during childhood. One significant aspect is the absence of warmth and emotional engagement from the primary caregiver. Additionally, if parents or guardians exhibit permissive attitudes toward aggressive behavior, it can further encourage bullying. According to Swain and Spire (2020), introverted children may be more likely to engage in bullying to express their dissatisfaction and frustration. Some of these bullies may have some troubles that cause them to burst and take out their anger on other children due to lack of emotional intelligence (Tidy, 2021).

Some learners are not taught to be sensitive or to care about other people's feelings. Insensitive to others contributes to bullying behavior (Tidy, 2021). Gordon (2021) purports a violent home environment is the greatest risk factor for developing antisocial behaviours like bullying. Problems such as divorce or poverty may also influence learners' behavior negatively.

Greef and Grobler (2008) found that learners who watch violent movies or play violent games are more likely to act aggressively and bully others in school. Violent games or movies tend to influence learner's behaviour and make them more likely to be bullies (Tidy, 2021). Krige (2000) argues that children display the negative behaviour which they are exposed to through the media.

## Types of bullying

According to Gordon (2019), there are various types of bullying, and these types are physical bullying, verbal bullying, sexual bullying and cyber bullying. Gordon (2019) explains that physical bullying happens when learners use their strength to control or dominate others. Physical bullies are usually bigger, stronger, and more aggressive than their classmates. Some examples of physical bullying are kicking, hitting, punching, and slapping. According to Gordon (2019), verbal bullying is when people use words, namecalling, and insults to hurt others and gain power over them. It can also involve gossip and comments meant to belittle or leave someone out of activities. De Wet (2005) notes that indirect bullying can include threats, spreading rumours, or writing hurtful graffiti. In sexual bullying most victims are girls, boys tend to touch girls on private parts such as breasts and curves. Boys may also share inappropriate notes, jokes, pictures, teasing, or rumours that are sexual in nature (Dupper, 2005).

Cyberbullying happens when a learner is harassed, embarrassed, threatened, or tormented by another learner online or through cell phones. It includes sending messages, images, and emails to humiliate someone, as well as sharing their secrets publicly (Sharriff, 2008).

Bullying has a serious negative impact on the child's educational experience. Bullying causes absenteeism and lack of concentration in class. Teachers may have difficulties in giving such learners an opportunity to learn due to the lack of educational interest by the victim in the teaching and learning process (Gordon, 2019). Murphy (2009) argues that children who are bullied often become passive in social situations. They cannot reach out to others or even start a conversation, and this results in losing interest in school and losing concentration in class, which results in poor scholastic performance. In line with Gordon (2019), Murphy (2009) pointed out that bullying makes learners lose interest in schoolwork and become reluctant or afraid to go to school. This affects learner achievement because attendance is an important factor in learner achievement.

## Measures to curb bullying

According to Divecha (2019), measures to curb bullying are to promote social and emotional learning, create a positive school environment, and involve parents in the process. Gordon (2019) argues that it is important for victims to report bullying to educators or person in authority before it causes harm, especially on academic performance. However, it is often difficult for learners to report bullying due to awkwardness, humiliation, embarrassment, and unease. It is therefore important for

each school to have a bully box where victims write their names and the names of bullies. If they do not know the name of the bully, they can mention on paper that the bully is unknown, and then teachers will therefore start to investigate the case until the case is resolved (Divecha, 2019).

According to Crisis Prevention Institute (2011), to help reduce bullying in schools, teachers need to set clear enforceable rules against bullying and need to reward positive behaviour. Teachers need to have open communication relating to bullying and to engage parents to curb bullying (Center for Disease Control, 2011).

## Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this investigation is the theory of socialisation. The theory of socialization includes behaviors like conflict, silence, stress, confusion, inequality, anger, guilt, hate, self-hatred, self-destructive actions, violence, and the establishment of power dynamics. It is important to use this theory since the behaviours mentioned above relate to bullying and allows the researchers to understand factors that causes bullying (Muhammad, 2016). The theory of power and socialisation theory enabled the researchers to investigate the casual factors of bullying and its impact on teaching and learning. Understanding the bullying phenomenon helped the study develop strategies to reduce bullying in schools.

## Research Methodology

Qualitative research was used in the study to investigate the types, causes, impact and measures to curb bullying. Qualitative method is useful in exploring, unearthing opinions, thoughts and feelings of respondents (Maree, 2010). The insight gained into the phenomenon of bullying was used to come up with strategies to curb bullying. Data was collected through interviews. One on one interviews were conducted with learners, teachers and principals in a school setting. Two grade 7 class leaders per school participated. The grade 7 learners are senior learners in the schools, and being class leaders puts them in positions whereby they must assist their teachers in maintaining discipline by reporting misbehavior among the learners in the school. Thus, class leaders are holders of data required by the study. Two educators, two learners and the principal from each school. Three principals, six learners and six teachers, took part in the study.

## Findings

The findings are organized based on the hermeneutic steps of data analysis. This paper includes themes and direct quotes from participants, categorized as follows: For School A, the participants are the principal (AP1), Teacher 1 (AT1), Teacher 2 (AT2), Learner 1 (AL1), and Learner 2 (AL2). For School B, the participants are the principal (BP1), Teacher 1 (BT1), Teacher 2 (BT2), Learner 1 (BL1), and Learner 2 (BL2). For School C, the participants are the principal (CP1), Teacher 1 (CT1), Teacher 2 (CT2), Learner 1 (CL1), and Learner 2 (CL2).

## 1. Description of Bullying

The study found that participants share a similar understanding of what bullying means, as their descriptions align closely. The interviewees mentioned the following:

AL2: "Bullying means hurting someone emotionally and physically, e. g. beating or saying horrible words to others intentionally".

AT2: "Bullying is when someone shows their friends that they are tough and stronger than others".

AP1: "Bullying is associated with actions that are hurting physically, emotionally and psychologically.

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BT2: "Bullying is when a learner wants to play leading role to others while making someone feel fearful powerless due to repeated actions".

CT1: "When someone uses violent words to the other causing them to feel inferior and does not show remorse it is bullying.".

CP1: "Bullying is when a powerful person takes advantage of a powerless person e.g. when one learner fights the other knowing that she / he will win the battle because the other one is powerless".

Data analysis reveals that the explanation of the concept of bullying by participants in all three schools, is relatively the same. The study finding thus indicates that, there is a common understanding of the meaning of bullying. The description of the concept of bullying by participants is in line with the definition by Placidius (2013) which states that bullying is a harmful action where someone deliberately causes or tries to cause injury or distress to another person. It includes various behaviors such as name-calling, intimidation, extortion, and physical fighting.

## 2. Impact of Bullying in Primary Schools

The data analysis found the following common impacts of bullying. The interviewees mentioned the following:

AL2: "Bullying causes low Self-esteem. Victims stop believing in themselves because they think there's something wrong with them. Low self-esteem may cause poor academic results.

AL1: "Bullying causes fear, and lack of participation in the classroom. Learners commit suicide before they get to the adulthood stage due to stress or pain".

AT2: "Bullying causes absenteeism, bullying tarnishes the schools' reputation. Bullying is a poison to the nation, if the district office is unperturbed, more learners will die".

AT1: Bullying disrupts formal instruction time. Teachers are affected mentally because they cannot deliver their lessons according to the plan and timetable, this surely affects teaching and learning".

BL2: "Bullying causes poor pass rate in schools. Teachers must help the principals to curb bullying because bullying continues, more learners will lose interest in schooling".

BT1: "Bullying cause's suicide, one of our learners committed suicide because she felt embarrassed after being recorded and posted on social media naked".

CL2: "Bullying increases the number of schools dropouts. Our country is looking forward to newly qualified doctors and teachers. If bullying continues the country will have fewer scholars or less educated people. Bullying has a negative impact on a child's academic performance".

CL1: "Bullying increases the number of criminal records. It is important to curb bullying because bullying cause many problems".

Data analysis indicates that bullying impacts negatively on teaching and learning. The research finding is supported by Nadine (2014) in that, bullying has caused more fear, suffering, classroom disruptions, school dropouts, and suicides, among children. The finding is also in line with Gordon (2019) who said that more learners are dying yearly as victims of bullying.

### 3. Causes of Bullying in Primary Schools

The data analysis revealed the following causes of bullying. The interviewees cited the following:
AT1: "One reason for bullying in primary schools is gender differences. I have dealt with many cases where boys were kicked and beaten by other boys who accused them of being lesbian or gay."

AT2: "Poverty causes bullying in schools, some learners are being bullied just because they don't have money for lunch, they wear old clothes, and they don't have expensive clothes or school bags".

AL2: "Being constantly punished harshly can make one to become a bully. Some learners are bullies because they feel like they are bad anyway and they must continue doing wrong things".

AP1: "Lack of parental involvement, lack of attention from home are some of the reasons learners cause trouble in schools, such learners seek attention".

BL1: "Bulling is caused by lack of self-confidence, bullies target learners who do not believe in themselves because they know that even if they bully them, they won't fight back. These bullies do it just to feel good".

BT1: "Some of the causes of bullying are family problems such as, anger, fights, alcohol etc. Family problems cause stress and learners from these families release anger and stress to others".

BP1: "The environment full of violence is the biggest factor that causes bullying in our school or society, we live in a community where technology is all over, these learners watch too much violence from TV, from neighbors or from home then they copy and practice it at school".

CT2: Some of the learners are victims of bullying because they are new at school.

CL2: "Learners usually fight for money or possessions, and this causes hatred among each other. In a later stage the powerful person may bully the weaker person".

CP1: "Causes of bullying in schools is drug abuse. Most of the bullies feel unloved therefore they use drugs to feel good.

The study findings point that bad parenting, learners with low self-esteem, television, homes with no respect, family problems and community violence can lead to the development of learners who bully others on school grounds. This is in line with the findings of Tidy (2021) in that, observing physical and verbal aggression at home and with the community can negatively affect children's ability to build relationships. This is supported by Gordon (2021) who found that dysfunctional families, particularly those experiencing domestic violence, may encourage bullying in schools and contribute to low self-esteem in victims.

### 4. Types of Bullying in Primary Schools

Participants gave various types of bullying. The following was mentioned: physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, cyber and sexual.

AT2: "Texting someone in an attempt to inflict injury or discomfort using a cell phone is called cyber bullying, and many learners are doing cyber bullying".

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BT1: "Some of the types of bullying I know are, psychological bullying and cyber bullying".

CL1: "Physical and emotional are some of the types of bullying".

CL2: "Social bullying is one of the types of bullying".

CT1: "When someone says horrible things to the other person about their culture and does not feel any remorse for that person is called racial bullying".

CP1: "Types of bullying are social, cyber, verbal and physical".

The study reveals that the main types of bullying occurring in primary schools are physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, cyber and sexual. The findings are in line with Gordon (2021) in that, the issue of bullying is fundamentally rooted in power dynamics in schools due to verbal, cyber, physical and sexual bullying.

## 5. Measures to Curb Bullying in Primary Schools

Participants suggested several strategies for reducing bullying in primary schools. The following was mentioned: the need to have unannounced visits from police officers to supervise and monitor learners at least once per quarter, having more prefects, involving different stakeholders, using bullying policies and involving parents. Engaging management team, having anti-bullying programs, reporting bullying, having safety committees. Engaging bullies and monitoring bully's behavior. Learners must be taught about the hazards of bullying. Professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, need to be invited to schools to speak to learners about the danger of ill-treating others.

**Interviews cited the following:**

AL2: "Schools must have more prefects to monitor, control and report bullying incidents. Teachers and principals should raise awareness of where learners are taught about bullying. Victims need to be comforted, encouraged and motivated so that they focus on their schoolwork".

AT1: "Victims should report bullying to the principals' office. The district office can help the schools by implementing new policies which will cater for this generation of amapiano. The district office must raise awareness to help these learners. Learners are suffering from depression. Teachers and police officers must help perpetrators or bullies. Nurses, social workers, teachers, and parents need to collaborate as a team.
to curb bullying".

BT1: "Teachers should set up anti-bullying programs. Psychologists should be invited to schools to raise awareness among learners about the dangers of bullying. The district office can help the school to eradicate bullying by supporting the school's policies. Schools must invite social workers for counseling. Victims need counseling. School trip must be organized for bullies to visit prisons where prisoners teach bullies about the dangers of bullying".

BT2: "Teachers must report perpetrators to their parents and if the bullies continue bullying, they must be expelled from school. The district office can help the school by being involved and doing their duty. Teachers need to report and involve parents.

Bullies need intervention".

BP1: "Schools should involve various stakeholders, who educate learners about the effects of bullying. Involving stakeholders will help learners understand how unacceptable bullying is in schools. Psychologist must be invited; victims should be given an opportunity to speak about their feelings and emotions".

The finding is in line with Tidy (2021) which suggests that mentoring program is another way to prevent bullying issues in schools. In this program older learners are trained to mentor younger ones. The study found that for the school to be able to effectively curb bullying, external stakeholders such as nurses, social workers and psychologists including parents must assist the school.

CT2: "Teachers, principals or the staff as a whole must reprimand bullies to stop bullying they must also monitor bully's behavior so that everyone can have a positive learning environment".

CT1: "Schools need to involve teachers in bullying cases, teachers should call learners to a private place and reprimand them. Teachers must involve parents of the victims and of the perpetrators. Teachers need to implement anti-bullying campaigns. It is always necessary to consider the reason behind the negative behavior, because if one understands the root because it will be easier to deal with the problem".

CP1: "Schools should use a policy that deals with such incidents to discipline learners who bully others. Schools must make use of the committees which deal with bullying to instill discipline. Teachers together with the district office need to come up with ideas to eradicate bullying. All victims need special programs where professionals such as social workers, psychologists, psychiatrist, nurses are present".

CL1: "Teachers must talk to the bully and the victim without taking sides. This will help the learners to speak and heal from negative behavior. Teachers should try to be friendly; this will make victims and bullies feel free, and this will make them to open up to their teachers".

CL2: "Victims should report the bullies, if the victims report the bullies the bullies will stop their bad behavior. Victims must be close to someone to heal. It is a necessity to take care of bullies and to organize programs where bullies can be given an opportunity to tell their side of the story".

The finding is in line with Gordon (2019) who argues that, to effectively address bullying, schools should promote a positive ethos, implement relevant policies, assess their needs and goals, and provide training for teachers, administrators, and staff. Involving parents and identifying resources for bullies, victims, and their families is also essential. Additionally, anti-bullying themes should be integrated into the curriculum.

**Discussion**

The literature indicates that bullying causes current and future harm. The study found that acts of bullying are also perpetrated because of previous experiences of bullying occurring at home. The research made it clear that bullying can only be curbed if the teachers, principals, district officials, parents and learners do their part to tackle the problem. The study mentioned the following as physical forms of bullying: kicking, hitting, assaulting, hitting and slapping. Verbal or indirect bullying is teasing, swearing, and name calling. The participants made it clear that physically weak and vulnerable learners are usually the victims of bullying. Research has shown that bullying manifests itself in power, powerlessness, aggression, dominance and oppression. Mishna (2017) purports that

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oppression is a process in which one social group takes advantage of another for its own benefit. The study identified the school playground as a common hotspot for bullying, indicating a lack of supervision during breaks. While some incidents are reported, many are not, as learners fear further victimization. Research has also revealed additional factors that contribute to bullying in schools. These factors include the media, forms of violence by parents at home, the learner's economic status, health, and socialization. The results of this study confirm the high level of bullying in school. The study reveals the impact of this phenomenon on learners. Learners feel unsafe at school, and bullying undermines their confidence and self-esteem. Learners commit suicide, there is poor pass rate, learners drop out of school, lack of participation in class, learners are withdrawn or reserved, there is high learner absenteeism, learners have low self-esteem, learners bunk classes, there is an increase of criminal records due to absenteeism, there is an increase of mental health problems and unhealthy learning environment.

## Conclusion

Bullying in schools severely disrupts the environment needed for effective teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the conclusion is that, there are several measures which primary schools can use to curb bullying. Measures to curb bullying are: having more prefects to monitor the school environment, involving different stakeholders such as nurses, police officers, social workers, psychiatrist and psychologists, using bullying policies, including and helping parents to foster an atmosphere of trusted communication with their children. Reporting bullying to teachers or school management team. Having safety committees. Monitoring bully's behavior by administering appropriate discipline. Provision of more funds to enable schools to organize anti-bullying campaigns. Implementation of policies. Completion of surveys by the district officials in providing the schools with reliable and usable information to curb bullying. Teachers must be approachable to make it easy for learners to report bullying.

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