Peer Victimization in Schools: Response from Botswana

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Students' discipline, especially discipline that disrupts the smooth implementation of the teaching and learning processes is receiving considerable interest and concern in many educational systems of many countries. Disruptive students' behaviour towards others can manifest itself in different forms. This paper focuses on behaviour that can cause physical and/or psychological hurt or harm to others to the extent that to its victim, schooling ceases to be safe and interesting. Hurtful behaviour towards other students by other students is referred to in this paper as peer victimization. Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper (1998) define peer victimization as "a tool to experience the gratitude of complete power over other human beings" which if attained, prevents the victim to learn effectively. The above definition will form the basis of the discussion of this paper. The investigation on this issue is made through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, school authorities and students.

PEER VICTIMIZATION: BOTSWANA'S PERSPECTIVE

Despite behaviour policies that address the wide range of opportunities available for students to develop responsible attitudes towards others and themselves, peer victimization persists in schools. The guidance and counseling programmes in schools have been strengthened to deal with specific students' behaviour problems including peer victimization. This followed a recommendation made in the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 to establish pastoral care units in schools. In part the recommendation reads: "Guidance and counseling should be improved by giving the coordinator an office, reduced teaching load . . . to effectively attend to the diverse social problems presented by students and to their general welfare (Botswana, Republic of 1994a: 24).

Even in the best-run schools many pupils experience peer victimization of one form or another. At a certain secondary school, nine students died after drinking a poisonous chemical called methanol. Some of the survivors alleged that they were forced to take the chemical by the senior boys. The intention was to get them drunk and not to kill (Mmegi, 2003). At another school, a fire gutted the boys' hostel. Boys who had been expelled from the hostels for ill-treating the junior students caused the fire. Even after expulsion from boarding, they would come at night and harass other students (The Midweek Sun, 2004).

PEER VICTIMIZATION: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The concepts of peer victimization and peer bullying convey the same meaning. The terms victimization and bullying will be used synonymously in this article. Peer victimization begins with a desire to hurt someone (Rigby, 2000). If peer victimization is violence, then it can be defined as "behaviour by people against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm" (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003: 21). "The glory in hurting is the enjoyment of seeing someone distressed, because the experience of causing the distress is pleasurable and the repetition of this experience continues to please" (Rigby, 2000: 72). Peer victimization is not an exclusive problem affecting the youth only. It can also affect adults. However, it is more prevalent among school-aged youth because pupils interact and socialize in large numbers at school setups more than at any other places.

Because of the inherently vulnerability of school institutions to bullying, peer victimization is therefore discussed in the context of the school structure. Girls, generally, tend to bully less than boys because their playgroups are much smaller (McManus, 1995). McManus, (1995: 16) further posits that: "For most girls, violence is taboo, and in learning to use it at all, they do not learn to use it with discretion, perhaps the few who strike out . . . strike out vigorously and strike out for longer". Rigby (2000) holds the different view that girls do not bully less than boys. He contends that it is only that the bullying tactics each sex uses take a different form. While the girls can be less physically in their tactics, they use indirect forms of bullying such as verbal bullying. Dreikurs et al. (1998) supports this view. They argue that because girls have been brought up to believe that their sex protects them from being hit by boys, they provoke boys, hoping that the boys will not retaliate. If the boys retaliate, " the girls go screaming and crying to the teacher and demand that the teacher consider their rights as women, namely protection and revenge".

In his study on "who bullies who" conducted in coeducational schools, Rigby (2000) noted that about 70% of the boys reported that a boy was victimizing them and about 4% said that a girl always victimized them. Twenty four percent of the girls reported that a boy was victimizing them and 25% said a girl was victimizing them. Peer victimization is a problem in many developed and developing countries. In Australian schools one in five children is being victimized by peers on a weekly basis. The problem of peer victimization in Australia is more serious than child abuse by adults, especially parents. Whereas calls about domestic violence and calls from children with drug problems are disturbing, calls complaining about bullying are even more disturbing (Rigby, 2000). A survey conducted on adults in Canada revealed that ". . . it is their peers whom they recall as the main abusers, not their parents" Rigby (2000: 46). The escalating rate of crime in the USA high schools has made district authorities to think security. Places like Philadelphia and Chicago put metal detectors in all their high schools (Merrow, 2004). In other schools, video surveillance, gates, locks and even police presence have become the norm (Mosca and Hoolister, 2004).

Bullies often go in groups because their individual members want to identify themselves with others of the same age cohort and for them to have a feeling of belonging and a sense of shared values and interest (Daniels and Garner, 1999). The members of a group also benefit from emotional significance attached to that membership (Daniels and Garner, 1999). Dreikurs et al. (1998: 130) add: "The approval of its peers becomes more important to the child than that of adults". As a social being, the child lives and grows in a group. Early training in the home is therefore very important as it can influence the child's attitude towards discipline and its acceptance of others. The better the relationship among the family members, the more likely will the child cooperate with its peers and teachers at school, provided the school atmosphere is in a broader sense, a continuation of the home atmosphere (Dreikurs et al., 1998). " . . . as a result of greater parental restrictiveness, South Asian young people emerge as less likely to smoke, drink alcohol and take drugs than their white peers" (Daniels and Garner, 1999: 211).

McManus (1995) contends that one is born with a predisposition to hitting others, and peer victimization is not a generic behaviour. Children's behaviour, Dreikurs et al. (1998) noted, as had Daniels and Garner (1999) earlier noted, is largely influenced by family circumstances and not by genes. If a child experiences parental neglect it may seek attention by victimizing its peers. Once abused a child will seek revenge by treating others the way they have been treated (Dreikurs et al., 1998; Moore, 2002; McManus, 1995). Also, a study by the 1993 Commission on Children and Violence concluded that children are not naturally violent. Violence, the study revealed, is a behaviour that is learned through parents, child minders, older siblings or close others or exposure to inappropriate media (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003). Moswela (2004) similarly argued but with respect to the negative influence of the media on the youth. In their book, West and Pennell (2003), have attributed unintentional racism, a form of peer victimization, to underachievement by certain ethnic-minority groups.

CONSEQUENCES OF PEER VICTIMIZATION TO THE VICTIM

A child who is being bullied loses its self-esteem as it feels the same of being called names or always being the victim, unable to fight back (West and Pennell, 2003). Usually, a child who is subjected to bullying under-achieves, further add (West and Pennell, 2003). The underachievement is usually the result of the psychological and physical withdrawal by the bullied from class. Psychologically, the victim becomes alienated, apathetic and indifferent about schooling. Physical withdrawal may be characterized by truancy and permanent withdrawal from school (Owens, 2004).

DETERRING PEER VICTIMIZATION

Interventions to peer victimization are necessary so that the bully conforms to the policies that emphasize the values of the school. Rigby (2000) does not make any claim that there is one single approach that can address peer victimization among students. However, he suggests two methods. First, the bully should be taken to the counselor who will show the student the importance of peaceful co-existence with others. At the end the student is required to apologies to the person who was bullied. Second, legal sanctions such as detention, suspension, should be meted against the perpetrator and in extreme physical bullying, the culprit, should be expelled. McManus (1995) argues against brutal punishment such as flogging as an effective way of deterring bullies. Such punishment, he argues, tends to reinforce the victim's actions. He suggests managing the problem rather punishing the culprit.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the extent of peer victimization in Botswana schools. It employed the following research questions to investigate this concern:

(i) Why do pupils victimize others?
(ii) Are boys/girls more bullies than girls/boys?
(iii) Do victims report cases of victimization to teachers or parents?
(iv) What are the implications of peer victimization to the victims?
(v) How can peer victimization be addressed in schools?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study combined the qualitative and quantitative research methods because each has something to offer the other does not (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). For instance, the questionnaire (quantitative) as a data collecting tool, enables the researcher to gather more data from many people and faster, than he or she would using an interview (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 1994). Whereas the quantitative design method can target a larger population size, the qualitative design produces quality from views expressed at some greater depth and detail (Elliott, 1991). The result of the complementary role played by each method is a hybrid study. To this end, evidence on the presence, extent, causes, implications and remedies of peer victimization was gathered using interviews and a questionnaire.

Sampling Procedure

The March (2003) educational statistics show that there are 764 primary schools and 233 secondary schools in Botswana (Botswana, Republic of 2003). A total of eighteen schools participated as follows; 6 primary schools, 3 from the rural area and 3 from the urban area were randomly selected; from the secondary schools, 9 from two urban centres and 3 from a rural area. The selection of the 12 secondary schools was made randomly from the 233 secondary schools and the 6 primary schools that participated were a random selection from the 764 present primary schools. The schools were also randomly selected from their rural and urban categories.

From each of the ten participating schools, the population of the study was comprised of 4 teachers, 1 head of pastoral care, and the school head. In the context of this study, teacher refers to a person who does not have any other responsibility except classroom teaching. The head of pastoral care, in addition to teaching duties, holds an administrative post. In a school setup, prefects play an important role in mediating other students' problems including bullying. Their participation in the survey was seen as providing first-hand experiences on peer victimization in schools. A total of 16 student prefects (half from the primary and the other half from the secondary schools) were randomly selected from 4 of the 18 schools chosen for the survey. The teachers were selected also on the basis of their mediating role to students' conflicts. The job of the head of pastoral care involves the welfare of students in the school, hence their involvement in the study. Where there were more than one head of pastoral (there can be more in some schools), a random selection was made. There is only one head teacher in each school in the Botswana school system. The head's involvement was on account of the fact that his or her office ultimately receives reports on students' behaviour problems generally. There were therefore 124 participants involved in the survey.

Procedure for Data Collection

The instruments used to collect data in the study were; a partly closed and partly open-ended questionnaire and an interview guide. The open-ended part of the questionnaire, and the interview gave the respondents the opportunity to elaborate more on the issues raised.

Prior permission to conduct a survey on peer victimization had been sought from the head teachers. At each school that participated in the survey, the head of pastoral care agreed to coordinate the exercise. Coordination involved distributing the questionnaire to the respondents and receiving them back after completion. In schools were students were involved in the survey, the coordinators were to choose 4 student prefects for the interview. The rest of the respondents, that is, teachers, heads of pastoral care and head teachers did the questionnaire. As the students participated in the group interview, a total of 4 interviews were therefore conducted.

RESULTS

Views of the participants were sought based on the research questions of the study listed under the title "purpose of the study". Peer victimization exists in many schools as evidenced by a resounding majority 'yes' response in Table 1. Given the natural propensity for young people to engage in mischievous acts, including beating each other, such an overwhelming response to the existence of bullying in schools is not unexpected. Beating, as implied in the definitions offered, is one aspect of peer victimization. Whereas peer victimization is present in most of the schools, it is, however, not a concern in all schools. Fifty six percent of the respondents (Table 2) do not regard it as a problem in schools. About 44% of the respondents who think it is a concern in schools have been supported by media reports on students' behaviour (Mmegi, 2003 and The Midweek Sun, 2004) and also by situations cited in Australia, Canada and the USA in this paper by Rigby, Mellow,and Mosca and Hollister. As noted, in the USA, districts have been forced by the escalating schools crime to resort to the use of tight security measures.

Curtis and O'Hagan (2003) and Rigby (2000) have attributed peer victimization, in part; to the pleasure the bully derives from seeing others suffer. Daniels and Garner (1999) on the other hand see bullying as a strategy young people use to get emotional support and self-identification with a particular group. The need to be accepted and identify with certain social groups has been viewed by Dreikurs et al. (1998) and Daniels and Garner (1999) as strong pressure from friends that cannot even be resisted by children from the best families. The findings support the arguments above but also add that students engage in peer victimization because they seek attention and want to be hero-worshipped by others. Alcohol and drugs, according to the reports from the students interviewed, are significant contributors to peer victimization. From the arguments advanced above, it could be said therefore that peer victimization is a sadists' power game played to gain influence over others and to avenge oneself.

The view by Deikurs et al. (1998), Moore (2002), Daniels and Garner (1999) and Curtis and O'Hagan (2003) that home environments can influence children's behaviour (positively or negatively) has received strong support from the findings. Evidence from the findings is that if children cannot get attention from home, they will get it elsewhere. This sense is summed up thus: "They bully their peers, particularly . . . because they were also bullied elsewhere".

The boys on the girls mostly perpetrate peer victimization. Fifty four percent of the respondents expressed this view. Girls, a shown in Table 3, do not bully other girls as boys do bully other boys and girls. The comment: "They come drunk and start to touch us all over" made by one student, further supports the results from the quantitative aspect of the questionnaire. McManus (1995) and Mmegi (2003) also supported the above view. Rigby (2000) and Dreikurs et al. (1998), however, do not agree that boys engage in peer bullying more than girls. The reason why girls are thought to be less bullies is that they go about it in a more subtle and private way. Girls provoke boys and when the boys retaliate, they run to the teachers to report (Rigby, 2000 and Dreikurs et al., 1998). The tendency by girls to report bullying acts more than the boys is suggested in Table 5. Normally, boys do not report being bullied because, it can be argued, reporting would expose them as cowards and they hate this. They would rather suffer silently or fight back either through their groups or using some others means.

Botswana, though not a class society *per se*, within its classlessness, there is some subtle peer victimization based on the social background of the individual child. This variable was rated second as a factor upon which bullying is based (Table 6). Reported cases of bullying based on the social background of the victim were more common in urban schools. In towns, disparities in the socio-economic standing of families are more pronounced than in villages. Residential accommodation in Botswana towns is classified as low, middle and high cost. Youngsters can use this to bully and isolate others. Normally, peer victimization based on ethnicity occurs where there are different ethnic groups of children in a school. In the Botswana government schools, students go to schools in or around their village or town. The population of day students in the rural areas would therefore predominantly comprise of pupils from the same village or nearby villages within the same or similar ethnic composition. This therefore renders ethnicity as a basis for bullying, an issue of little concern in rural schools.

Students in boarding schools, however, come from many different ethnical backgrounds. Incidents of bullying based on ethnicity, shown in Table 6, are likely to be from boarding schools. The low rating of 4.7% accorded to 'race' as a factor of peer victimization can be accounted for by the fact that in Botswana, expatriate officers most work and stay in urban centers where jobs are easier to find and for some reason, they prefer to send their children to English medium schools. Otherwise where the students' population is multiracial, bullying based on race is a problem as noted by (West and Pennell, 2003).

The most prevalent forms of peer victimization as shown in Table 4, are beating, use of hurtful names, and use of bad language to the victim. Boys use beating on their victims more than girls. The girls on the other hand use the other two methods more than the boys. However, whatever form peer victimization takes, the result is physical and/or emotional hurt to the victim (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003). The hurt or harm so inflicted can lead to underachievement (West and Pennell, 2003) as bullying will prevent the victim to increase his or her ability to take part effectively in group settings. A student's underachievement, as noted by Owens (2004), can result in truancy or permanent self-withdrawal from school. The author, having experienced bullying, can vouch that it is an emotionally humiliating and excruciating ordeal.

Students must feel both emotionally and physically safe if their learning is to be meaningful. Also, teachers need to go on with their teaching activities without having to waste valuable time managing students' behaviour problems. For this to happen, maximum safety should be ensured against peer victimization. Both the findings and the literature (Rigby, 2000 and McManus, 1995) advocate for an effective counseling system rather than punishment. A significant number of the respondents, however, hold that since bullies often use physical means on their victims, they should repay violence with violence. McManus (1995) opposes this thinking as morally unacceptable in modern times. A dialogue with the delinquent, he holds, is a more effective way of discouraging the behaviour.

Presentation of Quantitative Results

Out of the 124 questionnaires distributed, 91 were returned. This represented a 73% return rate. The results are presented below:

From the results above all respondents agreed that peer victimization exists in schools.

Table 1: Existence of peer victimization in schools

Yes	*No*	*% of Yes Responses*
124	0	100

Table 2 suggests that not all schools lose too much sleep over problems of peer victimization.

Table 3 shows that boys practise peer victimization far more than girls and that they target girls more than other boys. Many forms of peer victimization have been reported in the findings. However, the most three common among school-going youth are listed in Table 4 below:

Table 2: Peer victimization as a concern in the school(s)

Yes	*%*	*No*	*%*
40	43.9	51	56

The table 4 shows boys as using beating as a form of bullying than any other form and shows name-calling and use of bad language as prevalent forms of bullying by girls.

Table 3: Peer victimization according to gender: Percentage in each category

Factor	*Percentage*
Boy to boy	33
Boy to girl	54
Girl to girl	9.6
Girl to girl	3.2

Table 4: Common forms of victimization by gender reported to teachers and prefects

	Percentage	
Form of victimization	*Boys*	*Girls*
Beating	21	9
Being called hurtful names	15	22.7
Use of bad language	13	26

Girls report cases of peer victimization more frequently than boys do as illustrated in the table above.

Table 6: Reported peer victimization based on

Factor	*Percentage*
Race	4.7
Ethnicity	23
Gender	78
Disability	14
Social background	52.4

From the table 6, 78% of the respondents indicated that peer victimization based on gender is the most common. Also of significance is the social background factor with a 52.4% rating. Peer victimization based on ethnicity and disability although the ratings are relatively low is not insignificant.

Presentation of Qualitative Results

Reasons for Peer Victimization: The results did not reveal any one reason why students from the different types of schools (rural and urban; primary and secondary) victimize others. Also, the results did not come up with any theory that explains why peer victimization happens. The reasons for bullying others are wide and varied and cannot be attributed to a single factor. The results suggest that in many cases peer victimization is a spontaneous act done for fun to: "impress friends and be accepted in their company"; "feel great among other students"; "be hero-worshipped"; "derive pleasure from seeing others suffer"; "humiliate or embarrass their victims by insulting or beating them publicly" and so on.

The interviews with prefects made some interesting revelations on the behaviour of the boys towards the girls. They complained about boys harassing girls during evening entertainment especially in boarding schools. Boys, some of the interviewees alleged, have a tendency to force girls to dance with them against the girls' will during school entertainment and if a dance is refused the boys shout at them. This they claim, boys do when they are under the influence of alcohol and drugs. One student remarked: "They come drunk and start to touch us all over. That is why some of us prefer to remain at the hostels although regulations require that all should attend entertainment sessions. Another reason suggested by teachers and other senior staff for peer bullying was that students who bully others are perpetrating their experiences from home, which they have seen being practised on other family members or which they have personally experienced.

Consequences of Peer Victimization: The results suggest that students who are victims of peer victimization have a tendency of not interacting with others freely. One interviewee wrote: "They often will leave school at the earliest opportunity every day at the dismissal bell, therefore missing on opportunities to discuss schoolwork with others". Bullying can also affect the bully. The time the teacher spends resolving cases of peer victimization is valuable time lost on learning by the bully, lamented a head teacher.

Remedies: The following comments sum up the general feeling of the majority on how peer victimization can be addressed: "Bullies must be punished in a similar manner they treat their victims". This comment by a teacher represented the views of the majority of the respondents, teachers and students alike. A few respondents suggested that both the teachers and parents must be involved and cooperate in counseling the perpetrators. One respondent wrote: "Children's minds should not be allowed to wander, teachers should keep them busy most of the time".

CONCLUSION

The evidence that has been presented in this study demonstrates that a multitude of factors are associated with peer victimization. Some of these are not readily amenable to school policies or practices (the culturally or home background-related) although in a number of cases there are ways in which school policies might mitigate the impact of disadvantages to the child and the school. By and large, the study concludes that peer victimization is mainly a boys' game played mainly on girls. The view from the results that boys engage in peer bullying more than girls corroborates those of McManus's (1995) and not Rigby's (2000) and Dreikurs's et al. (1998). Peer victimization can, however, be serious to the extent of undermining school performances as the victims can resort to truancy or even leave school forever. The study, however, showed two contrasting views on how bullying can be addressed. The majority view from the findings advocates for physical punishment to the bully. Views from the literature on the other hand condemn physical punishment as contemporary no more relevant (McManus, 1995). In Botswana, the use of corporal punishment is not only a legal sanction in schools, it is also a method used on offenders in society generally. The majority view on the use of physical punishment as a deterrent to bullying is therefore consistent with what the law advocates. The study concludes by suggesting strategies schools can employ to ameliorate the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The general notion that bullies must be treated the way they treat their victims, as suggested by some respondents, can only reinforce their action and become even more bully. Recommendations based on moulding the child are suggested as follows:

(i) Schools should first investigate and understand what motivates peer victimization and then involve parents, school counselors and social workers in managing the behaviour. Because excessive strictness to the child by the parent or teacher, especially whipping, may arouse violent behaviour from the child (McManus, 2000), adults should use counseling more as a deterrent measure.

(ii) Because bullying is often the result of an idle mind, as suggested in the findings, teachers should keep students usefully occupied in one way or the other at school and at home, for example, by assigning work to be done at home.

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ABSTRACT This study made an investigation of the nature of peer victimization and its causes and effects on its victims. The investigation was carried out in six primary and twelve secondary schools in Botswana using questionnaires and interviews on a randomly selected group of teachers and students. The study concluded that peer victimization is very prevalent in schools and that boys are the worst perpetrators and they do it more on girls than on other boys.

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