

## **Bullying at a Zimbabwean Boarding School: Views of Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders**

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Bullying at schools has been reported to be problematic with regards to students' safety and academic achievement. Inasmuch as various scholars have delved into the problem of bullying, few have focused the issue from the perspective of the bully, the victim, and the bystander. The aim of this study is to discover and understand bullying behaviours at a Zimbabwean co-ed rural boarding school focusing specifically on the perceptions of students who identified themselves as bullies, victims, and bystanders. Participants ( $N = 6$ ) were students at the school and identified themselves as bullies, victims, or bystanders. Data was collected mainly through interviews done behind closed doors for privacy purposes and also through observation technique. The results of this case study research showed that bullying was rife at the boarding school with school prefects using their position to bully other students. In addition, victims protected bullies and bystanders felt powerless to intervene lest they become the next victim. The study also found that causes of bullying were intrinsic, inherent hatred, home background status, teacher favouritism, jealousy, unreported previous cases, complacency of teachers and lack of concrete structures that keep bullying under constant check. The study recommended that schools have concrete, rigorously enforced anti-bullying structures, rules, and regulations, with students being conscientized on the ills of bullying behaviour. Students across schools should be empowered to report bullying so that they do not suffer in silence.

Keywords: bullying, bullies, victims, bystanders, boarding school

## **INTRODUCTION**

Few studies have been done focusing on bullying behavior at a boarding school particularly in Zimbabwe (Mugove, 2017; Zindi, 1994). Bullying behavior is prevalent in most schools the world over. The definition of bullying varies and this research paper will adopt Olweus (1994) and Kaplan's (2007) definition of bullying as student's exposure, repeatedly, and overtime to negative actions that may involve verbal, violent and aggressive behavior. Sampson (2002) adds that bullying is targeted at students who cannot properly defend themselves due to their small body sizes, strength, or being outnumbered. Boarding school have typically 80 to 90 per cent of their overall school population living on campus in dormitory-style residential halls for the duration of the schooling year (Mander, et al., 2014). School staff members, who are usually dorm parents, teachers or coaches (Kennedy, 2017), supervise the dormitories.

Gudyanga, et al. (2014) found that bullying is rife in Zimbabwean schools and most of it was targeted on younger or weaker students who were not able to defend themselves. The most perplexing issue is that victims of bullying do not report bullying behaviours although bullying tends to be long lasting (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). The reasons for not reporting vary. For example, some victims feel adults do not take the issue seriously (Rigby, 2004). Describing the association between bullies and their

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victims, Omoke and Afen-Akpaïda, (2008) and Thornberg (2010) as cited by Asiyai (2015) noted that a single student who bullies can have far reaching effects on the school by creating a climate of fear and intimidation for his/her victims and bystanders.

### **Bully Profiles**

Research has shown that bullies are psychologically and socially stronger, and maintain their dominance in their peers using violence (Arafat, 2017). Rigby (2004) refers to bullies as individuals who have an aggressive personality pattern coupled with the tendency to react aggressively in situations Rigby (1993) went further to assert that bullies have an inability to control their aggressive tendencies and a positive attitude toward violence. A social cognition study done by Sutton, et al (1999) concluded that bullies have high-functioning social skills based on the finding that bullies were aware of the emotions of their victims.

Bullying comes in different shades and most studies support this assertion. In terms of violence, studies (Arafat, 2017) have shown that boys are more likely to engage in violent (physical) bullying behavior. Studies (Baldry, 1998; Mugove, 2017; Ncube, et al, 2015; Tsai & Gomba, 2012) have identified forms of physical aggression among boys that include threats, beating, pushing, rejection, and name-calling. Coloroso (2003) found that direct verbal aggression was the most common form of bullying, occurring with similar frequency in both sexes. For girls, similar studies have shown that bullying behaviour is mostly indirect and include deliberate manipulation of social relationships with the aim of isolating the victim by making her feel unwanted.

### **Victim and Bystander Profile**

Victims of bullying behavior are seen as passive, submissive, insecure, less assertive, physically weak, and tend to have lower social status (Arafat, 2017, Shetgiri, 2013, & Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Some studies have found that victims of bullying tend to be worried, have low self-esteem, face rejection from friends, and rarely engage in school activities (Ates, 2017). Some victims tend to be shy and not assertive enough to open up and state the situation they are in. Fraser-Thill (2018) found that victims of bullying tend to have insecure personality, lower peer acceptance, are special needs students, or have overprotective parents or teachers. In addition, some victims tend to blame themselves for the bullying behavior (Rigby, 2004) meted against them and is another reason why they do not report the bullying behavior to the adults or school authorities.

Some victims of bullies tend to bully others as revenge and these are sometimes referred to as bully-victims, reactive bullies, or aggressive victims. Research has shown that these bully-victims transition from being victims to bullies over a period of time (Shetgiri, 2013).

Several studies have shown that bystanders may be passive to bullying behavior (Arafat, 2017; Coloroso, 2003; Cowie, 2000) and in some cases may be seen as “acting in collusion with bullies” (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013 p. 316). Some bystanders may actually be active; cheering on the bully (Salmivalli, et al, 1996) thus may be seen as supporting the bully in the bullying act. While bystanders often fail to defend the victim even if they are capable, but they do exhibit higher levels of empathy towards the victims. It is in this present study that we are interested in gathering views, perceptions, and worldviews of bullies, victims and bystanders at a boarding school in rural Zimbabwe.

### **The Purpose of Study**

There has not been much written on bullying at a boarding school especially in Zimbabwe, and we as researchers are seeking to listen to student participants at a boarding school and build an understanding of bullying behaviour based on what we heard (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of this case study research is to investigate and explore perceptions of bullies, victims, and bystanders at a

rural Catholic boarding high school in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. The study also sought to understand bullying behavior at the school and came up with an explanation of what makes the case unique. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do bullies, victims and bystanders describe bullying behavior experiences at their school?
2. How do boarder students regard as the effects and solutions to bullying behavior at the school?

## **METHOD**

This study utilized a case study research design. A case study is an in-depth exploration of social phenomenon of a bounded system (Creswell, 2007; Swanborn, 2010). The unit of analysis, which determines the case, and in case study research is students' experiences with bullying behavior at their school. The aspect of bullying is an issue with far reaching consequences at school and in this study interviews were used to explore the uniqueness of the case in detail. The participants in this study have been selected based on their unique properties (Swanborn, 2010) such as having participated in bullying behavior, witnessed bullying and or were victims. The aim is to learn and understand the experiences of the individual students in the case.

Using a case study research design for this study has an advantage of allowing us to collect a lot of detail (Baskarada, 2014) pertaining to bullying which would be difficult with other designs such as phenomenology. The case study approach is valuable to use when researchers have little control of the events (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) and in our case, we have no control with respect to bullying at the school since we are outsiders. In addition, we used the design due to the rarity of research on the topic in order to collect rich data from the field. In addition, case study research provides a unique example of real people in real situations (students at a boarding school), enabling researchers to get an understanding of ideas (bullying behavior) clearly. Using the case study research design gave us a valuable tool for understanding bullying behavior at the school due to the few samples of bullying participants (Yin, 2003).

### **Participants**

The participants were six students (3 males and 3 females) drawn from a rural Catholic boarding school in the Midlands province. Students volunteered after learning that we were doing a study on bullying. The selection process then targeted those students who experienced bullying in various capacities. The grade level (Form) was also used focusing on average all the grade level. Some of the students' victimizations were extreme so they volunteered to participate as they saw the study as an opportunity to pour out their experiences. The average age of the participants was 17.5. The aim of the study was to recruit high school students who are bullies, were or are victims of bullying behavior, or witnessed bullying in one way or the other. Participant selection was done through purposive sampling targeting students who are boarders and who experienced these behaviors. The students willingly took part in the study and we asked the parents of the minor students (Luke, Peter, and Kathy), for permission to interview them. The other three students (Patience, Paul, and Angela) were above the age 18 and could consent on their own. In addition, the school authorities granted us permission to do the study at their school provided we did not name the school or the students involved. We thus used pseudonyms for the purposes of privacy and anonymity.

Table 1  
Demographic characteristics of participants (N=6)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Bully</i>	<i>Victim</i>	<i>Bystander</i>
Luke	Male	16	4		X	X
Peter	Male	17	4	X		X
Paul	Male	20	5	X		
Angela	Female	19	6	X	X	X
Kathy	Female	18	3		X	X
Patience	Female	17	5		X	X

### Data Collection

Data was collected mainly through interviews and observations. The whole process of data collection took six months with interviews ranging from one hour to a maximum of two hours each. We provided each of the participants with a letter of consent explaining the purpose of the study and for the minors we gave their parents a copy of the consent form. The interviews were to gather participants' perceptions on bullying behavior at the school. The questions solicited for forms, reasons, examples, evidence, times and places of bullying behavior. After the interviews, we also visited the students' hostels to observe how they lived and how bullying was done in the confines of the hostels, so naturalistic observation was another tool we used to collect data. Each of the researchers kept a journal recording important points from the interviews and from observation. Interviews were conducted at the school site and English was the main language used in addition to Shona language.

### Data Analysis

Bernard (2013) defined data analysis as the "search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (p.394). We mainly used content analysis to analyze data we obtained from the field (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012). Content analysis is a research procedure that involves quantification and analysis of the presence of words and concepts with the view of drawing meanings and relationships while at the same time making inferences of those words (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004). Hancock (2002) provided the necessary steps (with the exception to the first point) that researchers need to follow when using content analysis to analyze data and these are:

- We transcribed and translated the material into English language. (The researchers are both fluent in Shona and English to ensure high-quality translation).
- We each read the transcript making notes in the margin on interesting and relevant information.
- We then categorized each of the items we noted in the margin and came up with various categories.
- We then shared the categories we each made and linked similar categories coming up with fewer categories.
- We then came up with major (themes) and minor categories and we compared and contrasted them. We took some minor categories and fitted them into alternative major categories.
- We then reviewed the categories (themes) and we joined some of the categories together; for example, theme two of 'Time, place, and forms of bullying.'
- After coming up with the themes for this study, we then reviewed the original transcript to check if there is any relevant information that we might have left out and we incorporated the data into the final themes.

In the final analysis, we then developed naturalistic generalizations, which are essentially an explanation of the case that readers can learn from and apply to their situations (Creswell, 2007). We also provided a detailed description of the case focusing on the facts of the research study.

## **FINDINGS**

The study investigated the perceptions of bullies, victims, and bystanders at a rural Catholic boarding high school in the Midlands province. All participants were attending the school as boarders and two students were in form three, one student in form two, and the remaining three were in form six. Participants who stated that they at one time bullied someone at school were 50%, while the remainder 50% stated that they never bullied anyone. Those who experienced bullying behavior was 66.66% and 33.33% stated that they never experienced bullying behavior. Bystanders were 66.66% while 16.66% intervened one or twice when another student was bullied. Findings from individual and focus group interviews showed that bullying is prevalent at the boarding school in different forms, at different times, places and for different reasons. In addition, findings show that bullying behavior has effects on bullies, victims, and bystanders alike. Not much data concerning bullying behavior was witnessed during the periodic visits to the hostels. The observations were done twice per week for 2 hours for two months. Victims stated that bullies would not want to be seen in the act by people whom they did not know and due to the culture of respecting elders.

### **Reasons for Bullying**

In understanding the perceptions of bullies, victims, and bystanders of bullying, it is important to understand the reasons for bullying at a boarding environment as explained by the students in this study. One of the reasons why victims get bullied at a boarding school is the perceived low economic status background as evidenced by poor dressing (hence appearance), type of friends, and having little or no pocket money. As a boarder, one can be bullied for associating with day scholars who are considered poor and of lower class by boarders. As a result, the victim of bullying might be isolated at the boarding place when the day scholars who are his/her friends are not present.

Another reason why other students are bullied is that the bullies are jealous of the victim excelling in school, sports, and being liked by teachers. The explanation is that the bully, in some cases may be poor at academics or sports and tends to blame the victim for these failures. As put by one of the victims, "simple things that are not worth mentioning" provoke a bully. Bullies can also bully their victims if they interact with students of the opposite sex, especially a boy interacting with a girl may be bullied. Dating a boy or girl who is adored by bully girl or boy is a reason for bullying.

Form one students or students new to the school are often bullied. Being a form one is the most difficult part of being at a boarding school as they are expected to do all the duties like sweeping, cleaning, and washing dishes at the dining hall. Peter had this to say:

Form ones get bullied every time. At a boarding school like ours, we believe that being a form one is the sole reason for being bullied. So, the theme of bullying comes from that fact of being form one

### **Time, Place, and Forms of Bullying**

Most of the bullying incidents occur after the 6:00pm to 8:00pm study time at the hostels. Students agreed that supervision by the boarding master/mistress was difficult since the hostels they stay are set apart from each other. For example, by the time, the boarding master/mistress goes to one hostel to supervise or check on students, bullying might occur in another hostel. In some cases, bullying occurs at school, in-between subjects, when teachers are not present. Bullying also occurs at the sports field, and dining hall even in the presence of teachers or the boarding master/mistress. Angela had this to say about places where bullying occurs:

I think when we are at the hostels; most of the time it [bullying] happens between a person from the Advanced Level and the one from the lower Level; like instilling fear into these young ones, mocking them, make them wash our clothes, and all sorts of other things.

In some cases, the bully would say that they will meet at the hostel and the victim would know exactly what that meant. Paul, one of the bullies who is also a prefect professed that he uses his prefect status to bully other students and in the event of insubordination or refusal to perform what he demanded of the student, he would:

If the person would refuse to do what I want at school, then we would go to something else [bullying]. We will see each other at the hostels. I mean, I would go and ask him to open the trunk. I will take what I want and I will go.

Bullying at a boarding school is in many forms, and these seem to vary from time to time and place to place. For example, physical bullying seemed to occur more often at night at the hostel for both girls and boys. Another form of bullying common to both girls and boys was asking victims to do laundry for the bully who in most cases is a senior student. Name-calling is also one form of bullying that is common to both boys and girls and occurs often and in many places at the school. Some are even labelled gay and Satanists. Another form of bullying is forcing other students to supply the bully with food. Hiding the victim's personal belongings like books, clothes, and even blankets or pushing the victim down the stairs are other forms of bullying that occur at boarding schools.

During the water crisis at the school, form ones were asked to fetch water from the borehole by Form 6 students, some of them who were prefects. Angela reminisced:

Let's say we went to the borehole to fetch water, they would take the water from your bucket and pour it in their buckets. They would then force us to carry their buckets. We would carry the buckets to the hostels and then we would go back to the borehole to fetch our water.

### **Views of Bullies**

Two male students identified themselves as bullies and talked about why they bully other students and gave reasons why they still get away with it. One female student admitted that she once bullied another student, but had currently stopped. Peter, a bully, said they are slow learners and other students make fun of them when they get low marks. They then target these students with different forms of bullying showing them that despite lack of expert power they have the physical power. Bullies also said they target students who are quiet and seem not to be aware of what happens at a boarding school. Paul, a bully explained how bullies target their victims:

If you have a submissive character, then you are more prone to being bullied. Being submissive is like being quiet, being silly, being stupid; they will bully you. So, they first study your character, how you behave, how you talk so that they [bullies] understand how you think and act. If they see that you are blank, you do not even know anything, they will attack you. They would have realized that your quietness is due to stupidity. But then if you are a form one student, you talk a lot, the bullies fear that you might do something like reporting them.

Another form of bullying that occurs is when a group of students use a physically strong student to bully other students (Figure 1). The students stated that they call it 'using' because the physically strong student is not smart enough to realize that he is being used to bully other students. Peter explained how they actually did it:

Let's say in your class stream there is a person whom you know is very strong, we can actually use him to bully the young ones. We will use him there. In a way we are bullying him because we are using

him because of his physicality to bully younger students. We would send him to bully form ones ... we were using him.

Explaining why they always get away with bullying, the bullies stated that the victims are afraid of being further bullied. They also stated that they use threatening language that would make the victim fear them, hence they will not report. Bullies said that in most cases, teachers do not punish them severely, so they are tempted to bully the victim again. They said they bully victims continuously after being reprimanded in public because they take it as being ridiculed. Alarmingly bullies revealed that they can even go to the extent of booing teachers such that their teachers ended up being afraid of them. Paul had the following experience at a previous school:

If the teacher decides to beat us all, we would make a lot of noise and say haaaaaa haaaaaa haaaaaa. We were well known for misbehaving. And when we were in form four, it was worse. Unfortunately teachers were afraid of us. The fear was realised to the extent that when by the time we finished our final examination teachers had vanished from school. The only remaining two teachers who had invigilated our final examination locked themselves inside the office.

### **Views of Victims**

Victims of bullying incidents consider the reasons they get bullied as not important and silly. The victims do not consider bullying at the school as a big problem, but a normal way of how boarding schools operate. However, the victim participants agreed that bullying behaviour needs to be addressed. The victims in this study stated that they never reported the bullying behaviour to teachers or the boarding master/mistress. If ever they decide to open, they said they will tell a friend whom they would instruct not to tell anyone. The friends, in most cases are powerless to do anything, so the bullying will either continue at a lesser level (Figure 1). Kathy gave a reason why she does not report being bullied:

I have never reported anyone. The reason is that I fear for my friends to be given a hard time. I like them a lot. I know some do not like me judging by the way they talk to me or treat me. But, myself I just like all people irrespective of the treatment they give me. So if I report them they might be suspended for 2 weeks. So I would not want that to happen to them.

Kathy also stated that her bullies carried her on her bed whilst she was asleep. She stated that she woke up after feeling cold only to realize that she was outside.

Another reason why victims of bullying behaviour at a boarding school do not report is that no adequate action or reprimanding is done to the satisfaction of the victim. Worse still, the victims are bullied further if they report to the teachers, so for them it is better to remain silent. In fact, the victims stated that it was better for them to find favour from the bully by willingly doing what the bully asks them to do. In that way, the bullies tend to regard the willing victim as a 'young brother' or 'young sister' and will not be bullied often. Angela stated the reasons why victims do not report the bullies to the teachers. She said:

We were fearful to report them to the elders since we believed that they were older and hence were used to their school, let's just leave them alone and let them be comfortable. If you report, they will keep telling you that they do not like you, and at a boarding school, it's not good. We stay together at the hostels and they will torment you every day. To make matters worse they were prefects so reporting them you will be afraid they will influence others not to talk with you.

All the participants talked of the November Crisis as one event that influences them not to report to their teachers. November Crisis, according to the participants, is a bullying event that happens when

the Form 4 and 6 finish their public examination and beat up other students before they leave the school. Peter explained how the November Crisis pans out:

November Crisis is a time when form 4s and others like form 6 engage in fights after writing their exams. If you had an outstanding issue that's when you meet and fight because the assumption is that since the person is finishing Form 4, you will never meet each other. It does not end with fights only but Forms 1 to 3 are beaten at night for no apparent reason. It's a system that ... started a long time ago. November Crisis is there to settle past scores.

The victims stated that they were told to be aware of being bullied at school by their parents. The students said that their parents knew that bullying occurred at boarding schools probably because they themselves experienced or witnessed it. The participants stated that they are more likely to tell their parents than authorities at school. Patience had this to say:

Why is it that students end up telling their parents? It's because the parents take bullying seriously since they would say "my child is now affected in school." Here at school they take things lightly. They must be strong through giving punishments that a person will never do that again.

### **Views of Bystanders**

Not much came from the bystanders among the participants. Some of the bystanders were passive stating they were either afraid to get involved while others stated that they had strict orders from their parents "to mind their own business." In some cases, the bystanders stated that in some cases they might have ill-feelings against the victim especially from a previous fallout, conflict, or undeclared hatred. Kathy said:

When I saw her being bullied, I did not get involved although I could have helped her. We had our 'previous' so I saw that as a way of my issue being avenged. Besides we were not friends at all.

A prefect who got involved, who refused to be a bystander, said that he is now a hated person at the school because nearly all the boarder boys at the school view him as non-compromising person. He however said that he does not mind being labelled as he is physically strong and no one dares challenge him. A sympathetic bystander is given names when s/he tries to get involved, hence they are discouraged.

An explanation given by the bystanders for why they do not want to get involved is that they do not want to burden themselves as witnesses during the disciplinary hearings. In any case, one of the female bystanders who was sympathetic to the bullying incident got a sarcastic innuendo being called 'Sister Holy.'

### **Speech on bullying**

Prior to the gathering of data, one of the students had presented a speech on bullying at the Inter-Catholic Arts Festival. The student granted us the permission to reproduce his work in its entirety.

*In life everyone has the chance to go to school. School has stages i.e. preschool, primary school, high school and university. But most people say life begins at high school and at high school we meet a lot of challenges. It may be Maths, Science or physics but the most painful part of high school we might encounter is being bullied. It is argued by most psychologists that most bullies are said to have been abused by their parents and intent to express their anger on other inferior or weaker children, but the major question is: if it really hurts them that they were abused, why do they want other children to go through the same pain they went through? But yet some psychologists say that bullies are associated with drugs. Research has proved that drugs lead to antisocial behavior. As a victim of bullies and a bystander I have noticed that most bullies at boarding school are children who are spoilt. They go to*



school and want to be superior and feared. They do not want to earn respect but the want to gain it not realizing that they are emotionally, verbally and physically abusing someone. But then the worst part of bullying is that it leads to suicide and to a certain extent the victim can end up even committing themselves to drugs due to emotional frustration and stress. Ladies and gentlemen I do not speak because I want to, but because I have to help change other people`s lives.

The speech above was as a result of spontaneous outburst of the victim`s emotions that had accumulated in him after being bullied for a very long time.

**A bullying model**

Students explained that bullies (physically strong and senior students) bully physically weaker students and junior students. According to students if bullying is reported, either the bully is punished, suspended, or expelled or in some cases bullying incidences might increase or be reduced (figure 1). There is however danger according to students if the victim does not report as the bullying might also increase or be reduced. If it stops, the victim will be regarded as “junior brother” who will no longer be bullied because he would have protected the bully from the wrath of the school officials.

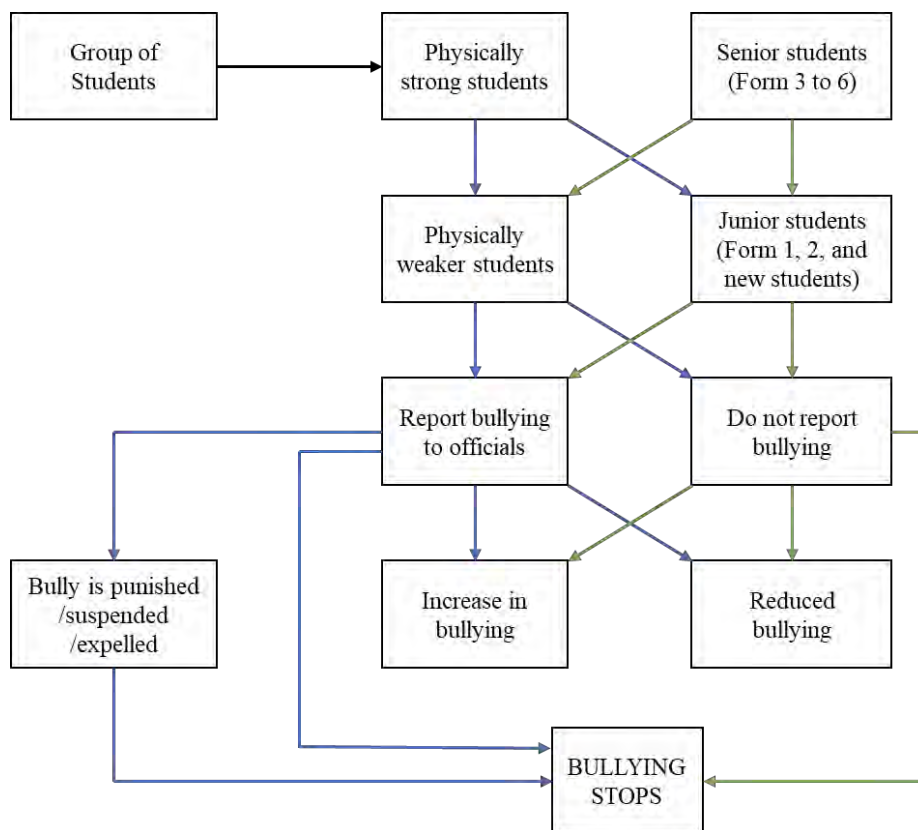


Figure 1  
A bullying model at a boarding school based on students` experiences

The bullying model above illustrates that bullying is still rife in schools. It is proof that without addressing the problem, the scourge remains rooted in schools, as shown by ‘Increase in bullying’ box.

### **Effects of Bullying according to Participants**

The victims stated that they suffer from physical pain when they are bullied. An example given by one of the participants is that he broke his arm when he was bullied and had to seek medical attention. Victims also stated that they are often isolated because other students are afraid of being bullied by the bullies if they are seen associating with them. In addition to being isolated, some victims said they would resort to alcohol (beer) and drugs (*dagga* or *mbanje*). Other victims may end up looking for younger student to bully. Luke, one of the victims had this to say:

It [Bullying] can lead to different kinds of things in your life like, even go through mental breakdowns or even trying to find ways of removing that pain and you end up going into drugs, or even end up looking for someone younger so that you can bully so that you can remove your pain on someone else.

One of the effects of bullying behavior on the victim is a noticeable change in behavior and also performance at school. Patience gave a narrative of what happened to her when she was bullied by another student. She said:

When I was bullied, I was disturbed a lot. You find that I was no longer active like I was before. I had changed a lot ... even at school my performance was down, and physically my weight decreased. Performance deteriorated.

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this case study was to understand the perceptions of bullies, victims, and bystanders of bullying at a boarding school in Zimbabwe. Findings from this study have shown that bullies, victims, and bystanders held different perceptions with regards to bullying at their school. The three groups of students were very much aware of the presence and prevalence of bullying at their school with some able to recount vividly their experiences with bullying behavior.

Our study's results are consistent with other findings from other studies (Dryden-Edwards, 2018; Tsai & Gomba, 2012) that bullying at school tends to occur during the absence of adults, especially at secluded unsupervised areas. In addition, since the school is a boarding school, boarder students experience bullying at the hostels. Supervision is done by a boarding master (for boys) or matron (for girls) and since the hostels are far apart from each other, concurrent supervision is difficult. This study found that most of the causes of bullying occurring at a boarding school are similar to causes of bullying at a school found by other studies (Mittal & Babu, 2017; Smith, 2016; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). These causes range from physical bullying, name calling, pushing, isolation, poor background, spreading rumors, and emotional bullying. However, bullying at a boarding school took the form of taking food from victims, being locked out of the hostel, dumping her on her bed outside the hostel. Kathy's narration of being carried outside the hostel while she slept on her bed is a new form of bullying this study found.

Another audacious or rather subtle form of bullying this study found was when bullies (pranksters) deliberately craft mischief that would create awkward situations between the victim and their teachers. An example is of tricking from ones who are not yet conversant with the names of the teachers to call them with their nicknames. The intention would be to arouse anger in the teacher so that the tricked victim gets punished.

One participant in this study (Kathy), a female student, seemed to be a lonely island in a vast turbulent ocean of perpetual rejection, hatred, and alienation at the hands of people she was literally chained to. This finding is a first of its kind that all her roommates would connive to bully her. As for the bully who led the bullying in the hostel, participants claimed that she was academically challenged and felt threatened such that she developed an equally opposing force probably of compensatory behavior to

subdue her perceived opponent. She did so through making the participant victim a scapegoat of her academic incompetence.

A finding from this study that seems to be different from findings from previous studies (Mugove, 2017; Zindi, 1994) - with the exception of some newspaper reports in Zimbabwe - pertains to the role of some prefects in bullying. School prefects were found, with one prefect participant, agreeing to bully other students through making false accusations, incrimination, unsanctioned detention, forced labor, and impounding of personal belongings. The result is that new and form one students ended up having a skewed perception of prefects' authority and role. Are they so privileged to torment and punish other students willy-nilly?

Another finding from the study that we have not found in previous research studies pertains to a specific event in the school calendar of students that involves bullying behavior. The event is the 'November Crisis' when completing students (Form 4 and 6) use the period or a certain day before they leave to beat up remaining students who had offended them in any way. This finding is perplexing, knowing that the boarding master and matron – including their assistants -will be there. So the question is, are they not aware of this event? If they are aware, what are they doing to stop it?

What is common throughout this and other studies is that victims and bystanders do not report bullying behavior to the teachers. The analysis revealed that victims took conscious efforts to protect their tormentors despite suffering emotional misery as well as physical bullying. The only exception was of the student who was pushed down the stairs and broke his arm. The reportage was inevitable in that situation. For the female participant, her parents' involvement was merely circumstantial, as they had noticed a change in her behavior. Had that not been noticed, it is the claim of this study that the victim would not have reported the bullying incident.

The study also showed that in most cases bystanders do not want to get involved in bullying situations. This is supported by earlier findings by Pizzoli and Gini (2012). We found that bystanders are hesitant, afraid, indecisive, or indifferent in relation to getting involved in bullying matters. This is supported by Salmivalli, et al (1996) who stated that bystanders may witness bullying silently and do not act in any way to stop bullying behavior.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this case study research was to investigate and explore perceptions of bullies, victims, and bystanders at a rural Catholic boarding high school in the Midlands province. The study also sought to understand bullying behavior at the school and came up with an explanation of what makes the case unique. The results of the study showed that bullying behavior was prevalent at the school and happened in many forms, many places, and for different reasons.

Victims of bullying behavior tend to resign themselves to relentless bullying and many are not comfortable to open up to their parents or teachers. In addition, victims felt that the prefects, who in some cases are the perpetrators of bullying behavior, were doing a disservice to other students and to the school in general. It is a recommendation of this research study that schools should develop mechanisms to identify bullying behavior and come up with averting strategies. Since the study found that some bullies are academically challenged, schools may provide additional support academically. In turn, students may be enculturated with a more loving attitude toward those who struggle academically. Although this issue might require additional study, leadership training may be provided to the prefects. This is so because they seem not to recognize the difference between leadership and bullying as some engaged in bullying behavior.

Most importantly schools must be innovative to find or develop contingency measures that are based on constant schools surveillances especially in bullying hot spots. For a start, an anti-bullying

suggestion box might be erected at the school and or rewarding whistleblowers and at the same time punish the bully to serve as a learning lesson to other students. Disciplinary hearings by school officials must be done in a way that does not burden the bystander being a witness. Disciplinary committees must create victim and bystander friendly hearings. Generally, students do not want to be involved in disciplinary hearings because of their inevitable interrogative nature hence schools should have them in a manner that does not lead to students not wanting to be witnesses.

In short, considering the victim of bullying conjures a picture of a person who must adapt and acclimate to the harsh environment of bullying devoid of the slightest hope for survival by dissolving their emotions in their tears or suppressing them in their sleep or begrudgingly confiding in a friend who can only offer sympathy. This is not, and must never be, an acceptable feeling or scenario at a boarding school where students are there to learn to become better citizens. A school culture that survives on established systems like the 'November Crisis' will likely create criminals in a society and this should never be acceptable. It is the recommendation of this study to thoroughly investigate and engage all stakeholders at the school to end the 'November Crisis' animal.

This case study was limited to one rural boarding school focusing on boarder students. The main reason for targeting the six participants is that they either experienced, participated in bullying behavior. The six students volunteered to participate in the study after purposefully sampling them due to their various bullying experiences. For future research, focus might shift to other boarding schools outside the district or even making a comparison between a day school and a boarding school with respect to bullying experiences at the schools. The study has shown that bullying behavior is prevalent at a boarding school and, some cases, is perpetrated by prefects who are supposed to be in the vanguard of the force against such types of ills such as bullying behavior.

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