

**Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour
in a South African high school**

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**Dissertation (article format) submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree *Magister Scientiae* in Clinical Psychology
at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University**

Supervisor: Dr D. K. Kirsten

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1. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1.1 Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Date: _____

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1.2

Certificate from language editor

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The Editors

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Declaration of language editing: Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in a South African high school

This letter confirms that I have personally undertaken language editing of the article "Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in a South African high school", written by Liani Krüger (Student Number 21871590). I have corrected the language and it is my professional opinion that the language used in the document is suitable for publication.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries.

With Kind Regards,

Colleen Holland

BA (English), HDE

Freelance Language Editor

Member of Professional Editors' Group (South Africa)

2. SUMMARY

Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in a South African high school

Key words: Adolescents; bullying; bullying tactics; gender differences; incidence; South African context.

There is widespread concern for the mental well-being of adolescents. Various studies have indicated the deleterious consequences of bullying for both victims and bullies, implying the serious need for interventions to lower the incidence of bullying in schools. Descriptive data must inform the development of intervention programmes. The present study aimed to provide such data and to add to existing research on bullying in South African schools.

This quantitative study investigated bullying behaviour in a parallel-medium, multi-racial high school in the North-West Province. The specific research aims were to examine the total incidence of bullying experiences and, specifically, frequency levels of being bullied according to age group and race group. Furthermore, gender differences in frequency levels of individual and group bullying, as well as gender-specific frequency levels of use of direct and indirect bullying tactics were examined.

A one-shot cross-sectional survey design was employed. A randomly selected representative sample of 635 learners, comprising 274 boys and 361 girls, completed a self-report survey instrument, the Peer Relation Questionnaire (Neser, Ladikos and Prinsloo 2004), with regard to their bullying experiences. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate frequencies, cross-tabulations and chi-square statistical tests.

Results indicated that 52% of participants reported to have been the victims of bullying. A significant difference in distribution of bullying frequency was indicated for race groups, but not for age groups. Black and coloured learners in this school experienced a higher frequency of bullying than white learners, which indicates that racial dynamics has an important impact on bullying behaviour in this school. Bullying frequency in this high school is not significantly lower in senior secondary learners (learners 16 years and older) than in junior secondary learners

(learners between 13 and 15 years), as was predicted by literature. In terms of gender differences, boys in this school were found to bully significantly more than girls. Furthermore, group bullying was found to be more prevalent than individual bullying in both genders. In this school boys and surprisingly girls too were shown to favour direct verbal bullying tactics (unpleasant teasing) and direct physical bullying tactics (hitting, kicking or pushing). This finding is a cause for concern as it is contradicted by literature which describes girls as preferring indirect bullying tactics (isolating the victim or threatening harm) to direct physical tactics, indicating that girls in this school use higher levels of physical aggression in bullying than the findings of other literature.

The found high incidence levels of being bullied and bullying behaviour trends indicate a need for an anti-bullying intervention in this school, which includes learners of all age and race groups. The study's findings imply that such an intervention should include a focus on bullying of black and coloured learners and address racial dynamics in bullying. Furthermore intervention should address group and individual bullying, as well as the use of direct bullying tactics among both boys and girls, particularly direct physical tactics. Although these findings are not generalisable to other South African schools, the need for further South African research to investigate unique trends in bullying behaviour is stressed.

3. OPSOMMING

Voorkoms en geslagsverskille in boeliegedrag in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse hoërskool

Sleutelwoorde: Adollesente; boeliegedrag; boelietaktieke; geslagsverskille; voorkoms; Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

Die geestelike welsyn van adollesente is 'n wydverspreide bron van kommer. Verskeie studies toon dat boeliegedrag vir beide slagoffers én boelies skadelike gevolge inhou, en dat daar dus 'n ernstige behoefte aan intervensies is wat die voorkoms van boeliegedrag in skole kan verlaag. Die ontwikkeling van intervensieprogramme moet aan die hand van beskrywende data geskied. Hierdie studie was daarop gemik om sodanige data te verskaf en om ook bestaande navorsing oor hierdie verskynsel in Suid-Afrikaanse skole aan te vul.

Hierdie kwantitatiewe studie het boeliegedrag in 'n parallel-medium, veelrassige hoërskool in die Noordwes Provinsie ondersoek. Die spesifieke navorsingsdoelstellings was om die algehele voorkoms van boelie-ondervindings in die skool te ondersoek, en veral die frekwensievlakke van die ervaring van boeliegedrag volgens ouderdoms- en rassegroep. Voorts is geslagsverskille in die frekwensievlakke van individuele en groep boeliegedrag, asook geslagspesifieke frekwensievlakke van die gebruik van direkte en indirekte boelietaktieke ondersoek.

'n Eenmalige deursnitopname ontwerp is gebruik. In 'n ewekansige, verteenwoordigende steekproef het 635 leerders, bestaande uit 274 seuns en 361 meisies, 'n selfrapporteringsmeetinstrument, die *Peer Relation Questionnaire* (Neser Ladikos and Prinsloo 2004), oor hulle boelie-ondervindings voltooi. Die *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* is gebruik om frekwensies, kruistabulerings and chi-kwadraat statistiese toetse te bereken.

Resultate het aangedui dat 52% van die deelnemers al slagoffers van boeliegedrag was. Daar was 'n beduidende verskil in die verspreiding van frekwensievlakke van boeliegedrag per rassegroep, maar nie per ouderdomsgroep nie. Swart en bruin leerders in hierdie skool word meer dikwels as wit leerders geboelie, wat dui op die belangrike impak van rassedinamika op boeliegedrag in dié skool. Die frekwensievlakke van boeliegedrag in die hoërskool is nie, soos uit literatuur voorspel

kon word, beduidend laer onder senior sekondêre leerders (leerders ouer as 16 jaar en ouer) as onder junior sekondêre leerders (leerders tussen 13 en 15 jaar) nie. Sover dit geslagsverskille betref, boelie seuns aansienlik meer as meisies in hierdie skool. Daar is ook gevind dat leerders van beide geslagte meer algemeen in groepe boelie as individueel. Seuns en verbasend ook meisies in dié skool verkies direkte verbale boelietaktieke (onaangename geterg) en direkte fisiese boelietaktieke (slaan, skop of stoot). Hierdie bevinding is kommerwekkend aangesien dit teenstrydig is met literatuur waarin aangetoon word dat meisies indirekte boelietaktieke (word met opset by dinge uitgesluit, word kwaadwillig gedreig) bo direkte fisiese taktieke verkies. In teenstelling met die bevindinge van ander literatuur toon hierdie studie dus hoër vlakke van fisiese aggressie in die boeliegedrag van meisies in hierdie skool.

Hierdie hoë voorkoms van boelie-ondervindings en boeliegedrag tendense toon 'n behoefte aan 'n teenboelie-intervensie in hierdie skool vir leerders van alle ouderdoms- en rasse-groepe. Volgens die studiebevindinge moet so 'n interventie onder andere op boeliegedrag onder swart en bruin leerders en die rassedinamika van boeliegedrag fokus. Die interventie moet voorts aandag skenk aan groep- en individuele boeliegedrag, asook die gebruik van direkte boelietaktieke onder seuns en meisies, veral direkte fisiese boelietaktieke. Hoewel hierdie bevindinge nie ten opsigte van alle Suid-Afrikaanse skole kan veralgemeen nie, bestaan daar 'n uitdruklike behoefte aan verdere navorsing in Suid-Afrika om unieke tendense in boeliegedrag te ondersoek.

4. PREFACE

4.1 Article format

For purposes of this mini-dissertation, which is part of the requirements for a professional master's degree, the article format as described by General Regulation A.13.7 of the North-West University was chosen.

4.2 Selected Journal

The target journal for publication is the Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health. The manuscript as well as the reference list has been styled to the journal's specifications, which include the APA (American Psychological Association) reference style.

4.3 Instructions to authors

JOURNAL OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

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Manuscripts:

Manuscripts should be submitted in English. They should be typewritten and double-spaced, with wide margins in MSWord format. Manuscripts should be submitted to The Editor, Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health, Department of Psychiatry, Stellenbosch University (Tygerberg Campus), PO Box 19063, Tygerberg 7505, South Africa, e-mail: sseedat@sun.ac.za. We encourage authors to submit manuscripts via e-mail.

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Manuscript format: All pages must be numbered consecutively, including those containing the references, tables and figures. The typescript of manuscripts should be arranged as follows:

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Abstract: For data-based contributions, the abstract should be structured as follows: Objective — the primary purpose of the paper, Method — data source, subjects, design, measurements, data analysis, Results — key findings, and Conclusions — implications, future directions. For all other contributions (except editorials, letters and book reviews) the abstract must be a concise statement of the content of the paper. Abstracts must not exceed 200 words. It should summarise the information presented in the paper but should not include references.

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Reference List: Full references should be given at the end of the article in alphabetical order, using double spacing. References to journals should include the authors' surnames and initials, the full title of the paper, the full name of the journal, the year of publication, the volume number, and inclusive page numbers. Titles of journals must not be abbreviated. References to books

should include the authors' surnames and initials, the year of publication, the full title of the book, the place of publication, the publisher's name. References should be cited as per the examples below (please note the absence of punctuation):

Haynie DL (2000) The Peer Group Revisited: A Network Approach for Understanding Adolescent Delinquency. Ph.D. Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, USA

Louw J (1990a) Comorbidity of conduct and anxiety disorders. Southern African Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 5: 43-51

Louw J, Mkize AC and Naidoo DH (1990) Cultural disorders. In: Isaacs S (ed.), Psychiatric Disorders in South African Children. Cape Town: Juta & Co. pp 84-96

McRoy RG, Grotevant HD and White KL (1988) Openness in Adoption: New Practices, New Issues. New York: Praeger Publishers

Population Reference Bureau (2002) Untitled fact sheet. Available at: http://www.prb.org/content/navigationMenu/Other_reports/2000-2002/sheet1.html. [Accessed 22 February 2002]

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4.4

Letter of Consent

I, the co-author, hereby give consent for Liani Krüger to submit the following manuscript for purposes of a dissertation (article format): Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in a South African high school.

It may also be submitted to the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health* for publication.

Dr D. K. Kirsten

Supervisor

5.

**Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in
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Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in a South African high school

ABSTRACT

Objective: Total incidence of bullying, frequency levels of being bullied per age- and race-group, and differences in gender-specific use of direct and indirect bullying tactics were investigated in a parallel-medium, multi-racial high school in the North-West Province of South Africa.

Method: An one-shot cross-sectional survey design was employed. A representative, randomly selected sample of 635 learners (n = 274 boys; n = 361 girls), completed the Peer Relation Questionnaire (Neser, Ladikos and Prinsloo 2004) regarding their bullying experiences. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to calculate frequencies, cross-tabulations and chi-square statistical tests.

Results: 52% of all participants reported to have been bullied. Black and coloured learners were bullied significantly more often than white learners. Boys bullied significantly more than girls and group bullying was more prevalent than individual bullying in both genders. Boys and, contrary to existing literature, also girls favoured direct verbal and physical bullying tactics.

Conclusions: The found high incidence levels of being bullied and bullying behaviour trends highlight a need for an anti-bullying intervention in this school to address racial dynamics and bullying tactics by both genders. The need for further South African research to investigate unique trends indicated by the study is stressed.

Word count: 200

Key words: Adolescents; bullying; bullying tactics; gender differences; incidence; South African context.

Incidence and gender differences in bullying behaviour in a South African high school

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There is global concern for the mental health of adolescents and the various negative social stressors that impact on their overall well-being (World Health Organization 2002). One such stressor is exposure to violence, which has deteriorating effects on adolescents' well-being (Seedat *et al.* 2004), in terms of their health and safety, capacity to receive quality education, self-esteem and social relationships (Jones *et al.* 2008). Bullying is a form of violence that takes place in schools (Maree 2005) and has been identified as one of the most important factors threatening learners' well-being on various levels (Evers *et al.* 2007). Bullying contributes to the wide exposure of children to violence in their homes, communities, via the media and also in schools (Maree 2005). A misperception exists that bullying is a normal part of the process of growing up. Bullying is abuse that has a destructive impact on psychological, social and emotional levels in the individuals involved (De Wet 2006). This renders bullying in schools a major source of concern (Prinsloo and Naser 2007).

Olweus, a Norwegian researcher, pioneered the first comprehensive research studies regarding bullying behaviour in the 1970s, which initiated investigations into bullying incidence and dynamics in various countries (Reid, Monsen and Rivers 2004). Olweus defined bullying to occur when the victim, who is unable to defend himself or herself, is exposed repeatedly and over a long period of time to intentional harm by one or more people (Olweus 1995). This harm is exerted in various forms, either directly or indirectly. Direct bullying involves physical assaults, such as hitting, tripping, shoving or taking the victim's belongings, and verbal attacks,

such as name calling and taunting. Indirect bullying, also termed relational bullying, can involve spreading rumours or exclusion from a group (De Wet 2006, Reid *et al.* 2004). In addition, Sharp and Cowie (1994) explain bullying as a systematic abuse of power. These definitions of bullying do not include a one-time attack, playful fighting or teasing between friends. Thus, although not all aggressive behaviour is regarded as bullying, bullying is regarded as aggressive behaviour (Jones *et al.* 2008). Three groups of individuals are involved in bullying, namely the bully, the victim and the bystanders. The study will focus on the bully and the victim.

Evidence from previous research indicates the broad negative impact that bullying has on victims as well as bullies. Its effects range from short- to long-term consequences on the involved individuals' social, mental and physical well-being (De Wet 2005, Townsend *et al.* 2008). In line with the interpersonal nature of bullying, its impact on social functioning is almost unavoidable, and victims frequently feel rejected, betrayed, isolated by their peers and are prone to lack social skills (De Wet 2005). The psychological impact is evident in that bullies and victims show higher levels of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and low self-esteem (Townsend *et al.* 2008). In some serious cases, suicide attempts by bullying victims or attempts by the victim to murder the bully have been documented (De Wet 2006). In terms of the victims, the physical complaints associated with bullying, such as headaches and stomach pains (De Wet 2005), have been linked with the internalisation of raised stress levels caused by experiencing bullying. Further consequences of bullying for the victims are avoidance (such as certain areas of the school premises or avoidance of the school through truancy) and a decrease in academic performance (Ma, Stewin and Mah 2001). In terms of the bullies, utilizing bullying behaviour corresponds with the use of other self-destructive and illegal types of behaviour, such as drug

abuse, truancy, vandalism and fighting, which all have negative impacts on the bullies' well-being (De Wet 2005). In adulthood, bullies frequently persist in aggressive behaviour, such as domestic violence (Liang, Flisher and Lombard 2007). Bullies may also acquire a criminal record later on in life (Ma *et al.* 2001).

Various studies have investigated the prevalence of bullying and have shown that bullying is a common phenomenon in schools worldwide (Andreou, Vlachou and Didaskalou 2005, Maree 2005, Naser *et al.* 2003, Reid *et al.* 2004). Bullying is prevalent in rural, suburban and urban schools (Ma *et al.* 2001). It is estimated that between 7% and 23% of school children are victimised by their peers (Putter 2007). According to Townsend *et al.* (2008), the incidence of bullying in the United States of America (USA), Israel, Western Europe, New Zealand, Japan and Australia varies between 5% and 35%. In a study that included children from 27 countries, the majority of 13 year-olds was found to have been exposed to bullying (World Health Organization, 2002).

Although a large amount of research has been undertaken on bullying in developed countries, few studies have been conducted in developing countries, such as South Africa (Liang *et al.* 2007, Naser *et al.* 2003). Existing South African studies show high incidence levels of bullying, which indicates that bullying is indeed also a problem in South Africa (De Wet 2005). Researchers such as Naser *et al.* (2004) examine the incidence of bullying not only by investigating the amount of learners that are bullied or who bullies, but also by investigating frequency levels of bullying, thus measuring how often a learner is bullied or bullies. A study undertaken by Naser *et al.* (2003) found that in Grades 6 to 11 of predominantly black pupils in

Tshwane, 42.5% of the respondents had been bullied once or twice a month (21.7%), or once or twice a year (20.8%). Liang *et al.* (2007) found that over a third (36.3%) of South African Grades 8 and 11 learners were involved in bullying behaviour in Cape Town and Durban, and that 19.3% of learners reported to have been victims of bullying. Greeff and Grobler (2008) found a bullying incidence of 56.4% in a study of black and white Grades 4 to 6 learners in Bloemfontein. Bullying incidence levels, particularly in urban African schools, are very high (Townsend *et al.* 2008) and Jones *et al.* (2008) propose that this is a consequence of a reigning culture of violence, such as neighbourhood, police, gang and school violence, in these schools' communities. Exposure to violence also occurs in reports of violence and Shields, Nadasen and Pierce (2008) opine that hearing about violence has a similar impact to witnessing it. This implies that the harmful impact of South Africa's high levels of community violence (Leoschut and Burton 2006, Ward *et al.* 2007) is exerted on adolescents throughout the country by means of indirect exposure. Children who are exposed to high levels of violence seem to learn that aggressive behaviour is a useful mechanism for negotiating relationships. They are consequently more prone to exert proactive aggression, such as bullying, because of their positive attitude towards violence (Camodeca and Goossens 2005, Vera *et al.* 2004). Against this backdrop, it has been proposed that the high levels of bullying measured in South African schools can be regarded as a consequence of South Africa's violent context (Jones *et al.* 2008, Leoschut and Burton 2006) and South African adolescents' subsequent high levels of exposure to violence.

While it is undisputed that high levels of bullying occur both globally and in South Africa, it is also evident that the incidence of bullying varies among countries, provinces within countries and studies (De Wet 2006). Townsend *et al.* (2008), Smith *et al.* (2002) and Griffin Smith and

Gross (2006) explain that differences in bullying incidence may be attributed to varying definitions of bullying, as well as differing measuring instruments used in studies.

A number of explanations have been given for the occurrence of bullying. Socio-cultural and behavioural models explaining bullying behaviour propose that bullying stems from the bully having been bullied; imitating the behaviour of role models; compensating for a poor self-image; having poor impulse control; needing to feel in control or exerting power; relieving frustration; being bored; being ignorant in not realising the impact of his or her actions and experiencing peer pressure to bully (Andreou 2004, Liang *et al.* 2007, Maree 2005).

Disagreement exists regarding the impact of contextual factors, such as schools' racial composition, on bullying behaviour. Olweus (1995) describes that it is a misperception to attribute school characteristics, such as large class or school sizes, or differences in learners' appearance and language as causes of bullying. Instead, gender and age are described as major role-playing factors in bullying behaviour, exerting a bigger impact than the aforementioned factors, school location and racial composition (De Wet 2005, Whitney and Smith 1993). However South African studies have found that differences in the frequency levels of bullying according to race indeed exist. Naser *et al.* (2003) reported that white learners experience less frequent bullying than black and coloured learners. In another study Naser *et al.* (2004) indicated that coloured and black participants were bullied at significantly higher frequencies than Indian and white participants, but does not propose explanations for these findings. Therefore racial dynamics seem to impact on bullying behaviour, but research evidence regarding this aspect is scarce in South Africa. Jones *et al.* (2008) provides a possible

explanation in stating that region-specific racial, socioeconomic, historic-politic, religious and cultural dynamics are likely to underlie the social inequalities, such as age and gender, which are causative factors in bullying. This might describe the unique context in which bullying occurs in South African schools.

Since age is described as an important determinant in bullying dynamics, other reasons for bullying are found in developmental models. Early adolescence stretches from twelve to eighteen years (Wait, Meyer and Loxton 2003). Some of the developmental tasks that have to be mastered in the adolescent developmental phase are identity formation, formal thought operations, emotional development and establishing membership of the peer group (Thom 1992, Wait *et al.* 2003). Identity formation constitutes the adolescent developing a unique identity and this occurs through various processes, one of which is to negotiate his or her gender identity (Wait *et al.* 2003). Gender identity formation requires adolescents to uniquely incorporate and/or dispel social gender norms, which include gender-specific management of conflict and aggression, thus impacting on the adolescent's involvement in bullying. According to Piaget, formal operations concern the cognitive ability to think logically and abstractly, and to hypothesise about abstract themes or alternative solutions to problems (Thom 1992, Wait *et al.* 2003). Bullies, as well as victims, often do not plan their behaviour and solutions to problems according to logical thinking, and therefore their actions often lead to unsatisfactory end-results. Further, bullies seem to develop dysfunctional social information-processing skills, in that they easily interpret someone as having aggressive intentions (Kaukiainen *et al.* 2002). In terms of emotional development, adolescents experience intense and fluctuating emotions, such as anxiety, irritability and anger. Subsequently, they often act impulsively in their expressing emotions and

thus mismanagement and dysregulation of emotions may play a significant role in bullying behaviour. Lastly, establishing membership of a peer group and group involvement plays an important role in bullying dynamics. Bullying is a social dynamic which involves individual and group variables (Gini 2006, Reid *et al.* 2004). Atlas and Pepler (1998) found group involvement in 85% of bullying cases. It is important for adolescents to feel as though they are part of and fit into a specific group of individuals their age (Thom 1992, Wait *et al.* 2003). Therefore, relational bullying is effective, as it causes victims to feel rejected by members of their peer group. Furthermore, the need to be part of a group can result in individuals using bullying behaviour in order to gain acceptance into a group of individuals who advocate this type of behaviour (Safran 2007).

Research conducted in bullying has found a general tendency for bullying to begin in pre-primary school, peaks in primary school and decreases in high school (Athanasziades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzi 2010, De Wet 2003, Jankauskiene *et al.* 2008, Smith *et al.* 2002). Children between the ages of seven and nine report the highest frequency levels of bullying and in high school, junior secondary learners are bullied at higher frequency levels than senior secondary learners. Bullying behaviour appears to decrease in high school as adolescents' emotional regulation, formal thought operations, and social and assertiveness skills mature (Frisèn, Jonsson and Persson 2007, Griffin *et al.* 2006).

Furthermore, gender differences in frequency levels of bullying have important consequences for interventions and, accordingly, have been widely investigated internationally. Gender differences exist in bullying behaviour in adolescent boys and girls, such as in the frequency of bullying and

bullying tactics employed. Research has shown that boys are more likely to engage in bullying behaviour than girls (Andreou 2004, Frisèn *et al.* 2007, Greeff and Grobler 2008, Jones *et al.* 2008, Liang *et al.* 2007, Ma *et al.* 2001, Naser, Ladikos and Prinsloo 2004, Reid *et al.* 2004). It is important to note that boys seem to bully both boys and girls, while girls predominantly bully only girls (Griffin *et al.* 2006, Ma, Stewin and Mah 2001, Seals and Young, 2003). Socially constructed masculine or feminine norms can be used to conceptualise gender differences in bullying behaviour (Athanasziades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis 2010). The behaviour prescribed by these norms is used and tested as adolescents negotiate their gender-role identity formation. On the one hand, masculine norms prescribe for boys to be aggressive, competitive and dominant, using physical force to achieve dominance and social status if necessary (Jones *et al.* 2008, Safran 2007). Girls, on the other hand, are guided by the traditional feminine stereotype to be gentle, passive and to avoid physical expression of aggression. Furthermore gendered discipline norms may underpin gender differences in bullying frequency as boys tend to receive more physical punishment than girls (Jones *et al.* 2008). Broadly, social norms allow and even encourage the expression of aggression in boys, and discourage it in girls. This implies that using bullying behaviour, particularly direct but also indirect tactics, is more acceptable in boys than in girls. Subsequently, boys often deny their motives for bullying, attempt to justify bullying behaviour or diminish its impact and are unempathetic towards the victims of bullying; while girls admit more easily to bullying and can emphatically understand the victim's experience (Athanasziades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis 2010).

Recently, researchers have challenged the majority of research that describes boys to bully more often than girls. It is argued that the methods of bullying favoured by boys are more visibly

identifiable and thus more likely to be reported than the indirect methods favoured by girls (Griffin *et al.* 2006). This could account for high measured frequency levels of bullying by boys, and underestimated as well as underreported frequency levels of bullying by girls (Ma *et al.* 2001, Reid *et al.* 2004).

Group dynamics in bullying seem to have gender-specific tendencies. Literature describes boys as generally more prone than girls to participate in bullying by following a bully's lead and reinforcing his behaviour. Boys who bully are also often popular with aggressive peers, which then heighten the likelihood of individual bullying evolving into group bullying (Safran 2007). Girls, however, tend to defend the victim or are detached witnesses to bullying, making them less involved in the bullying acts (Athanasiaades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis 2010). In terms of South African research, Naser *et al.* (2004) states that individual boys are ranked as bullying the most often, groups of boys the second most often and individual girls the third most often. In support of this, Prinsloo and Naser (2007) found from a study of 1873 learners in Grades 6 to 11 in Tshwane South that boys bully the most often (65%), followed by a group of boys (35%) and then girls (25%). Limited studies could be found that investigate frequency levels of bullying in terms of individual and group bullying, which is cause for concern as this is a central factor in bullying dynamics.

Direct and indirect bullying tactics are employed by boys and girls at differing frequency levels. However, contradictory research results exist regarding the preference of each tactic by each gender. Researchers seem to agree that direct verbal bullying, namely teasing and name calling, is cited as the most frequent bullying tactic used by boys (Greeff and Grobler 2008, Naser *et al.*

2004, Seals and Young 2003). Furthermore, a large majority of studies describe that boys use high levels of direct physically intimidating methods, like hitting or kicking, and prefer direct verbal and physical bullying to indirect tactics (Andreou *et al.* 2005, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz and Kaukiainen 1992, Greeff and Grobler 2008, Reid *et al.* 2004, Safran 2007, Scheithauer *et al.* 2006). Direct bullying tactics as prescribed by the masculine stereotype encourage visible and direct expressions of aggression. Boys tend to use bullying strategies which communicate unmistakable defeat and thereby also nullify aggressive impulses and cognitions (Andreou *et al.* 2005), thereby asserting their dominance within their peer group and heightening their social status by means of physical displays of aggression (Scheithauer *et al.* 2006). The use of direct bullying tactics peaks over the age of thirteen to fourteen years and then declines, with some studies citing higher levels of indirect tactics used by older boys (Scheithauer *et al.* 2006). Indirect bullying tactics require verbal and social skills. Boys have been shown to develop at a slower rate psychosocially than girls. Consequently, boys “catching up” in their relational skills may cause them to replace direct physical tactics with indirect tactics (Björkqvist *et al.* 1992) and increase their use of indirect bullying tactics as they grow older. Thus, researchers, such as Greeff and Grobler (2008) explain that boys use indirect bullying tactics at higher levels than expected, although these levels are still lower than direct tactics.

It is broadly agreed that girls also prefer to use direct verbal methods of bullying, such as teasing and name calling (Greeff and Grobler 2008, Neser *et al.* 2004, Seals *et al.* 2003). Apart from their preference for verbal bullying tactics, various studies have shown that girls tend to further bully indirectly (Olweus 1995, Salmivalli and Kaukiainen 2004). As social norms prescribe that girls avoid using direct methods to communicate their aggression, they often lack tactics to

express frustration and conflict, which leads to the use of indirect bullying tactics (Athanasziades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzi 2010). Girls bully by exerting harm by social manipulation of friendship relations, exclusion, and verbal methods, such as spreading rumours (Andreou *et al.* 2005, Björkqvist *et al.* 1992, Ma *et al.* 2001, Reid *et al.* 2004). Girls who bully tend to focus on perceived differences between individuals, promoting antagonism and pettiness to maintain power (Safran 2007). Thus girls' methods entail relational aggression, which most often encourages aggression-encouraging cognitions (Camodeca and Goossens 2005). Consequently, the process of bullying extends over longer periods of time than boys' direct physical bullying, prolonging the negative impact of the bullying (Safran 2007). Girls bully in subtle and manipulative attacks which are difficult to recognise as bullying by uninvolved individuals, and thereby avoid being identified as bullies. Furthermore, in contrast to adolescent boys, who tend to have larger social networks, girls have fewer but closer friendships and therefore indirect bullying tactics might prove more effective to girls than to boys. However, researchers have recently begun to question the commonly held belief that girls prefer indirect bullying tactics to direct physical bullying tactics, citing research results that describe girls using more direct physical tactics than indirect tactics (Artz, Nicholson and Magnuson 2008). Snetchen and Van Puymbroeck (2008) describe violent crimes by girls to be on the increase and suggest that physically aggressive behaviour used by girls may be pre-empted by high levels of exposure to community violence, combined with society being increasingly accepting of girls maintaining their self-sufficiency with physically aggressive acts.

The design and content of anti-bullying interventions does not fall within the scope of this research. However, it is important to note that various researched interventions exist and that

researchers stress the importance for strategies to be tailored to suit the needs of specific schools and communities (Safran 2007). Integrated school programmes are the most efficacious in dealing with bullying (Neser *et al.* 2003). It is important to investigate bullying incidence levels in order for bullying to be acknowledged as a problem in a specific school (De Wet 2005), as well as gender differences in bullying frequency (Athanasziades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis 2010) and bullying tactics used by boys and girls. This information will then assist in the development of appropriate programmes should the need for such strategies be indicated.

In light of the above, the following research questions emerge. What is the incidence level of being bullied in a parallel-medium, multi-racial South African high school in the North-West Province? What are the incidence levels of being bullied per age- and race group, and do the incidence levels per age- and race group differ significantly? What are the incidence levels of individual and group bullying by boys and girls, and do boys or girls bully more individually and as part of a group in this school? What bullying tactics are used by boys and girls in this school?

Aims

The primary aims of the study were to investigate bullying in this South African school by determining: (i) the total incidence levels of being bullied; (ii) the frequency levels of being bullied per age and race group; and whether (iii) differences exist in frequency levels of being bullied according to age and race group. Further aims were to examine gender differences in bullying behaviour by determining: (iv) the frequency levels of individual and group bullying by boys and girls; (v) differences in frequency levels of individual and group bullying by boys and

girls; and lastly examining (vi) the frequency of the use of direct and indirect bullying tactics by boys and girls.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for the study are:

H11: The total incidence levels of bullying in this school are high.

H01: The total overall incidence levels of bullying in this school are low.

H12: Frequency levels of being bullied are high for junior secondary learners, and moderate for senior secondary learners.

H02: Frequency levels of being bullied are not high for junior secondary learners, and not moderate for senior secondary learners.

H13: A significant difference exists in the frequency levels of being bullied per age group.

H03: A significant difference does not exist in the frequency levels of being bullied per age group.

H14: Frequency levels of being bullied are high for black and coloured learners, and moderate for white learners.

H04: Frequency levels of being bullied are not high for black and coloured learners, and not moderate for white learners.

H15: A significant difference exists in the frequency levels of being bullied per race group.

H05: A significant difference does not exist in the frequency levels of being bullied per race group.

H16: The frequency levels of individual or group bullying are higher by boys than by girls.

H06: The frequency levels of individual or group bullying are not higher by boys than by girls.

H17: Boys and girls differ significantly regarding frequency levels of individual or group bullying.

H07: Boys and girls do not differ significantly regarding frequency levels of individual or group bullying.

H18: Boys and girls use direct bullying tactics at higher frequencies than indirect bullying tactics in this school.

H08: Boys and girls do not use direct bullying tactics at higher frequencies than indirect tactics in this school.

METHOD

Design

A one-shot cross-sectional survey design was used in this quantitative study, which formed part of a larger mixed method design (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009).

Participants

A randomly selected representative sample of learners (n=635) from a parallel-medium, multi-racial, predominantly Afrikaans high school in the North-West Province was used. The school maintains a high standard of education and is located in a middle to high socio-economic area. The sample consisted of 274 males and 361 females.

Measuring Instruments

The self-report Peer Relation Questionnaire (PRQ) was used, which was developed in 2002 by Naser, a Sociologist from the Department of Criminology at the University of South Africa

(Neser *et al.* 2004). Following its design, the PRQ was submitted to professionals within the Gauteng Department of Education and to others familiar with the nature and scope of Neser's study, with the purpose of evaluating the nature and content of the questionnaire. Using the subsequent feedback, Neser revised the PRQ. Neser then conducted a pilot investigation (n=220 learners) and processed its results. Further revision led to the PRQ being found reliable and valid. The authors are not aware of the development of other questionnaires measuring bullying behaviour using South African participants; consequently, the PRQ was viewed as the most suitable measuring instrument, compared to internationally applied questionnaires that have not been standardised for South African participants.

The PRQ consists of 33 items and provides for the possibility that the participant completing the questionnaire may be a bully, a victim or a witness to bullying (Neser *et al.* 2004). Items are answered using a Likert scale which gives a choice of five points (always, often, sometimes, hardly ever, and never). The PRQ includes 11 questions regarding the participant's biographical details and family characteristics. Items are also included that investigate the participant's feelings about school, as well as his/her relationships with fellow learners. Finally, the PRQ contains a section focusing on bullying at school. This section uses 20 questions to gather broad information about the participant's perception of his/her experience relating to bullying. The PRQ measures whether the participant feels safe at school, has witnessed bullying at school, has been bullied at school, the frequency of being bullied, who the bullies are and who is bullied in terms of gender, which bullying tactics are used, and whether the participant considers bullying to be a problem at this school. The Cronbach coefficients calculated on the applicable items in the study indicated reliability (standardised Cronbach coefficient alpha = 0.67). For the study,

only the Afrikaans version of the PRQ was used, since most children in the school are Afrikaans or have at least Afrikaans second language skills, which is sufficient for comprehension of the questionnaire (Neser *et al.* 2004). An English version of the PRQ was available on request but never used.

The structure of the PRQ posed some limitations in statistical analysis of data gathered. Several items have sub-items which are not mutually exclusive, complicating comparisons between these items and only rendering it possible to compare frequency distributions, rather than pure frequencies. Furthermore, this does not make it possible to determine significance of differences between the use of direct physical, direct verbal and indirect bullying tactics, as more than one sub-item measures frequencies of the latter two types of bullying, while only one sub-item investigates direct bullying tactics. Therefore, in the study, frequencies of use of tactics are described and significance of differences is not reported.

Procedure

This preliminary investigation was the result of a request by the school for a psychological team from the North-West University to investigate the incidence and nature of bullying in their school. Information gathered would be used to determine whether the need for an intervention to prevent bullying exists, and should this be found to be the case, the research results would inform such an intervention or further research. Each parent/guardian and teacher in the school received a letter explaining the goals of the research, where after written informed consent from teachers and the participants' parents/guardians was obtained, and a random representative sample was drawn. The purpose of the study was verbally explained to all participating learners, where after

data collection took place by registered clinical, counselling and educational psychologists and interns. Learners (n=635) in Grades 8 to 12 completed the PRQ, and it was explained that there were no correct or incorrect answers. Subsequent to participating in the research, participants were given the option of requesting therapy free of charge at the Institute for Psychotherapy and Counselling. Feedback would also be given to interested participants subsequent to the completion of the research.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by the Statistical Consultation Services at the North-West University. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach Alpha reliability indices for each question were computed. Incidence levels of being bullied per age- and race group, as well as incidence levels of bullying behaviour by boys and girls, were examined by investigating frequency levels. Thus in these instances how often a learner bullied or was bullied was investigated. Two-way frequency tables, which represent the cross-tabulation of two or more categorical variables (Field 2005), were produced to display the frequency levels of bullying per age- and race group, as well as gender differences in bullying frequency and tactics. The levels of each variable are arranged in a grid, and the number of observations in each category is noted in the table's cells. Chi-square tests of independence, the Pearson chi-square test and Fisher's exact test, were used to show whether frequency levels of bullying differ significantly per age- and per race group, as well as whether boys and girls reported significantly different distributions in terms of incidence levels of using bullying behaviour. The Pearson chi-square test is used to determine the significance of differences between distributions of two categorical variables forming a two-way frequency tables (Field

2005). However in small sample sizes the Pearson chi-square test may at times not be considered valid, in which event Fisher's exact test, which is also a test of independence, is utilized (Upton 1992).

Ethical aspects

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Steering Committee of the high school and the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (project number 05K14). All parents, guardians and teachers in the school received a letter explaining the goals of the research. Written informed consent was obtained from teachers and parents/guardians, and verbal explanation of the purpose of the study was also given to learners before commencing data gathering. Confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw at any time were ensured. Participants could also receive therapy if so required. The research study was completed by a registered intern psychologist and followed the ethical guidelines stated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (Health Professions Council of South Africa 2004). Research results are intended for publication in the Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics of this sample are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

The sample consisted of 43.15% boys and 56.85% girls. The age distribution was as follows: 5.67% were 13 year-olds, the 14-, 15- and 16-year age groups were each almost 20% (14 years 19.68%, 15 years 19.84%, 16 years 19.06%) and over 35% were older than 16 years (35.75%). In terms of race, 94.17% of participants were white, 2.84% were black and 2.99% were coloured. In the sample, 95.27% of the learners spoke Afrikaans as their main language, while 2.05% spoke English, 2.05% spoke Setswana and 0.47% spoke Sesotho. One participant (0.16%) had a first language that was not accounted for by the questionnaire. However, good Afrikaans second language skills are a prerequisite for enrolment in this multi-racial school, and thus the language distributions of first language of the participants were not regarded as an obstacle when using the Afrikaans version of the PRQ.

The total incidence and frequency levels of being bullied in this school are illustrated in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

In total, more than half of the participants indicated that they had been victims of bullying (52.76%). While 6.11% reported that they were bullied every day, 13.61% described being bullied once or twice a week, and over 20% of the participants were bullied once or twice a month (21.67%). Almost 60% of these participants reported to have been the victims of bullying once or twice a year (58.61%).

Two-way frequency tables tables and chi-square statistics

Table 3 shows the frequency levels of being bullied per age- and race group.

Insert Table 3 here

Although the large majority of the school has experienced bullying, fortunately, reports of being bullied regularly were far less than being bullied once or twice a year. Of learners in the 13 year-old category who had been the victims of bullying, 4.5% were bullied every day, 31.8% were bullied once or twice per week, 18.2% were bullied once or twice per month and 45.5% were bullied once or twice per year. In the 14 year-old category of learners who had been the victims of bullying, 7.5% were bullied every day, 15.0% were bullied once or twice per week, 28.8% were bullied once or twice per month and 48.8% were bullied once or twice per year. Of 15 year-old victims of bullying, 7.1% reported to have been bullied every day, 14.3% were bullied once or twice per week, 14.3% were bullied once or twice per month and 64.3% were bullied once or twice per year. In the 16 year-old category, 6.0% were bullied every day, 14.9% were bullied once or twice per week, 25.4% were bullied once or twice per month and 53.7% were bullied once or twice per year. Lastly, of learners older than 16 years that had been bullied, 5.0% were bullied every day, 8.4% were bullied once or twice per week, 20.2% were bullied once or twice per month and 66.4% were bullied once or twice per year.

In terms of black learners that had been bullied, 7.7% were bullied every day, 38.5% were bullied once or twice per week, 23.1% were bullied once or twice per month and 30.8% were bullied once or twice per year. In terms of coloured learners that had been bullied, 21.4% were bullied every day, 21.4% were bullied once or twice per week, 28.6% were bullied once or twice per month and 28.6% were bullied once or twice per year. Lastly, 5.4% of white learners reported to have been bullied every day, 12.3% were bullied once or twice per week, 21.3% were bullied once or twice per month and 61.0% were bullied once or twice per year.

Table 4 shows the chi-square statistics for age- and race group differences in terms of the frequency levels of being bullied.

Insert Table 4 here

No significant difference was indicated between the frequency level distributions of the victims of bullying per age group ($p = 0.164$, Fisher's exact test). Therefore junior secondary learners are not being bullied significantly more than senior secondary learners. However, a significant difference was indicated between the frequency level distributions of the victims of bullying per race group ($p = 0.004$, Fisher's exact test). This indicates that learners of different race groups in this school experience different frequency levels of bullying, and specifically black and coloured learners are being bullied significantly more than white learners. .

Table 5 contains the frequency levels of individual and group bullying by boys and girls.

Insert Table 5 here

Twice as many girls (40.54%) as boys (19.55%) reported not to have bullied at all. In total, more boys indicated to have been involved with bullying (23.21%) than girls (16.70%). More boys (16.69%) than girls (13.83%) reported to have bullied once or twice during the year. The majority of boys reported not having been part of a group that bullied in the year that the data was collected (17.86%), but only a slightly lower amount of boys (16.59%) reported that they had bullied as part of a group once or twice in the year. The majority of girls also reported not having been part of a group that bullied (35.09%) and 18.18% reported to have bullied once or

twice in the year. In total, boys reported a slightly higher total involvement in bullying as part of a group (24.73%) than girls (22.33%).

Chi-square statistics for gender differences in terms of frequency levels of individual and group bullying are reported in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 here

A significant difference in distribution exists between boys and girls in the frequency levels of bullying as an individual ($\chi^2(4) = 44.79, p < .0001, N = 629$), as well as in the frequency levels of bullying as part of a group ($\chi^2(4) = 36.63, p < .0001, N = 627$). According to these results, boys in this school are more prone than girls to bully both individually, as well as part of a group.

In Table 7, the frequency of the use of direct and indirect bullying tactics by boys and girls are illustrated.

Insert Table 7 here

According to Table 7, boys reported to prefer using direct bullying tactics, described as being hit, kicked or pushed (9.95%), as well as direct verbal bullying tactics of unpleasant teasing (9.73%). The direct verbal tactic of bad name calling (4.75%) was reported to be the third most preferred tactics by boys and used at a lower frequency than the other direct tactics. Boys indicated indirect bullying tactics as the tactic they least preferred (threatening to harm the victim 4.00% and isolating the victim 3.24%).

Girls reported to use direct verbal tactics (unpleasant teasing 5.35%, bad name calling 3.70%) and physical tactics (hitting, kicking or pushing 4.15%) more than twice as much as indirect tactics (isolating the victim 1.81% and threatening to harm the victim 1.89%).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aims of this preliminary study were to investigate the total bullying incidence, frequency levels of being bullied in terms of age- and race-groups and to examine gender differences in terms of frequency of bullying and bullying tactics in a parallel-medium, multi-racial South-African high school in the North-West Province of South Africa. Much of the study's findings correspond with international literature and research in the field of bullying. However, the significance of some of the study's results sharply contrasting with the findings of other research studies must be further investigated. The study's results question widely-held assumptions about bullying dynamics, such as contesting the notion that racial factors do not significantly impact on the frequency levels of bullying, or that boys use more direct and girls more indirect bullying tactics.

Results confirm that, as supported by other South African studies, bullying is a highly prevalent phenomenon in this school. Just over half (52.76%) of participants had experienced being bullied and a fifth (21.67%) of the victims of bullying indicated being bullied once or twice per month. The incidence levels measured are twice as high as international estimates (Putter 2007), and high when compared to global statistics, which describe bullying in various countries to range between 5% and 35% (Townsend *et al.* 2008). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of H11, which poses that the total incidence levels of bullying in this school are high. Findings,

however, correspond with South African research. Greeff and Grobler (2008) report bullying incidence levels at 56.4% and Naser *et al.* (2003) found that 21.7% of participants were bullied once or twice a month. The high bullying incidence in this high school is similar to the incidence levels measured by other South African studies.

It is argued that South Africa's high levels of community violence cause high levels of direct and indirect exposure to aggressive behaviour (Jones *et al.* 2008). This may in turn lead to the high incidence of bullying found in South African schools as learners may view this type of behaviour (Camodeca and Goossens 2005, Greeff and Grobler 2008, Liang *et al.* 2007, Vera *et al.* 2004), and thus also bullying, as acceptable (Shields *et al.* 2008). In this context, it is proposed that high levels of exposure to violence in the South African context most likely contributed to the high levels of bullying measured in this school, and this should be further investigated. Furthermore results motivate that social norms of masculine and feminine identities advocated by the community and school be examined, as gender stereotypes tend to allow and even encourage aggressive behaviour in different forms (Jones *et al.* 2008), and thus may contribute to the high incidence levels of bullying in this school. Furthermore, the high levels of bullying reported in the study might have been inflated by the self-report measures employed in the study that unfortunately do not correct for adolescents' egocentricity which may cause them to exaggerate their experience with bullying (Greeff and Grobler 2008). However, notwithstanding the above, our results indicated that bullying is a prevalent problem in this school and it is therefore proposed that a bullying intervention be implemented.

Significant differences were not indicated in the distribution of bullying frequency per age group. Thus H02 cannot be rejected, as results indicated that frequency levels of being bullied are not high for junior secondary learners, and not moderate for senior secondary learners. H03, which poses that a significant difference does not exist in the frequency levels of being bullied per age group, can also not be rejected. This finding contradicts other researchers' findings describing that bullying incidence decreases significantly throughout high school (Athanasiaades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis 2010, Frisèn *et al.* 2007, Naser *et al.* 2003, Griffin Smith and Gross 2006). Possible reasons for the study's results not showing a significant decrease can be the continuing impact of the contextual factors heightening this school's incidence levels of bullying, as described, which in turn heightens the need for an anti-bullying intervention in this school. However, further investigation to determine factors contributing to this finding is required. Bullying intervention in this school should include all age groups, as significant differences in frequency levels were not found.

Frequency distributions of bullying experience by black, coloured and white learners were found to differ significantly in this current study. The null hypothesis H04 is rejected in favour of H14, which poses that frequency levels of being bullied are high for black and coloured learners, and moderate for white learners. Furthermore the null hypothesis H05 is rejected in favour of H15, which states that a significant difference exists in the frequency levels of being bullied per race group. However the dynamics of the frequency levels indicated still needs to be determined. Of the participants who have been victims of bullying, the majority of coloured learners experience every day bullying (28.6%), and the majority of black learners experience bullying once or twice per week (38.5%). The majority of white learners experience bullying once or twice per year

(61.0%). Therefore, in this school, black and coloured learners experience higher frequency levels of bullying than white learners, which is in line with findings from other South African studies (Neser *et al.* 2003, Neser *et al.* 2004).

Former studies propose that racial dynamics do play a significant role in bullying behaviour in South African schools, in contrast to findings of overseas school studies (Whitney and Smith 1993, Olweus 1995). A possible explanation for the observed trend in the current study is that the majority group white learners bully the minority group black and coloured learners in order to ensure that they maintain their group identity, and thus their need for power and control (Maree 2005). South Africa's history of racial inequalities and subsequent racial power relations may manifest in the bullying behaviour of learners in schools, causing race-related differences in bullying frequency levels in South African schools, such as those found in this study. However, although results indicate that minority groups are being bullied more than majority groups in this school, it cannot automatically be assumed that majority groups bully the minority groups in this school, since it was not determined who is being bullied by whom. Further investigation is necessary to examine the underlying racial dynamics causing the race differences in frequency levels found. Against South Africa's historic-politic backdrop of racial power relations, it is surprising that few South African studies have investigated race as a determining factor in bullying behaviour and lacking results exist that describe frequency levels of experiencing bullying per race-group. It is imperative that further research be conducted to determine the underlying factors impacting on race disparities observed in bullying frequency levels in this school.

Furthermore, while black and coloured participants were found to experience higher frequency levels of bullying than white learners in this study, 41 white participants reported to experience bullying once or twice a week (12.3%) and 71 white participants reported to experience bullying once or twice per month (21.3%). White learners in this school are thus not immune to bullying, and are also targeted. Therefore, the bullying of white learners is prevalent in this school and cannot be ignored. Subsequently, it is proposed that a bullying intervention in this school include both learners from all race groups and focus on the bullying of black and coloured learners.

Furthermore, the study investigated gender differences in bullying frequency levels and tactics. Results showed that a significant gender difference exists in the distribution of bullying, in that boys bully more than girls both as individuals and as part of a group in this school. The null hypothesis H06 is rejected in favour of H16, describing that the frequency levels of individual or group bullying are higher by boys than by girls. Furthermore H07 is rejected in favour of H17, which states that boys and girls differ significantly regarding frequency levels of individual or group bullying. Boys reported over 20% more individual bullying than girls (boys 53.87%, girls 29.08%) and reported over 15% more bullying as part of a group than girls (boys 57.20%, girls 38.78%). In a South African study, Neser *et al.* (2003) found 49.3% of participants were bullied by a boy, 28% by a group of boys, 24.6% by a girl and 15.9% by a group of girls. The study's findings are consistent with those of other studies in showing that boys are more often involved in bullying than girls (De Wet 2005, Frisèn *et al.* 2007, Liang *et al.* 2007) and correspond with social norms prescribing that masculinity is projected by behaviour expressing aggression. While our results found that girls' frequency levels of bullying behaviour are lower when compared to

boys', they are still high. Therefore, it is argued that girls must also be included in anti-bullying interventions.

Results further indicate that, contrary to expectations, participants in both genders bully more often as part of a group than as individuals in this school. Groups of boys were found to bully the most often, individual boys the second most often, groups of girls the third most often and individual girls the least often. This finding differs to results described by Neser *et al.* (2004) and Prinsloo and Neser (2007), who found that, whereas boys bully the most often, groups of boys bully the second most often and individual girls are ranked as bullying the third most often. The trend in this study seems to indicate that in this school, group bullying is more popular than individual bullying. Thus, it is important that group bullying should be addressed in an anti-bullying strategy. This finding could indicate a spiralling effect in that as more individuals become involved in bullying as part of a group, so more individuals use bullying behaviour and may subsequently bully as individuals; thus causing bullying incidence levels to further increase. However, it should also be considered that participants might have underreported individual bullying, regarding the admission of participation in group bullying as more acceptable than individual bullying. Few studies investigating the dynamic of group bullying in adolescents could be found and, considering the study's findings, it is advocated that this trend should be investigated with further research.

The study also aimed to describe the bullying tactics used by boys and girls in this school. Gender distributions were interpreted to investigate the bullying tactics employed by boys and girls. Boys in this school were found to favour using both physical (hitting, kicking or pushing)

and verbal direct bullying tactics (unpleasant teasing) and to use these tactics in corresponding frequencies. Therefore the null hypothesis H08 is rejected in favour of H18 in terms of boys, in stating that boys use direct bullying tactics at higher frequencies than indirect bullying tactics. However, this finding is contrasted by the results of other studies that show that boys use direct verbal bullying tactics more than direct physical bullying tactics (Greeff and Grobler 2008, Naser *et al.* 2004, Seals and Young 2003). The observed trend is disturbing, as hitting, kicking or pushing entails higher levels of expressed aggression and lower impulse control in aggression management than direct verbal tactics, as well as having a higher risk of physical injury. Consequently, it is imperative that intervention addresses direct verbal and physical bullying, and that the above finding is further investigated. Results also found that boys in this school use indirect bullying tactics less frequently than direct bullying tactics, which is corroborated by previous research findings (Artz *et al.* 2008, Greeff and Grobler 2008, Naser *et al.* 2004, Seals and Young 2003).

Our results show that girls in this school prefer to use the direct verbal bullying tactics of teasing, which is in line with other research findings (Greeff and Grobler 2008, Naser *et al.* 2004, Seals and Young 2003). Furthermore, girls reported to be twice more likely to use direct physical bullying tactics, such as hitting, kicking or pushing, than indirect relational tactics, such as isolating victims or threatening harm. This finding implies that girls, like boys, in this school reported to use more total direct than total indirect bullying behaviour. Therefore the null hypothesis H08 is also rejected in favour of H18 in terms of girls. This finding is in contradiction with the bulk of research describing girls as using higher levels of indirect bullying than direct physical bullying (Andreou *et al.* 2005, Björkqvist *et al.* 1992, Ma *et al.* 2001, Reid *et al.* 2004).

These results are of great concern as they show that girls in this school are using higher levels of outright aggression when compared to the findings of other studies. Artz *et al.* (2008) reported corresponding results and posed the explanation that in a male-dominated society, girls find that they are able to assert high social status when mirroring traditionally male bully tactics, thus by using direct physical bullying tactics. Snetchen and Van Puymbroeck (2008) cite that society is becoming more accepting of female aggression, as well as increasingly encouraging girls to be self-sufficient, which may lead to them using more physical tactics.

The study found high incidence levels of being bullied and bullying behaviour indicate a need for an anti-bullying intervention in this school, which includes learners of all age and race groups. This study's findings imply that such an intervention should include a focus on reasons for bullying, the reduction of bullying behaviour, and should address racial dynamics in bullying. Furthermore intervention should address group and individual bullying, as well as the use of direct bullying tactics, particularly direct physical tactics, in both boys and girls. Further research is needed in this school to understand the reasons for bullying, amongst others gender norm and racial dynamics.

Although these findings are not generaliseable to other South African schools, the need for further South African studies to investigate unique trends in bullying behaviour in school contexts is stressed. Questions for future research are: Do racial power relations play a significant role in the high incidence of bullying in South African schools? Are changing social norms encouraging girls to use higher levels of direct physical bullying tactics than in the past? Are high levels of exposure to violence causing boys and girls to use higher levels of direct

physical bullying tactics? Are high incidence levels of bullying motivating boys and girls to utilise more aggressive physical tactics to achieve social dominance? Are more individuals becoming involved in bullying as part of a group, thereby eventually causing incidence levels of bullying to increase?

It is also important to note the limitations of the study. Firstly, the research results cannot be generalised to other schools in South Africa. Secondly, the use of self-report measures, such as the instrument used in the research, holds restrictions, as it relies on accurate recall and reporting by the participant, which might have impacted on the findings. The structure of the questionnaire used did not render it possible to measure the significance of gender differences in bullying tactics and, therefore, further research in this regard is encouraged. The study also did not aim to determine the causative factors for bullying in this school, hence qualitative data are lacking. Lastly, this study did not investigate the racial dynamics underlying bullying frequency levels. The nature of bullying experience by learners per race, as well as the race of the learners who bully was not determined. Therefore the study did not examine whether learners of different races bully one another, or whether learners mostly bully learners of their own race. Further investigation should take place with regard to racial dynamics underlying bullying frequency levels in this school.

CONCLUSION

This study adds to the limited research pool investigating bullying in South African schools and highlights the need for continuous further research in this field. Results strengthen existing research showing that bullying is a prevalent problem, not only in South Africa, but also in this

particular high school. The necessity for an anti-bullying intervention in this school cannot be ignored and should be actively advocated. At a broad level, the study's findings raise questions about the significance of the impact of South Africa's high levels of violence, as well as that of the behaviour encouraged by socially constructed racial dynamics and gender norms. Therefore, it might be that in order to fully address the problem of bullying, multifaceted approaches are necessary; that not only entail anti-bullying intervention in schools, but also involve strategies to address adolescents' management of exposure to violence and encourage critical examination of the impact of social norms and racial dynamics on bullying behaviour.

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Table 1 – Descriptive statistics

Variable		Frequency (n)	Per cent (%)
Gender	Boys	274	43.15
	Girls	361	56.85
Age	13 years	36	5.67
	14 years	125	19.68
	15 years	126	19.84
	16 years	121	19.06
	Older than 16 years	227	35.75
Race	Black	18	2.84
	Coloured	19	2.99
	White	598	94.17
Language	Afrikaans	605	95.27
	English	13	2.05
	Sesotho	3	0.47
	Setswana	13	2.05
	Other	1	0.16

Table 2 – Total incidence and frequency levels of being bullied

	Frequency (n)	Per cent (%)
Item: Have you been bullied by other learners in your school?		
Yes	335	52.76
No	290	45.67
Frequency missing	10	1.57
Item: How often were you bullied at your school this year?		
Every day	22	6.11
Once or twice a week	49	13.61
Once or twice a month	78	21.67
Once or twice a year	211	58.61

Table 3 – Frequency levels of being bullied, per age- and race group

	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age	13 years		14 years		15 years		16 years		Older than 16 years	
Every day	1	4.5	6	7.5	5	7.1	4	6.0	6	5.0
Once or twice per week	7	31.8	12	15.0	10	14.3	10	14.9	10	8.4
Once or twice per month	4	18.2	23	28.8	10	14.3	17	25.4	24	20.2
Once or twice per year	10	45.5	39	48.8	45	64.3	36	53.7	79	66.4
Race	Black		Coloured		White					
Every day	1	7.7	3	21.4	18	5.4				
Once or twice per week	5	38.5	3	21.4	41	12.3				
Once or twice per month	3	23.1	4	28.6	71	21.3				
Once or twice per year	4	30.8	4	28.6	203	61.0				

Table 4 – Chi-square results for testing of significance of age- and race group differences in frequency levels of being bullied

		Degrees of freedom	Value	Probability
Age group and frequency levels of being bullied	Pearson chi-square statistics	12	16.719*	0.158
	Fisher's Exact Test		16.127	0.164
Race group and frequency levels of being bullied	Pearson chi-square statistics	6	17.166*	0.013
	Fisher's Exact Test		16.042	0.004

* 30% of the cells have expected counts less than 5. Chi-Square may not be a valid test.

Table 5 – Frequency levels of individual and group bullying by boys and girls

	Individual bullying				Group bullying			
	Boys n	%	Girls n	%	Boys n	%	Girls n	%
I did not bully at all this year	123	19.55	255	40.54	112	17.86	220	35.09
I bullied once or twice this year	105	16.69	87	13.83	104	16.59	114	18.18
I bullied sometimes this year	27	4.29	13	2.07	26	4.15	21	3.35
I bullied once a week	12	1.91	4	0.64	17	2.71	4	0.64
I bullied several times per week	2	0.32	1	0.16	8	1.28	1	0.16
Total involvement in bullying	146	23.21	105	16.70	155	24.73	140	22.33

Table 6 – Chi-square results for testing of significance of gender difference in frequency levels of individual and group bullying

	Degrees of freedom	Value	Probability
Pearson chi-square statistic for gender and frequency levels of bullying as an individual	4	44.7882	<.0001
Pearson chi-square statistics for gender and frequency levels of bullying as part of a group	4	36.6268	<.0001

Table 7 – Frequency of the use of direct and indirect bullying tactics by boys and girls

	Boys		Girls	
	n	%	n	%
Being hit, kicked or pushed	132	9.95	55	4.15
Being teased in an unpleasant way	129	9.73	71	5.35
Being called bad names	63	4.75	49	3.70
Being isolated	43	3.24	24	1.81
Being threatened with harm	53	4.00	25	1.89