

PEER VICTIMISATION IN SCHOOLS: PREDISPOSITION TO, REASONS FOR AND MEASURES AGAINST THIS PREVALENT PHENOMENON

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1 Introduction

Peer victimisation is a form of harassment and anti-social behaviour which prevails in all segments of the school community. Bullying can take many forms: physical, emotional, verbal or a combination of these. It may involve one child bullying another, a group of children against a single child or groups against other groups. It is not unlike other forms of victimisation and abuse in that it involves

- an imbalance of power
- differing emotional tones, the victim will be upset whereas the bully is cool and in control
- blaming the victim for what has happened
- lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings and concerns of the victim
- a lack of compassion.
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Bullies are often learners with a history of abuse where they have been bullied or abused themselves. Sometimes they are learners experiencing life situations they can't cope with, that leave them feeling helpless and out of control. They may be learners with poor social skills, who do not fit in, who can't meet school expectations. They bully to feel competent and successful, to control others, to gain some relief from their own feelings of powerlessness.

Banks (1997: 2) is of the opinion that learners who engage in bullying behaviours seem to have a need to feel powerful and in control. They appear to

- derive satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering on others
- have little empathy for their victims
- defend their actions by saying that their victims provoked them in some way
- often come from homes where physical punishment is used and parental involvement and warmth are lacking
- be defiant towards adults, antisocial, and apt to break school rules.

Coloroso (2002: 1-2) identifies the following common traits in bullies, who all

- like to dominate other people
- like to use people to get what they want
- find it hard to see a situation from the other person's vantage point
- are concerned only with their own needs, and not the wants, pleasures, rights and feelings of others
- view weaker siblings or peers as prey
- use blame, criticism and false allegations to project their own inadequacies onto their target
- refuse to accept responsibility for their actions
- lack foresight, that is, the ability to act with reference to the short-term, long-term and possible unintended consequences of their current behaviour.

Samenow (2002: 4) describes the following particular behaviour and personality traits of learners who are inclined to bully:

- greater than average aggressive behaviour patterns
- the desire to dominate peers
- the need to feel in control, to win
- no sense of remorse for hurting another child
- a refusal to accept responsibility for their behaviour.

Nansel, Overpack, Pilla, Ruan, Simsons-Morton and Scheidt (2001: 7-8) found that bullies were more likely to be involved in other problem behaviours, such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Bullies showed poorer school adjustment, both in terms of academic achievement and perceived school climate. Nansel et al (2001: 7-8) reported greater ease of making friends, indicating that bullies are not always socially isolated.

According to Bidwell (1997:15), the reasons most commonly endorsed by learners as legitimate reasons for bullying are "because the victim annoyed them" or "to get even". The next most common category were reasons that had nothing to do with the victim instigating an attack. The victimisation took place because the other person was deemed different or unlikeable. The latter reasons indicated that bullying is not always the result of provocation by the victim.

Hoover, Oliver and Thomson (1993: 83) reported the following bullying motivators in their study:

- verbal playfulness ("done in fun")
- social factors ("who my friends were"), ("I didn't fit in")
- physical factors ("too weak"), ("too heavy") ("being overweight")
- physical appearance, dress and physical strength

McLean (BBC News1998: 2) identifies three main factors that cause learners to bully others:

- Isolation: Introverted, shy or 'self-contained' loners are more vulnerable.
- Being different: This includes ethnic minorities, people with glasses, acne, pronounced accents, weight problems and especially high or low IQs.
- Soft targets: Bullies often spot vulnerable targets by their lack of assertiveness. This is often shown by under- or overreaction, such as crying.

When a group of adults (Kidscape Survey 1999: 3) were asked why they thought they were bullied while in school, most of the respondents were of the opinion that they were victimised because their parents were divorced or had died in prison, they belonged to a minority race or religion in their school, they had a posh or 'lower class' accent, they wore the wrong type of clothes, or they were

- shy, didn't answer back
- too short or too tall
- looking good or unattractive
- not interested in or poor at sports
- too sensitive or cried easily
- too intelligent or stupid
- skinny or fat
- talented in music, art or poetry
- too poor or too rich

What should be done to deal with the issue of bullying in schools?

Although teachers and parents may be able to deal with individual cases of bullying as they occur, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the occurrence of peer victimisation in the schools. There are three main reasons for this, namely

- Bullying often goes undetected by both teachers and parents (Skiba & Fontanini 2000).
- Without adequate training, many teachers and parents fail to understand the dynamics of peer victimisation ("Bullying is part of growing up.") (US Department of Education 1999).
- Bullying is a holistic problem that occurs in the social environment as a whole (Charach, Pepler & Ziegler 1995: 12-18).

Given this situation, the most effective means of addressing peer victimisation is through comprehensive, integrated school programmes, intervention to reduce opportunities, and rewards for non bullying behaviour rather than focusing on the perpetrators and victims alone. Brewster and Railsback (2001: 14-16) point out that anti-bullying programmes can take many shapes but suggest the following seven steps to address bullying through strategies to promote a positive school ethos:

- Assess the school's needs and goals.
- Develop an anti-bullying policy.
- Provide training for teachers, administrators and other school staff.
- Involve parents.
- Identify resources for bullies, victims and families.
- Provide increased supervision in areas where bullying tends to occur.
- Integrate anti-bullying themes and activities into the curriculum.

The following are some best practice examples of learner welfare policies that adhere to the requirements to develop whole-school bullying policies, implement curricular measures, improve the schoolground environment and empower learners through conflict resolution, peer support and assertiveness training:

- The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme developed, refined, and systematically evaluated in Bergen, Norway is one of the best-known initiatives designed to reduce bullying among learners (Olweus & Limber 1999). The underlying philosophy is to involve teachers, learners and parents in efforts to

- raise awareness about bullying
- improve peer relations
- intervene to stop intimidation
- develop clear rules (policy) against bullying behaviour
- support and protect

The programme intervenes on three levels

- ▶ School: Learners are surveyed anonymously to determine the nature and occurrence of the school's bullying problem; supervision of learners is increased during breaks; schoolwide assemblies are conducted to discuss the bullying issue, and teachers receive inservice training.
- ▶ Classroom: Teachers introduce and enforce classroom rules against bullying, hold regular meetings with learners to discuss peer victimisation, and meet with parents to introduce the programme and to encourage participation.
- ▶ Individual: Staff intervene with bullies, victims and their parents.

- Cowie and Olafsson (2000: 79-95) examined the impact of a peer support service as an intervention strategy to counteract bullying at school. The basic assumption is that learners themselves have the potential to play a helpful role in tackling bullying behaviour. Three broad types of peer support are identified: befriending, conflict resolution and counselling-based approaches. The support programmes include common elements such as teaching the basic skills of active listening, empathy, problem-solving and supportiveness. Four common themes draw the three types of intervention together:

- They are activated by a request for help with regard to a specific bullying situation and are generally implemented soon after a bullying incident has occurred.
- The support programmes all give the peer helpers skills and strategies for enabling the young people involved in the peer victimisation situation to find a resolution to the problem.
- Although the intervention is made by the peer helpers, adults retain a supportive and supervisory role without imposing solutions.
- They are non-punitive interventions which do not seek to apportion blame but to offer clear and genuine channels of communication among those involved in the situation.
- All take place outside the classroom as part of the overall anti-bullying policy of the school, and so depend on the school having the resources and commitment to facilitate the peer support system.
- The systems are coordinated by a member of staff with particular personal qualities of dedication to cooperative values with a commitment to reduce antisocial behaviour.

2 Method and respondents

The major outcomes of the study were to identify key concerns regarding bullying in schools, and to make information available to legitimate and interested stakeholders in the development of problem-solving strategies.

In the first semester of 2002, a structured survey questionnaire was constructed and subjected to the criticism of colleagues, members of the Department of Education and others familiar with the nature and scope of the study. On the basis of ensuing feedback, the draft instrument was revised and drawn up in its final form, consisting of nineteen pages and comprising thirty-four main questions, focusing on the issues mentioned.

The researchers were able to generate a non-probability sample by means of the convenience sampling technique consisting of Grade 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 learners from six primary and secondary schools, in District 4, Tshwane South. The sample does not permit generalizations outside the group of sample elements. Table 1 provides an overview of the general demographics of the respondents. For the purpose of Chi-square calculations, the age variable was regrouped into two sub-categories, namely "Under 15 years" and "Over 14 years".

The questionnaire was administered in each school by lecturers from the Department of Criminology, the Institute for Criminological Sciences and staff from the Department of Education in Gauteng in classrooms during normal class periods. The survey was conducted in August/September 2002 and the learners completed 220 questionnaires. Seventeen were not correctly completed and could not be used in the study. This investigation served as a pilot study for the main survey to be completed at the end of 2002/beginning of 2003. The results were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data processor and analysed by means of frequencies and cross-tabulations utilizing chi-square statistical tests. The statistical meaning attached to the concept "significance" means probably true and/or not due to chance. A research finding may be true without being a significant indicator in a certain context. Levels of significance indicate how likely a result is due to chance. For example, statistical significance at the 5 percent (0.05) level or less indicates that a finding has a 95 percent (or higher) chance of being true. Subsequently the accepted levels of significance reported in this study are as follows. The 5 percent level of significance includes all chi-square values where $p < 0.05$ and $p > 0.01$. Secondly the 1 percent level of significance covers all chi-square values where $p < 0.01$ and $p > 0.001$ and thirdly the 0.1 percent level where $p < 0.001$.

The study was exploratory and the purpose was to acquire descriptive information from learners to help schools assess the following issues:

- Who are the learners with a disposition to bully?
- What are the main reasons for peer victimisation?
- What should be done to deal with the issues of bullying in schools?

Table 1 depicts the characteristics of the research group. Approximately equal numbers of each age group were represented in the sample. Most of the respondents were in the age group over 14 years (55.6%) with the highest representation in the 15 years (19.8%) and 16 years (20.8%) age groups. Most of the respondents were female learners (53.1%), while males constituted 46.9 percent of the sample. Of the respondents, 30.9 percent were from primary schools (Grade 6: 15% and Grade 7:

15.9%) and 69.1 percent were from secondary schools (23.7% in Grade 11). Most of the respondents (59.9%) were blacks, followed by whites (34.3%), Coloureds (3.4%) and Indians (2.43 %).

Table 1 Characteristics of the research group

Demographic variable	N*	%
Age		
12 years or under	34	16.4
13 years	30	14.5
14 years	28	13.5
15 years	41	19.8
16 years	43	20.8
Older than 16 years	31	15.0
Gender		
Male	97	46.9
Female	110	53.1
Grade		
6	31	15.0
7	33	15.9
8	28	13.5
9	31	15.0
10	35	16.9
11	49	23.7
Population group		
Black	124	59.9
Coloured	7	3.4
Indian	5	2.4
White	71	34.3
Unspecified/Other	0	0

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3 Results

Table 2 reports that the general attitude held by 43.5 percent of the respondents was that they believed they were as able (26.6%) or more able (16.9%) than other learners to bully others if they wanted to.

Table 2 If you want to, how able are you to bully other learners?

Variable		More able than most pupils	% About as able as most	Less able than most	Total
Gender					
Male	N=97	23.7	32.0	44.3	100.0
Female	N=110	10.9	21.8	67.3	100.0
Age					
Under 15 years	N=92	15.2	25.0	59.8	100.0
Over 14 years	N=115	18.3	27.8	53.9	100.0
Grade					
6	N=31	12.9	25.8	61.3	100.0
7	N=33	6.1	24.2	69.7	100.0
8	N=28	25.0	25.0	50.0	100.0
9	N=31	16.2	41.9	41.9	100.0
10	N=35	28.6	25.7	45.7	100.0
11	N=49	14.3	20.4	65.3	100.0
Population group					
Black	N=124	15.3	12.9	71.8	100.0
Coloured	N=7	28.6	28.6	42.8	100.0
Indian/Asian	N=5	40.0	40.0	20.0	100.0
White	N=75	16.9	49.3	33.8	100.0
Total	N=207	16.9	26.6	56.5	100.0

Statistical analysis of the data indicates that male and female respondents differed statistically at the 5 % level of significance in their answer to this question. More than half of the male learners (55.7%) regarded themselves as able (32.0%) or more able (23.7%) than other learners to bully in contrast to almost one-third of the female scholars who believed that they were able (21.8%) or more able (10.9%) than others to participate in bullying activities (Chi-square: value 11.792; df 2; p .003) (1% level). No significant differences were observed between the responses of age groups regarding their ability to bully other learners. Fifty percent or more of the learners in Grade 8 (50.0%), Grade 9 (58.1%) and Grade 10 (54.3%) indicated that they were able or more than able to victimise other learners. An analysis of the responses of the population groups revealed that the white (66.2%) and Indian (80.0%) respondents were as able or more able than most learners to bully others, compared to only 28.0 percent of the blacks and 57.2 percent of the Coloureds in the group. The difference measured as highly statistically significant (Chi-square: value 38.191; df 6; p .000).

Table 3 illustrates the respondents' inclination to hurt or upset another learner. More than sixty percent of the group had felt like hurting or upsetting another learner, either "sometimes" (54.6%) or "often" (6.8%).

Table 3 Have you ever felt like hurting or upsetting another learner?

Variable		No, never	% Yes, sometimes	Yes, often	Total
Gender					
Male	N=97	38.2	51.5	10.3	100.0
Female	N=110	39.1	57.3	3.6	100.0
Age					
Under 15 years	N=92	37.0	57.6	5.4	100.0
Over 14 years	N=115	40.0	52.2	7.8	100.0
Grade					
6	N=31	38.7	54.8	6.5	100.0
7	N=33	39.4	60.6		100.0
8	N=28	35.8	57.1	7.1	100.0
9	N=31	32.3	58.0	9.7	100.0
10	N=35	31.4	60.0	8.6	100.0
11	N=49	49.0	42.8	8.2	100.0
Population group					
Black	N=124	46.0	49.2	4.8	100.0
Coloured	N=7	14.3	57.1	28.6	100.0
Indian/Asian	N=5	20.0	60.0	20.0	100.0
White	N=75	29.6	63.4	7.0	100.0
Total	N=207	38.6	54.6	6.8	100.0

Across gender, virtually equal numbers of male (38.2%) and female (39.1%) participants indicated that they never felt like hurting or upsetting another learner. However, it was noticed that male members of the sample more often (10.3%) felt inclined to bully than females (3.6%). No significant differences were found in the various age groups and the findings corresponded to a large extent with those of the general investigation group. More than one-thirds of the learners in Grade 6 (38.7%), Grade 7 (39.4%), Grade 8 (35.8%), and almost one-third in Grade 9 (32.3%) and Grade 10 (31.4%) said that they never felt like victimising another learner. Nearly fifty percent of the Grade 11 learners (49.0%) expressed the same sentiment. Regarding the feeling to hurt or upset others, the various population groups differed as follows in their response under the category "never":

- blacks 46.0 percent
- Coloureds 14.3 percent
- Indians 20.0 percent
- whites 29.6 percent

The learners' responses differed statistically at the 5% level of significance in terms of their

population groups (Chi-square: value 13.362; df 6; p .038).

Table 4 Participation in bullying on a group-related and individual basis during 2002

Form of bullying	No part	Once or twice	% Sometimes	About once a week	Several times a week	Total
Group-related basis	64.3	17.4	11.1	5.3	1.9	100.0
Individual basis	72.0	16.4	10.6	1.0	0.0	100.0

Table 4 presents the responses to the questions regarding participation in bullying activities. Answers to the question "How often have you been part of a group that bullied another learner this year?" indicated that more than one-third (35.7%) of the learners had bullied another learner as part of a group on some basis during 2002, with the highest percentage doing so once or twice (17.4%). Nearly one-fifth (18.3%) of the group admitted to bullying another learner as part of a group sometimes (11.1%), about once a week (5.3%) or several times a week (1.9%). It appears that group pressure may be significant in peer victimisation as there were somewhat fewer respondents who bullied on an individual basis (28.0%). Again, the most common frequency reported was once or twice (16.4%), with 11.6 percent of the group admitting to bullying other learners sometimes (10.6%) and once a week (1.0%).

According to the analysis of the data regarding these two questions on a group-related and individual basis of peer victimisation, homogeneous findings emerged in terms of the gender/age/grade/population group subgroups. The numbers reported correspond to a large extent with the answers of the total investigation group. However, a few distinct differences were noticeable at the 5% level of statistical significance:

- **Group-related bullying**
 Chi-square:
 Age: value 10.422; df 4; p .034 (5% level)
 More than 10 percent (10.9%) of the male group admitted to bullying another learner once a week in contrast to less than 1 percent (0.9%) amongst the female respondents.
 Chi-square:
 Population group: value 22.238; df12; p .035 (5% level)
 More than half (57.1%) of the Coloured learners took part in group-related bullying (with the highest incidence doing so "sometimes" [28.6%]) in comparison to about one-third of the blacks (33.9%) and whites (38.0%), and only a fifth (20.0%) of the Indian learners.
- **Individual bullying**
 Chi-square:
 Grades: value 26.464; df 15; p .033 (5% level)
 Close to half (45.5%) of the bullying on individual level took place in Grade 7 compared to

less than one-third of the learners in all the other Grades who bullied someone on their own.
Chi-square:

Population group: value 28.573; df 9; p .001 (0.1% level)

More than half (57.1%) of the Coloured group had bullied another learner on an individual basis (with the highest incidence doing so "sometimes" [28.6%]), in marked contrast to than one quarter of the blacks (25.0%), Indians (20.0%) and whites (31.0%).

Table 5 There are various reasons for bullying other learners. What reason do you think you would give for bullying someone, if you did it?

Reason	Yes	% No	Total
For fun	38.6	61.4	100.0
Because the victims annoy the bullies	47.3	52.7	100.0
Because the victims are regarded as wimps (not brave, strong or confident)	35.7	64.3	100.0
To get belongings or money from the victims	23.2	76.8	100.0
Bullies want to show how tough they are	48.3	51.7	100.0
Because others were doing so	30.4	69.6	100.0
To get even	49.3	50.7	100.0

Table 5 enumerates the general views of the respondents with regard to the reasons for peer victimisation. The three reasons most commonly endorsed by learners as legitimate reasons for bullying were

- to get even (49.3%)
- because bullies want to show how tough they are (48.3%)
- because the victims annoy the bullies (47.3%)

More than one-third of the learners suggested that the reasons for bullying were "for fun" (38.6%) and one-third "because others were doing so" (30.4%). The next category is perhaps also the most disturbing and reflects the true nature of peer victimisation. The reason had nothing to do with the victim instigating an attack, but simply because the learner was deemed different or unlikeable, namely "because the victims are regarded as wimps (not brave, strong or confident)" (35.7%). This reason offered by learners pinpoints a key aspect of peer victimisation - that bullying is not always the result of provocation by the victim. The reason "to get belongings or money from the victims" was supported by fewer respondents (23.2%).

Results from the analysis of the age/grade/population group subgroups (data not shown in table) indicated that learners' views differed at the 5% level of statistical significance regarding the following reasons for bullying:

- Age. The percentage of respondents under the age of 15 years (23.9%) who reported bullying for fun as the reason for peer victimisation was smaller than the group of learners over the age of 14 years (50.4%) with the same view (Chi-square: value 15.162; df 1; p .000) (highly significant). Nearly one-third of the age group over 14 years (30.4%) expressed the opinion that the reason for bullying was to get belongings or money from the victims in contrast to the 14.1 percent of learners under the age of 15 years who felt likewise (Chi-square: value 7.628; df 1; p .006) (1% level). More than half of the learners over the age of 14 years (57.4%) suggested the reason for bullying someone was to show off (to show how tough they are) compared to about one-third of the respondents under the age of 15 years (37.0%) (Chi-square: value 8.547; df 1; p .003) (1% level). Close to forty percent (38.3%) of the group over 14 years endorsed behaviour modeling ("because others were doing so") as a reason in comparison with only a fifth (20.7%) of the learners under the age of 15 years (Chi-square: value 7.485; df 1; p .006) (1% level). Retaliation ("to get even") was given by more than half (55.7%) of the learners over the age of 14 years as the reason for bullying, while nearly 15 percent fewer learners (41.3%) in the younger age groups agreed (Chi-square: value 4.210; df 1; p .040) (5% level).
- Grade. The majority of Grade 9 (54.8%) and Grade 10 (54.3) learners were of the opinion that bullying for fun is a reason for peer victimisation compared to the less than 10 percent (9.7%) of the group in Grade 6 (Chi-square: value 23.860; df 5; p .000) (highly significant). Nearly two-thirds (67.3%) of the Grade 11 learners endorsed showing off as reason for bullying compared to the 32 percent of the Grade 6 group who affirmed this reason (Chi-square: value 12.495; df 5; p .029) (5% level). A significant percentage of the learners in senior grades (Grade 9 [64.5%], Grade 10 [42.9%] and Grade 11 [63.3%]) supported retaliation as the reason for peer victimisation. To get even was a less popular choice among the junior grades (Grade 6 [38.7%], Grade 7 [39.4%] and Grade 8 [39.3%]) (Chi-square: level 11.086; df 5; p .050) (5% level).
- Population groups. Differences in the reasons given for bullying were related to Bullying for fun (Chi-square: value 7.751; df 3; p .050) (5% level). Nearly half (46.0%) of the blacks answered in the affirmative while fewer Coloureds (14.3%), Indians (20.0%) and whites (29.6%) endorsed this reason for peer victimisation.
- To get belongings or money from the victim (Chi-square: value 8.204; df 3; p .042) (5% level). Almost thirty percent of the black learners (29.8%) expressed the view that "to get belongings or money from the victims" was a reason for bullying. This opinion was shared by less than 15 percent Coloureds (14.3%), whites (14.1%) and no Indian scholars.
- To show off (Chi-square: value 17.760; df 3; p .000) (highly significant). To show off was given as a reason by approximately sixty percent of the blacks (59.7%) and Indians (60.0%) in contrast to less than one-third of the Coloureds (28.6%) and whites (29.6%) who supported this reason.
- Because others were doing so (Chi-square: value 12.1666; df 3; p .007) (1% level). Nearly forty percent of the blacks (38.7%) indicated behaviour modeling as the reason for bullying, while this reason was supported by only 21.1 percent of the white learners and by none of the Coloured or Indian respondents.

Table 6 indicates that most respondents (80.7%) believed that teachers and learners should be concerned about stopping peer victimisation in their schools, and that teachers themselves (87.0%) should try to stop bullying when it occurs.

Table 6 Measures against bullying

Measure	Yes	% No	Don't know	Total
Do you think that teachers and learners should be concerned about stopping bullying in your school?	80.7	6.3	13.0	100.0
Do you think teachers should try to stop bullying?	87.0	3.4	9.6	100.0
Do you think learners themselves should help to stop bullying?	83.1	6.3	10.6	100.0
Do you personally try to stop bullying when you see it happening?	58.9	30.5	10.6	100.0
Do you think that learners and teachers should work together to stop bullying?	87.0	4.3	8.7	100.0
Do you think you could use some help from somebody to stop you from being bullied?	60.9	20.3	18.8	100.0
Would you be interested in talking with other people about the problem of bullying at school to see what could be done about stopping it?	69.1	15.0	15.9	100.0

The group as a whole reacted positively to the questions "Do you think learners themselves should help to stop bullying?" ("Yes" 83.1%) and "Do you think that learners and teachers should work together to stop bullying?" ("Yes" 87.0%).

Fewer learners supported personal involvement with bullying in any form. This tendency was supported by the observation that:

- About sixty percent (58.9%) of the group were willing to try to stop bullying on their own when they saw it happening. Nearly one-third (30.5%) of the respondents answered this question in the negative and more than ten percent (10.6%) responded in the "don't know" category.
- Approximately sixty percent (60.9%) indicated that they could use some help to stop themselves from being bullied. About equal numbers of the group said "no" (20.3%) and "don't know" (18.8%).
- Less than seventy percent (69.1%) responded "yes" when asked if they would be interested in talking about the problem of bullying with other students to see what they could do about

stopping it, with 15.0 percent of the learners responding "no" and 15.9 percent "don't know".

According to the analysis of the data of the gender/age/grade/population group subgroups regarding the matter of personal involvement in bullying (data not presented in table), the respondents' answers to the following three questions differed at the 5% level of statistical significance:

- "Do you personally try to stop bullying when you see it happening?"
 - ▶ Age (Chi-square: value 6.132; df 2; p .047) (5% level). Meaningful differences emerged in the answers between the age groups. A much higher percentage of older learners in the age groups over 14 years (37.4%) indicated that they are not willing to intervene, compared to about a fifth (21.7%) of learners in the under 15 years age group who answered "no".
- "Do you think that you could use some help from somebody to stop you from being bullied?"
 - ▶ Gender (Chi-square: value 12.867; df 2; p .002) (1% level). Opinions were more mixed when participants answered this question. About half (53.6%) of the learners indicated that they could use help to stop them from being bullied in comparison to over two-thirds (67.3%) of the female group. More than a fifth (21.8%) of the females were unsure, while 15.5 percent of the male learners answered in the "don't know" category.
 - ▶ Age (Chi-square: value 6.844; df 2; p .033) (5% level). Twice as many (26.1%) learners in the under 15 years age group were uncertain in answering this question compared to the respondents (13.0% "don't know") in the over 14 years age group.
 - ▶ Population group (Chi-square: value 29.527; df 6; p .000) (highly significant). Close to three-quarters of the blacks (74.2%) and Indians (80.0%) indicated that they could use some help in comparison with less than half of the Coloured (42.9%) and white (38.0%) learners.
- "Would you be interested in talking with other people about the problem of bullying at school to see what could be done about stopping it?"
 - ▶ Gender (Chi-square: value 21.244; df 2; p .000) (highly significant). More than eighty percent (81.8%) of the females in the group said "yes" when asked if they would be interested in talking about bullying with other learners in order to stop it. About half (54.6%) of the male respondents expressed the same feeling.
 - ▶ Age (Chi-square: value 6.725; df 2; p .035) (5% level). Noteworthy differences appeared between the responses of the age groups. One fifth (20.0%) of the learners in the group over 14 years expressed their unwillingness to talk to others about the problem of peer victimisation in contrast to less than ten percent (8.7%) among the younger age group.
 - ▶ Grade (Chi-square: value 23.227; df 10; p .010) (1% level). Considerable differences were revealed between grades in answering this question. More than eighty percent (83.9%) of the respondents in Grade 6 answered in the affirmative, with about half of the learners in Grade 10 (51.4%) expressing the same sentiment. A relatively high percentage of learners in Grade 8 (25.0%) and Grade 10 (20.0%) were uncertain and responded in the "don't know" category.
 - ▶ Population group (Chi-square: value 24.683; df 6; p .000) (highly significant). A very high percentage of Indians (80.0%) and blacks (74.0%) said "yes", while there were fewer Coloureds (42.9%) and whites (38.0%) with the same opinion. More than

one-quarter of the Coloureds (28.6%) and whites (25.4%) said they don't know.

4 Conclusion

The general attitude held by more than forty percent of the respondents was that they believed they were as able (26.6%) or more able (16.9%) than other learners to bully others if they wanted to. When asked "Have you ever felt like hurting or upsetting another learner?" more than sixty percent of the group indicated that they had felt like hurting or upsetting another learner either "sometimes" (54.6) or "often" (6.8%).

More than one-third (35.7%) of the learners admitted that they had bullied another learner as part of a group during 2002, with the highest percentage doing so once or twice (17.4%). It appears that there might be a group aspect significant to peer victimisation as somewhat fewer respondents were bullied on an individual basis (28.0%).

The three reasons most commonly endorsed by learners for bullying were to get even (retaliation) (49.3%), because bullies want to show how tough they are (show off) (48.3%) and because the victims annoy the bullies (47.3%). Nearly one out of three learners suggested that the reasons for bullying were "for fun" (38.6%) and "because others were doing so" (behaviour modeling) (30.4%). More than one-third (35.7%) of the group affirmed that learners were bullied because the learner was deemed different or unlikeable. This reason reflects on an important aspect of peer victimisation - that bullying is not always the result of provocation by the victim.

When asked about measures against bullying most respondents (80.7%) believed that teachers and learners should be concerned about stopping bullying, and that teachers themselves (87.0%) should try to stop bullying when it takes place. The whole investigation group said "yes" to the question "Do you think learners themselves should help to stop bullying?" (83.1%) and "Do you think that learners and teachers should work together to stop bullying?" (87.0%). Fewer members of the group supported personal involvement with bullying in any form.

Future research in the area of peer victimisation could include more qualitative studies of learners', teachers' and parents' perspectives. It might be valuable to learn more about parents' views on bullying as this could add a new dimension to the phenomenon. Teachers' perspectives were also investigated in the present study and the findings will be reported in the near future

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