AUTHOR:
Pryah Mahabeer
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4576-690X

AFFILIATION:
University of KwaZulu Natal

CORRESPONDENCE TO:
mahabeerp3@ukzn.ac.za

DATES:
Published: 20 Feb 2020

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Mahabeer, P., 2020. Novice teachers' beliefs and fears on bullying in schools in South Africa. KOERS — Bulletin for Christian Scholarship, 85(1). Available at: https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.85.1.2445

COPYRIGHT:
© 2020. The Author(s). Published under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Novice Teachers' Beliefs and Fears on Bullying in Schools in South Africa

ABSTRACT

Worldwide, and in developing countries like South Africa, bullying and violence in schools are a prevalent problem. Negotiating and managing bullying in schools has become progressively challenging for teachers, more so for novice teachers entering the profession. Through semi-structured interviews, this interpretivist qualitative study explores the fears and beliefs of four novice teachers within the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Using narrative analysis, novice teachers attributed their understanding, worldviews, beliefs, fears and the manner in which they responded to bullying instances to: their biographical backgrounds, their personal beliefs and attitudes, social and contextual factors. They demonstrated an understanding of bullying, and recognised the prevalence and persisting problem of bullying in schools. They recalled from their growing up years how they experienced bullying, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, from their own personal histories, attitudes and beliefs. They expressed fears about not effectively identifying and responding to bullying behaviours. Lastly, teachers associated bullying with an imbalance of power. Although teachers were aware of informal anti-bullying interventions, they stressed the lack of concrete formal intervention strategies to reduce and stop bullying. The teachers recommended a collaborative and democratic process of all stakeholders deciding policies and crafting customised practical intervention strategies, rather than a generic approach to eliminating bullying and violence in schools.

Keywords: *anti-bullying, beliefs, bullying, fears, school violence, teachers*

1. Introduction

Globally, the prevalence of bullying is increasing, and it is projected that 246 million children experience bullying in some way or the other (UNESCO, 2017). Professor Wayne Hugo (cited in Wolhuter, 2017) accentuates that almost 80 % of South African children are bullied on their way to and from school and at school, but many are also bullied by teachers. He further emphasised that private schools showed fewer incidences of bullying, implying that parents are not only buying better marks but also their children's safety by sending them to private schools. By the same token, a report by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) (2008 cited in Mncube & Harber, 2013) confirmed that only 23 % of South African learners felt safe at school compared to Sweden, Denmark and Norway where learners were the safest, with 70% stating they felt safe at school (Mncube & Harber, 2013).

Bullying has been evident for more than two decades with a strong correlation between bullying and violence in schools, which has been characterised by school shootings, chronic bullying, physical violence, and suicide (Raven & Jurkiewicz, 2014). Despite the existence of policies against bullying and violence in schools, bullying continues in many South African schools (Mncube & Harber, 2013; Russell, Day, Loverno & Toomey, 2016). In South Africa, the widespread scourge of bullying and its associated school violence has become a prevalent phenomenon, with extensive immediate and long-term effects for the victims, bullies, bystanders, and teachers, in their efforts to detect and respond to bullying in schools (Bradshaw, 2015; Mncube & Harber, 2013; UNESCO, 2017).

Considering the pervasiveness of bullying and violence in schools, it is imperative to understand how teachers deal with these issues in the classroom and at a school level. More importantly, how teachers who are new to the field and are not perhaps adequately trained to dealing with the matters of bullying (Raven & Jurkiewicz, 2014). Therefore, this study seeks to establish the beliefs and fears of novice teachers in addressing and dealing with the issue of bullying within the South African schooling context. The findings of this study may inform policy around developing in-service and pre-service teacher education initiative programmes to better equip teachers with strategies for managing problems of bullying and school violence in schools. This study could prove valuable in informing school policies and strategies related to bullying and school violence.

2. Conceptualising the notion of bullying

Bullying is often described as a degree of repeated aggressive and violent behaviour categorised by a power inequality in favour of culprits over victims, with the aim to cause intentional injury or suffering to the victim (UNESCO, 2017). With adverse implications for the perpetrator, victim and the bystander. The fundamental causes of bullying and violence in schools are linked to gender stereotyping and discrimination: not conforming to a sexual orientations and social norms, vulnerable children from poor and cultural minority groups, refuge communities, children with disabilities are at greater risk, and unsupervised children and adolescents in the school (UNESCO, 2017).

There are different types of bullying. This can include psychological abuse, physical abuse (hitting and kicking), sexual abuse, verbal abuse (name calling), cyberbullying and relational (ignoring another person) bullying (Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles & Simmonds, 2014; Yoon, Sulkowski, Bauman, 2016; UNESCO, 2017). Bullying behaviour can either be direct or indirect; with direct bullying encompassing teasing and physical violence like hitting, whereas indirect bullying consists of behaviours like spreading rumours, isolating the victim by excluding them from peer groups (Bauman & Hurley, 2005; UNESCO, 2017). This creates an unsafe learning environment of fear and insecurity, which often hinders learning as children cannot learn in stressful environments. With the ubiquity of electronic communication technologies, methods of bullying increase. As such, with cyberbullying being on the increase, its relevance to teacher education and in- and pre-service teachers should be prioritised (Boulton et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2013; Kruger, 2011).

The effects of bullying are detrimental to the bully and the victim. There is a growing concern that the experiences of bullying for both the victim and perpetrator are linked to emotional, behavioural, and academic risks, such as: increased drop-out rates, high absenteeism rates, poor self-esteem, poor academic performance, depression and suicidal thoughts, poor social skills, the susceptibility to school violence, and the chance of victims and perpetrators turning to violence at an older age (Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler & Wiener, 2005; Russell et al., 2016). Notably, bullying and violence in schools impinge on the fundamental right to safe, equal and quality education for all learners, and it affects the health and well-being of learners, adolescents and adults continuing into adulthood (UNESCO, 2017).

3. The centrality of the teacher's role in curbing bullying

The school is a dangerous environment for bullying, with most bullying occurring within the schooling situation (Yoon et al., 2016). This points to the crucial role teachers play in promoting safety in schools by reducing bullying behaviours. Their role is influenced by their own perception of the problem of bullying in their schools, and the school climate (Russell et al., 2016). Russell et al. (2016) further suggested that teachers with more classroom experience and from racial minority backgrounds may be more mindful and responsive to bullying, implying that bullying is more prevalent in underprivileged societies where

there is low academic performance. This suggests that there is a correlation between socio-economic status, education and bullying behaviours.

Yoon and Bauman (2014) argue that teachers are not perceived as efficient at intervening in incidences of bullying, and that they require more than mere knowledge of bullying to be effective in identifying and responding to bullying. A study by Oldenburg, van Duijn, Sentse, Huitsing, van der Ploeg, Salmivalli and Veenstra (2015) revealed that greater victimization rates in classrooms are linked to greater propensity among teachers to point the cause of bullying to influences outside their classroom. This infers that teachers attributed the causes of classroom bullying to forces outside the school and the classroom and so they felt addressing the bullies at school without addressing the causal factors would not avail much. Unfortunately, they felt they were not empowered enough to address factors outside the school and classroom parameters when intervening in bullying incidences. Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan and Gulemetova (2013) indicated that teachers were more likely to witness students being bullied and perceived bullying as a major problem at their school. The authors further suggest that, although teachers were involved in crafting bullying policies at their schools, they wanted more training related to cyberbullying and bullying.

By teachers ignoring bullying, they conveyed to students the message that they should not expect teachers to intervene, assist and protect them, which would be interpreted by learners as a lack of concern and empathy on the teachers' part (Yoon & Bauman, 2014). Earlier research conducted by Mishna et al. (2005), suggested that teachers were unaware that their learners were being bullied, which is a major cause for concern. Yoon and Bauman (2014) highlighted that relying on referral to an authority may also suggest that teachers are ill-prepared or unwilling to manage the bullying and violence at the individual or classroom level. They suggest promoting a positive classroom and school climate requires that everyone plays a role in reducing bullying, a collaborative approach that side-lines punitive strategies.

A positive school climate is linked to lower incidences of bullying and teachers' ability to positively cope with challenging student behaviours (Cornell, 2013). Teachers who considered their school climate as antagonistic or hostile were disinclined to discipline bullies, respond to incidences of bullying, or work with victims; as opposed to those teachers who did not perceive the school climate as hostile (Yoon et al., 2016).

4. Teachers' beliefs and fears of bullying

Williams and Corvo (2008) explored in-service and pre-service teachers' fears of school violence in New York using a mixed method approach. Their findings revealed that pre-service teachers feared being harmed themselves, like being attacked or shot. While some in-service teachers feared for their own safety, the majority of the teachers feared harm coming to their students. Williams and Corvo (2008) suggested that teacher education address the fears and anxieties of pre-service and in-service teachers in relation to school violence.

Bauman and Hurley (2005) further highlighted that teachers underestimated the occurrence of bullying, and the majority of teachers over-confidently identified themselves and their peers to be adequately equipped in preventing severe bullying issues. This was despite their reported lack of training in the pre-service and in-service teacher education and development programmes, which are essential to their proficiency in detecting and responding to bullying (Bauman & Hurley, 2005). They underlined the following key findings from their study: firstly, victims of bullying felt that school personnel did not respond adequately and intervene much in bullying situations. Secondly, first-year teachers felt self-confident in their capacities to identify and respond to bullying. Thirdly, boys were more prone to bullying than girls. Lastly, teachers' attitudes were that corporal punishment

would improve learner behaviour. They recommended that teacher attitudes and beliefs be balanced with accurate and realistic information and training on best practice for teachers in preventing bullying in schools (Bauman & Hurley, 2005).

Clearly, adequate support and education must be provided to in-service teachers to deal with the realities in schools. They should be equipped with strategies for ensuring their own safety and that of their learners, and for detecting warning signs of bullying behaviours. Moreover, pre-service teachers must be trained to understand the realities of school violence including bullying, and they must be encouraged to express and confront their fears and beliefs about bullying and school violence, through developmental workshops. This is because failure to address the concerns by teachers will lead to the loss of good teachers in their early careers (Williams & Corvo, 2008).

Much research focuses on the prevalence, risk and protection of bullying but little emphasis has been placed on the role of teachers and their understanding and experiences of bullying, including the factors influencing their interventions (Mishna et al., 2005; Yoon & Bauman, 2014). There is limited research on teachers' perceptions of bullying (Bauman & Hurley, 2005). Raven and Jurkiewicz (2014) also noted that there is limited research that examines teachers' perceptions and attitudes to bullying; their beliefs, fears and personal experiences of bullying and how all that influences the manner in which they respond to bullying behaviours. Literature indicates the importance of understanding both pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs and their responses to bullying, and how a neglect thereof, can destabilise effective anti-bullying initiatives (Boulton et al., 2014). Importantly, teachers are at the forefront of managing bullying and anti-bullying campaigns in schools, and they have a significant role to play. This study therefore, explores the fears and beliefs of teachers in a developing country like South Africa.

5. Teachers' responses to bullying in schools

Teachers play a vital role in bullying prevention and intervention strategies and studies (Bradshaw et al., 2013) direct that the majority of teachers need further training on efficient prevention interventions for all types of bullying and school-wide policies. Teachers' own beliefs, fears and experiences are significant in affecting their evaluation of incidences of bullying and their responses thereof (Yoon et al., 2016). Studies by Bauman and Hurley (2005) on teacher attitudes and beliefs about bullying, revealed that many occurrences of bullying were not detected and responded to effectually by teachers, and this potentially compromised intervention strategies and programmes.

Recent studies suggest a lack of quality training programmes for pre-service and in-service teachers on bullying in schools; further, much of the training provided places emphasis on information about bullying without concentrating on the factors essential in developing a response to bullying incidents (Yoon & Bauman, 2014). They advocate that teacher responses to bullying should be understood within the wide context of the classroom and school management, and interpersonal relationships as influenced by contextual and individual variables. In other words, a more measured process should be promoted, focused on a training approach that would assist teachers understand their own dispositions and provide a range of strategies that teachers can consider when responding to various bullying incidences that they experience (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Research is lacking on teachers' understanding of bullying and on the factors influencing their views and interventions (Mishna et al., 2005). Yoon et al. (2016) argue that further research should explore effective pragmatic teacher strategies to managing bullying, and support interventions for the victims. This should be offered to both pre-service and in-service teachers, and should go beyond mere information to assist teachers understand the dynamics associated with bullying and school violence. Intervention programmes must

be sensitive towards culture, society and home (Bauer, Lozano & Rivara, 2007). This study hopes to unpack novice teachers' beliefs and fears, understandings and experiences on bullying within the South African school context.

The study focused on responding to the following two research questions:

1. What are teachers' beliefs and fears about bullying in schools?
2. What have been some of their personal experiences of bullying?

6. Research methodology

In recognising the diversity of lived realities and knowledge, while developing a sense of human dignity and shared responsibility and a commitment to worldwide cohesion. The study is a qualitative interpretivist study based on the premise that bullying and violence in schools is socially constructed and that people, from their own personal experiences, beliefs and fears; have different constructed realities that allow them to make sense of bullying and violence in schools (Cresswell, 2013; Williams & Corvo, 2008). Therefore, this qualitative interpretivist research study provides first-hand accounts of novice teachers' beliefs and fears, including their understanding and experiences of bullying with the aim of interpreting and finding meaning in their work and social environments (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Narrative analysis accentuates on the way individuals (teachers) present their beliefs, constructions and experiences of themselves to make sense or their lived realities, making it appropriate for this study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Narrative analysis is significant in analysing, interpreting and presenting qualitative data to richly capture teachers' beliefs, fears, understandings and experiences of bullying.

6.1 Context of the Study

In the South African context, bullying is prevalent in schools and teachers are at the forefront of dealing with incidences of bullying and school violence. The researcher was curious to explore teachers' own personal beliefs and fears, and experiences on bullying as there appears to be an absence thereof, specifically within Sub-Saharan context, more specifically in South Africa. The intention of this study was to gain insight into the beliefs, fears and experiences of novice teachers in the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa.

6.2 Participants

The participants in this study refer to teachers who have less than five years teaching experience within the school environment. At the time of the study, the participants had limited experience of teaching, however, their beliefs, fears and experiences of bullying extended from their school going years to their roles as pre-service teachers and as novice teachers in their respective schools. Through purposive and convenience sampling, the sample consisted of two male and two female teachers who were teaching in a high and primary school respectively in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The purpose of the study was not to generalise the findings but to gain an understanding of the research phenomenon. The sample was selected irrespective of gender, race and class. The participants have a minimum qualification of a Bachelor of Education degree, and acquired experience at schools both as pre-service and in-service teachers. The participants were also students furthering their studies at a university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and were selected on availability by the researcher for this study (Cresswell, 2013).

6.3 Production of the data

Cortazzi (2014) emphasised that in times of educational and social change it is imperative to explore teachers' perceptions, beliefs and experiences, which are aspects of teacher' culture, which he argues, is under-researched. Using semi-structured interviews, teachers

were asked to reflectively focus on themselves and share their own personal beliefs, fears and experiences of 'bullying'. This was important in exploring teachers in their situations, hearing their voices, understanding what their experiences were and how they thought from the insider perspective about bullying in schools (Cortazzi, 2014). This was done to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers understand and respond to 'bullying'. As such, narrative analysis was used to make meaning of their understandings and personal experiences, and their own beliefs and fears (Cohen et al.,2018; Cortazzi, 2014).

Measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Semi-structured interviews facilitated eliciting teachers' lived realities and conceptions; and the verbatim quotations from participants were used to ensure authenticity (Cohen et al., 2018). These semi-structured interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. In analysing the data, consistent and contradictory themes were identified by reading and re-reading the transcriptions for emerging themes (Merriam, 2002). Ethical issues were considered, the rights and confidentiality of participants were observed through the use of pseudonyms, transparency and disclosure of the study. To improve credibility, member checking was conducted, where interview responses were given to teachers for confirmation. Data was generated from multiple sources and the data was constantly reviewed and interpreted, focusing on their 'multiple realities' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

6.4 Discussion of findings

The themes emerging from the data collected discussed below are: bullying as an imbalance of power; factors prompting bullying behaviours; teachers' fears and uncertainties associated with bullying; teachers' life trajectories associated with bullying; teachers' responses to eradicating bullying in schools.

Billy, Anele, Tony and Tammy asserted their understanding of bullying in the following responses:

> *According to my understanding, bullying is an act done by the person or group of people against my will. It can be physical and emotional, insults and swearing. Usually bullying is done by people or groups which are more powerful than the victim (*Billy*)*

> *To me, bullying is being persistent and aggressive towards another individual wanting to overpower them to get what you want and show dominance* (Anele)

> *Bullying is when a learner goes out of their way to insult or put down another student, showing a lack of consideration for the other person as a human being. The bully believes themselves to be a 'better' or 'higher' person, which learners should understand we are all the same* (Tony)

> *It is a problem that has persisted for generations. However, it is becoming more recognised in recent years. Bullying can be present in many forms. I believe that bullying is where someone is intimidated or pressured into doing something by an individual that is seen as being superior, which often happens when there is an imbalance in the roles of power* (Tammy)

From the above responses, the novice teachers in this study were aware of the growing prevalence and persistent problem of bullying over the generations, and the different types of bullying in schools. However, absent was their recognition of cyber-bullying as a form of bullying in schools. The findings revealed that teachers experienced bullying directly or indirectly in their lives. They recognised the continuing problem of bullying and demonstrated a relatively good understanding of the direct and indirect nature of bullying behaviours: the characteristics of aggressive and persistent bullying behaviours; the physical, psychological, emotional effects of bullying; and the power associated with bullying. Clearly, bullying is detrimental to the victim and the bully, and there is extensive research on the long and

short-term negative psychosocial and emotional effects of bullying for the victim and the bully; such as anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, underdeveloped social skills that could continue into adulthood (Mishna et al., 2005; Raven & Jurkiewicz, 2014).

Anele stated, that as a teacher, one is constantly resolving learners issues of bullying whether it is physical bullying, name-calling or intimidation and you have to ensure a safe environment for all learners,

> *…you constantly encounter children harassing other children on a day to day basis when being at schools. It can be something as little as just taking another child's pencil without permission, intimidating them by threatening to hit them, or taking away another's child's lunch. And as a teacher, you have to resolve these issues and ensure that children are in a safe environment* (Anele)

Evidently, teachers' attitudes towards bullying and their self-assurance in their mediation skills influence their readiness, enthusiasm and capacity to respond to bullying in schools (Sudermann, Jaffe & Schieck, 1996 cited in Bauman & Hurley, 2005). As Tammy noted, bullying is associated with attitudes, beliefs and experiences, which are important determinants the way teachers experience and the way they respond to incidences of bullying.

7. Bullying as an imbalance of power

The notion of 'bullying' is often associated with aggressive behaviour and power that is: intentional, repetitive, and an imbalance or abuse of power (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). As a teacher, Tammy noted that the reasons for bullying were a display of power and control,

> *At times, you will be bullied into performing certain functions at school and threatened or victimised if you refuse such a role. I am of the opinion that bullying comes about because there are individuals who take advantage of their roles in power or even gender roles at times. Bullying happens because someone needs to feel as though they are in control. Bullying often comes about to instil fear in the individual and show them their place as well as to keep those individuals in line, as though there is only one right way which is that of the bully him/herself. Some bullies might even experience pleasure out of watching people being ridiculed and belittled.* (Tammy)

Teachers in this study associated bullying with an imbalance of power, aggressive behaviour and dominance of *"roles of power and gender roles*" (Tammy). The teachers argued that bullying supported a hierarchical approach that instilled fear and overpowered victims as a result of their inexperience or ignorance. "*To an extent I would say that a bully instils fear in you and takes advantage of your ignorance. Believe it or not, there is even a top-down approach (*hierarchy*) when it comes to bullying*" (Tammy). She emphasised that bullying limited teachers' agency to act, "*we are bullied into acting like puppets with management being the puppeteers pulling the strings to show their power*" (Tammy). Teachers argued that teachers within the power structures that exist in schools have turned schools into power struggles which hinder the execution of any intervention programmes whether it be for learners or for creating a collaborative and collegial environment for staff and management. Tammy lamented how *"schools have lost the idea of schooling and turned education into a power struggle. It is unlikely that there will be any interventions anytime in the future"*.

Teachers' understanding of bullying was associated with power, an imbalance and manipulation of power by the perpetrator (bully) over the victim. As one of the teachers mentioned, it is a "*disagreement*" (Tammy) and a demonstration of "*superiority*" (Tammy) or power over another individual that results in the victim enduring "*ridicule*" and "*belittling*" (Tammy). Interestingly, Tammy commented on her own experience as a teacher being bullied by those in power in management positions at the school. This implied that bullying is a phenomenon that teachers were also experiencing within the school structures. This

could be from learners, parents, other teachers, school management committees, and teacher unions.

8. Factors prompting bullying behaviours

The participants in this study attributed social problems, biographical and contextual factors as being among the causes of bullying behaviours. For example, being brought up in violent communities and families, poverty, dysfunctional families, drugs, child abuse and neglect, and corporal punishment are the root of bullying behaviours. Other participants recognised biographical factors, such as, personal attitudes, emotions (of insecurity, anger and jealousy), upbringing, and age as the reasons for bullying. Tony believed there were several reasons for bullying that could be attributed to biographical factors: "It *may be due to the bully's insecurities, some are seeking attention, others may have poor people skills, or poor relationships with parents and so they do not see what they are doing as wrong. Some may just be angry mean children".* Feelings of "*anger*" and *jealousy*", being "*cheeky"* and *"showing off*", as well as "*learner's upbringing*" (Billy), *"drug abuse and corporal punishment"* (Billy) were identified as contributing biographical and social factors to bullying behaviour by the participants. As Anele and Billy expressed,

> *I think its social factors that actually produce bullying or bullies. Children are brought up in environments where there are people who act in such manners and therefore, pick it up and behave that way to others to try and gain control or instil fear in them to prove their dominance. It can also be that children are neglected, and by portraying a violent role they are able to get what they want (*Anele*)*

> *Bullying…usually it is caused by being cheeky, to show off. Sometimes bullying may be caused by jealousy, something you have and they don't. It can also be caused by your upbringing, if you are coming from a violent community or family. Anger, poverty, being ignored, corporal punishment causes bullying. Drug abuse is a concern (*Billy*)*

Schools are supposed to have policies in place and a learner code of conduct to deter violent behaviour. Mncube & Harber (2013) reiterated that despite the existence of these policies, bullying, violence and abuse in schools is on the increase. They draw attention to the high levels of violence in schools in South Africa may be attributed to the violent legacy of apartheid, the perpetuation of patriarchal values and behaviours, widespread availability of guns, high unemployment rate and poverty results in learners resorting to crime and violence (Mncube & Harber, 2013). The authors further highlighted that at the heart of the problems in responding to bullying and violence in schools is the low teacher morale, commitment and motivation and the divided nature of the staff that leads to the chaotic (Mncube & Harber, 2013).

In response to identifying their fears when it comes to bullying, the novice teachers stated that bullying leads to increased school violence and more serious and violent crimes that can extend into adulthood, and perhaps lead to imprisonment for the perpetrators. This is coherent with research conducted by Mishna et al. (2005), Raven and Jurkiewicz, (2014) and reports by UNESCO (2017). Teachers expressed how bullying compromised safety in schools for bullies and victims and the risk of petty bullying incidences leading to grievous bodily harm, death or even suicide. While Billy identified how teachers contributed to bullying by "*using corporal punishment, hitting the students and using the cane"* (Billy).

9. Teacher fears and uncertainties associated with bullying

The teachers in this study expressed fears of bullying behaviours. They feared not being able to identify and respond to bullying effectively. Some teachers stressed the need to prioritise the safety of all their learners above their own. One respondent noted that, *"I fear*

more for the safety of these children that are being bullied as well as for those that are bullying these children" (Anele).

As a result, teachers recommended a collaborative and democratic process for deciding policies and practical intervention strategies that will include all relevant stakeholders like teachers, parents, learners, School Management Teams, Teacher Unions, the Department, and specialised bodies dealing with bullying behaviours. They further feared bullying behaviours escalating to school violence and more serious crimes, "*It could be stealing an innocent child's lunch today resulting in robbing houses in the future and causing grievous harm to people*" (Anele). Billy and Tony indicated that,

> *Bullying may cause bullies to act beyond their control, using dangerous objects. In schools, senior learners bully junior learners. The extent of bullying… sometimes it leads to prison, violence, and 'gangsterism'* [sic] (Billy)

> *My fear is not seeing bullying happening, or misinterpreting the situation. When I attempt to guide a bully to stop bullying another person, it only makes the bully angrier, and no solution occurs (*Tony*)*

Teachers also feared being victimised themselves by bullies like other teachers and management, which would affect their work situation, "*as a teacher, my fear is that…I will be victimised at school by other teachers as well as management. I also fear that I might become unhappy in my work situation as a result*" (Tammy). Apparent is Tammy's fear of being victimised if she refuses to comply with demands by School Management. She noted that management will turn a minor issue into a full on confrontation resulting in her becoming unhappy in her work situation. She expressed how being a female teacher contributed to being exploited with extra responsibilities within the school structures. How she was manipulated into completing job tasks outside her job description as a teacher. Tammy's fear was being victimised if she stopped complying and responding to management's requests. Management could make her professional life as a teacher unhappy and difficult.

Knowledge of the prevailing attitudes on bullying is important in responding towards incidences of bullying. Generally, research revealed that teachers are uncertain about how to intervene and manage bullying behaviour and require the necessary skills to respond effectively to bullying (Kruger, 2011). Studies suggested that first year teachers' attitudes and beliefs about bullying indicated that there is need for more training on dealing with bullying as bullying leads to violent acts of revenge, criminal acts and suicide (Bauman & Hurley, 2005).

10. Teachers' life trajectories associated with bullying

In their growing up years, some teachers in this study vividly recalled the name-calling and the feelings of nervousness, shame and sadness, and lowered self-esteem associated with bullying. Some teachers in this study blocked their experiences of bullying. This was reflected in one of the participant's response when she noted that *"there are several experiences that I have, most of them have dissolved and faded from my mind as a new issue arise. I have also observed bullying happening to other colleagues"* (Tammy). Siann and Callaghan (1993) as cited in Bauman and Hurley (2005) highlighted the pervasiveness of gender variances in the experiences of bullying, with boys being more physical and girls more psychological. One female teacher in this study regarded herself as fortunate not to being a victim of bullying, *"I was lucky enough to have not experienced any type of bullying*" (Anele).

Tammy further expressed experiencing bullying at "*different levels*" in her life. These experiences ranged from being bullied in schools to being bullied in her growing up years and in her years of teaching by the School Management Team and other teachers. She spoke

about having disagreements with colleagues and due to her timid and passive nature, she was bullied into taking on additional work responsibilities and bullied out of promotional posts. Tammy indicated,

> *The bullying that I have experienced has occurred at different levels. There have been disagreements between myself and other educators and because I am a relatively timid person… I would be asked to take on extra workload…. As teachers we are even bullied by parents who feel as though it is their right to do so because they are backed by the media and department.*

As Tammy referred to her experience of being a victim of bullying on "*different levels*" by "*other educators*" and "*parents*", in her current position as a teacher. Bullying and violence in schools can come from different sources and take on different forms with different actors (Mncube & Harber, 2013). For example, bullying can be learned outside of school but perpetuated inside school. Learners may bully each other, teachers may bully learners, learners may bully teachers, parents may bully teachers, and principals may bully teachers or be bullied by them (Mncube & Harber, 2013).

One male teacher recalled being bullied directly and indirectly from the age of 6, and that it was regarded as "*custom*" (Billy), as normal behaviour which extended to high school and into his years at university. He described being a victim of emotional and physical bullying.

> *It started as I began to attend school at the age of 6, but during that time it was just regarded as custom/culture or a procedure for young boys to pass that stage. Big boys forced us to fight until one man is standing, the 'hero' or the 'champ'. If you don't fight, you would be called 'mama's boy'. No one would want to associate himself with you because of your cowardice. The teachers also contributed to the bullying by physically hitting, slapping, caning, and insulting the learners. Teachers can hit learners more than ten times on the hands or buttocks. Bigger boys used to take pocket money from us and pens. They called the action 'renting'. When I went to boarding school, it was worse. New comers were badly treated both physically and emotionally by other students. Again, I experienced other bullying when I was a student. I witnessed two students were brutally injured and they ended up in hospital* [sic] (Billy).

From the above excerpt, it can be noted that the experiences made them more sensitive and responsive to the hidden and abusive nature of bullying, how teachers contributed to the growing problem of bullying, and the need to make learners aware of bullying and to disclose victimisation.

When teachers in the present study were asked about their own experiences of bullying, they reminisced having several experiences, which they experienced at different levels during their lives, directly or indirectly, happening to themselves or others. A study by Mishna et al. (2005) noted that the personal experiences of bullying on teachers indicated that many teachers were bullied while growing up and the effects continued into adulthood; with some becoming bullies in response to having been bullied; while others described the bullying that they experienced as continuous, terrifying, fearful and serious. This eventually influenced the way they responded to incidences of bullying. As Tony mentioned how his role as a victim changed to becoming a perpetrator, which he consciously became aware of,

> *I was bullied and it was not a pleasant period in my life. I took what others said to heart and let it define me. Despite the fact that they did not really know anything about me. It was mainly being called 'useless', a 'loser', or a 'failure', amongst other things, as I struggled in school. Luckily, there were not many physical altercations. I was bullied from Grade 7 to 12, and it took years for me to find a way to redefine myself from what others said I was. I bullied one person when I was 13. I did not realise until I had already hurt someone that the joking around had gone too far. I realised I was becoming a bully*

> *myself, aiming at someone else to avoid being the person who gets bullied. I have been very conscious of this ever since* (Tony)

Interestingly, Tony painted his experience of bullying as *"something learners do not fully acknowledge as bad. They may feel that they are just having fun".* Fighting and corporal punishment are considered part of growing up and are normalised (UNESCO, 2017). Bullying is not a new trend and children and adults have been bullied for many generations with many people believing and downplaying bullying as a harmless and normal stage of development for children (Bauman & Hurley, 2005). Children may experience bullying in schools, at home, in their communities, and online, with cyberbullying becoming a major problem and often it is ignored by parents and teachers. Many cases of bullying are not reported because of lack of trust in adults, fear of repercussions, feelings of guilt and embarrassment, lack of awareness of how to deal with it. Bullying is often simply ignored by teachers and parents (UNESCO, 2017).

11. Teachers' responses to eradicating bullying in schools

Novice teachers in this study found it challenging to recognise and to intervene in incidences of indirect bullying, and their lack of response in perceiving these incidences as significant led to a lack of disclosure by learners of bullying incidences. The majority of teachers reported that they have not received the necessary training on bullying and expressed the need for more adequate training and support. Generally, the majority of the participants highlighted being unaware of any anti-bullying formal intervention strategies in their schools to eradicate bullying. In response to whether there were intervention strategies to combat bullying at their school, one respondent noted, "*not really, it is unlikely that there will be any interventions anytime in the future"* (Tammy). This was further supported by Tony and Anele in their responses below:

> *No I am not, I know that there are guest speakers who talk about it, but I know that it does not always create a solution. Many of the bullies are generally good kids who take their jokes or attempt to impress peers too far at another's extent. They are not aware of the psychological implications, at least not actively* (Tony)

> *I have not encountered any formal interventions that have been put into place that will reduce or even stop bullying completely and therefore, have no knowledge of what schools really do to prevent bullying* (Anele)

This suggests that schools are ignoring and not prioritising the escalating problem of bullying in schools. Only one teacher was aware of some anti-bullying strategies at school,

> *Learners' code of conduct; the learner who insults, beats or causes any behaviour which is against the other learner it may lead to suspension but minor misconduct are resolved by school and parents. Other schools have a disciplinary committee. There are other interventions in place e.g. ground duty roster, teachers not allowed to leave learners unattended (*Billy*)*

Despite the many intervention initiatives and awareness programmes, bullying prevails in schools and is taking a violent turn as we witness the misconduct and disrespect of many learners toward their peers and teachers (Yoon et al., 2016). Studies argue that the intensity (number of hours) and the duration (days or months) of intervention programmes influences its effectiveness (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). Research (Mishna et al., 2005) has indicated that many teachers reported that they lack the information, guidance and training for responding to indirect bullying, and they sent the learners to the principal's office for acts of physical

bullying. From other studies, teachers suggested that anti-bullying policies should provide a clear structure and serve as guidelines for teachers and the School Management Team on how to deal with bullying behaviour, and that anti-bullying programmes should be intensive and long-lasting (Kruger, 2011).

Teachers are influential in the lives of their students and what is paramount is the manner in which they recognise and respond to bullying incidences and develop and implement intervention strategies to mitigate bullying (Mishna et al., 2005). The learners' decision to disclose bullying to the teacher is determined by their teachers' response. Studies by Craig and Pepler (1996, cited in Mishna et al., 2005) highlighted that students indicated that teachers do not consistently intervene to stop bullying while teachers expressed that their lack of intervention emanated from 'uncertainty' about how to respond to bullying problems without having witnessed them first hand.

Clear and functional anti-bullying policies and procedures are essential elements of a successful whole-school prevention and intervention approach that brings together experts from various disciplines, like educational psychologists and families within the school community, the Department of Basic Education, as well as national policies (Kruger, 2011). To eradicate and reduce bullying in schools, the participants suggested that parents take a proactive role in the effective implementation of anti-bullying intervention strategies. Learners and teachers must be well informed on the reasons and implications of bullying, including the legal implications. School policies on bullying must be collectively and collaboratively developed by all stakeholders (Department of Education (DoE), parents, teachers, learners, SMT, community), as Billy advocated,

> Charity begins at home. Learners need to be taught from home how to behave in societies. They must know that bullying is a criminal offence. We also need to teach learners of what they see on television is an act not real. We can take learners to the acting scenes. Policies regarding bullying should be in place and visible, and be applicable to all learners in school (Billy)

One female teacher (Anele) suggested a nurturing approach be adopted in response to bullying and not a reprimanding approach, as it is important to understand learners' circumstances and situations and to provide support and counselling to learners and finding the source of their problems that influence their behaviour.

> *I believe the best way to get through to children is taking a nurturing approach and not a reprimanding one. Provide support for those children that have been bullied as well as the children that are bullies. Every school should provide counselling to students and find out the reason why some resort to bullying other students. It will be easier to find a way to eradicate it. It is our duty to set good examples to students and enlighten them, not only about academics, but also about empathy and humanity* (Anele)

By the same token, teachers need to come to the classroom with the knowledge and skills that allow them to establish a culture that proactively minimises bullying and creates a positive environment for learning effectively, characterised by lower rates of bullying behaviour (Allen, 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2013; Kruger, 2011). According to Tony, "*since there are so many potential reasons to make a child make the conscious effort to put down a fellow person, it is hard to create a solution without spending time with the bully".* Essentially, teachers must do more than merely provide information about bullying to learners. Teachers must serve as good role models and have an empathetic and humane approach to the bully and the victim alike. Teachers must be approachable and understanding; and learners must be able to trust teachers to respond and react impartially, positively and effectively when incidences of bullying are reported to them, and to treat each incident on an individual basis,

> *I think it really has to be something that is done on a one-on-one basis, as each case can be unique. Obviously, the public speakers can help, but perhaps something more on a personal level, some students could help, like speaking to a slightly older peer who has suffered, hearing from both sides. I hope more bullies feel guilty and are strong enough people to make amends for their wrong doing (*Tony*).*

Research indicates that teachers often do not recognise or react to instances of bullying, and school-based anti-bullying interventions are useful only if teachers are committed to addressing bullying behaviour, and if they employ skilful classroom management anti-bullying strategies (Yoon et al., 2016). Considering school based anti-bullying interventions, the participants in this study argued for the development of concrete intervention strategies. These should be carried out through a collaborative and democratic approach by involving all stakeholders that cuts across race, class and gender, "*make decision-making collaborative and a democratic process, not a unilateral one…a balanced ratio of males and females…Tolerance and maturity is key (Tammy).* This suggests that the way in which males and females deliberate, respond and manage bullying in schools is influenced by their gendered roles.

It can be concluded that there continues to be a lack of existing policy and legislation and weak enforcement, and a lack of strong school leadership and management in the implementation of school intervention strategies and policies and codes of conduct to prevent bullying and school violence. There appears to be limited capacity, support and training for teachers, and scarce resources in schools to respond to bullying and violence in schools. There is also lack of awareness among education policy-makers and other stakeholders on the causes and implications of bullying. There is poor collaboration among all stakeholders in dealing with bullying in schools, a lack of safe and friendly monitoring and reporting mechanisms of bullying intervention programmes, and a lack of counselling and other support systems for victims and perpetrators. This is corroborated by literature (Kruger, 2011; UNESCO, 2017).

To address these challenges, monitoring committees should be established that clearly report and outline methods documenting bullying incidences and intervention processes and counselling for both the victim and the perpetrator in schools. Policies and procedures at national and at school level should be updated and reviewed to include cyberbullying. Consistent with Kruger (2011), policies should, not only focus on bullying behaviour between learners, but also on other dynamics in the school context, such as learner-on-teacher, teacher-on-learner, teacher-on-teacher, and principal-on-teacher bullying.

Notably, social identity plays a prominent role in understanding how the social features of teachers' lives shape who they are, their relationships, and how they interact with others; which influences how they think and act (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Within this study, teachers indicated how their life trajectories, relationships and interactions with others in their lives shaped their beliefs, fears, understanding, experiences of bullying; which eventually determined how they responded to bullying behaviours, or not.

There should be a collaboration of all stakeholders through discussion forums, and education and training is vital to addressing and managing bullying in schools (Kruger, 2011). What is more, the curriculum should be used to raise awareness among learners. This can be done through teaching, classroom activities and assessments, and by creating an inclusive, non-violent and safe positive climate for learning, that embraces changing the attitudes and mind-sets of learners (Kruger, 2011; UNESCO, 2017).

12. Conclusion

As teachers continue to be confronted with the lack of formal and pragmatic intervention

strategies in eliminating bullying in schools, a rethink of anti-bullying policy intervention strategies is called for at all levels. The school culture and attitudes of all stakeholders influence the manner in which the school and teachers respond to the issue of bullying and school violence. A collaborative and democratic process that includes all stakeholders, such as, teachers, learners, parents, the community, school management, the department, and other specialists, to deliberate and decide on anti-bullying policies should be put forward. In addressing bullying in schools, the anti-bullying interventions must be an enculturation of worldviews, values, beliefs, cultures and attitudes for all stakeholders.

Anti-bullying intervention strategies at school must be customised, concrete and practical. They should represent a shift away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to addressing all aspects of the school context, and not only learner-on-learner bullying instances.

Creating a co-operative learning space is key in addressing the realities teachers are confronted with that include challenging their own beliefs, experiences, perspectives, fears and anxieties related to bullying. It will be beneficial for further studies to be conducted to evaluate programmes, intervention strategies and support mechanisms to adequately educate, train and equip pre- and in- service teachers with the tools for effective management of bullying and violence in schools.

Bibliography

Allen, K. P. 2010. Classroom management, bullying, and teacher practices. *The Professional Educator*, 34(1), 1-15.

Bauer, N.S. Lozano, P. & Rivara, F.P. 2007. The effectiveness of the Olweus bullying prevention programme in public middle schools: A controlled trial. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 40(3), 266-274. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2006.10.005.

Bauman, S. & Hurley, C. 2005. Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs about Bullying: Two Exploratory Studies. *Journal of School Violence*, 4(3), 49-61. https://doi.org/10.1300/j202v04n03_05.

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. 1992. *Qualitative research: An introduction to theory and methods.* Needham Height: Allyn & Bacon.

Boulton, M.J., Hardcastle, K., Down, J., Fowles, J., & Simmonds, J. A. 2014. A comparison of preservice teachers' responses to cyber versus traditional bullying scenarios: Similarities and differences and implications for practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *65*(2), 145-155. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487113511496.

Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., O'Brennan, L. M., & Gulemetova, M. 2013. Teachers' and education support professionals' perspectives on bullying and prevention: Findings from a national education association study. *School psychology review*, *42*(3), 280.

Bradshaw, C.P. 2015. Translating research to practice in bullying intervention. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 322–332.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. 2018. *Research methods in education*. 8th Edition. New York: Routledge.

Cortazzi, M. 2014. *Narrative analysis*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cortes, K. I. & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. 2014. To tell or not to tell: What influences children's decisions to report bullying to their teachers? *School psychology quarterly*, *29*(3), 336. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000078.

Creswell, J.W. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, Los Angeles: Sage.

Farrington, D. P., & Ttofi, M. M. 2009. School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 6. Oslo: Campbell Co. https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2009.6.

Kruger, M.M. 2011. *Bullying in Secondary Schools: Teachers' Perspectives And Experiences*. Unpublished Master's dissertation: Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University.

Kvale, S. 1996. *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Menesini, E., & Salmivalli, C. 2017. Bullying in schools: the state of knowledge and effective

interventions. *Psychology, health & medicine*, 22(sup1), 240-253.

Mishna, F., Scarcello, I., Pepler, D., & Wiener, J. 2005. Teachers' understanding of bullying. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 28(4), 718-738. https://doi.org/10.2307/4126452

Mncube, V. & Harber, C. 2013. *The dynamics of violence in South African schools*. *Report. Pretoria: University of South Africa*.

Oldenburg, B., van Duijn, M., Sentse, M., Huitsing, G., van der Ploeg, R., Salmivalli, C., & Veenstra., R. 2015. Teacher characteristics and peer victimization in elementary schools: A classroom-level perspective. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(1), 33-44. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-013-9847-4.

Raven, S., & Jurkiewicz, M. A. 2014. Preservice Secondary Science Teachers' Experiences and Ideas about Bullying in Science Classrooms. *Science Educator*, *23*(1), 65.

Russell, S. T., Day, J. K., Ioverno, S. & Toomey, R. B. 2016. Are school policies focused on sexual orientation and gender identity associated with less bullying? Teachers' perspectives. *Journal of school psychology*, *54*, 29-38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2015.10.005.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.). T*he social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

UNESCO. 2017. School Violence and Bullying: Global Status Report. Paris, France UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization).

Waasdorp, T. E., Pas, E. T., O'Brennan, L. M. & Bradshaw, C. P. 2011. A multilevel perspective on the climate of bullying: Discrepancies among students, school staff, and parents. *Journal of School Violence*, 10(2), 115-132. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2010.539164.

Wolhuter, B. (2017). SA the world leader in school bullying – study. *The Mercury*, 13 December 2017.

Yoon, J., & Bauman, S. 2014. Teachers: A critical but overlooked component of bullying prevention and intervention. *Theory into Practice*, *53*(4), 308-314. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2014.947226.

Yoon, J., Sulkowski, M. L., & Bauman, S. A. 2016. Teachers' responses to bullying incidences: Effects of teacher characteristics and contexts. *Journal of school violence*, *15*(1), 91-113. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2014.963592.