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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEACHER'S AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PSYCHO-PHYSIOLOGICAL
CAUSES OF BULLYING AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN
WESTERN PROVINCE, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Bullying in schools is one of the features of crisis in the contemporary school system. It threatens pupil's security and quality of learning. Bullying as a disruptive behaviour has been described as a subset of aggressive behavior that involves an intention to hurt another person by a variety of means. It includes physical and verbal assault and social exclusion. The purpose of the study was to establish teachers' and students perceptions of psycho-physiological causes of bullying among public Secondary school students in Western Province, Kenya. The study was based on Albert Bandura's social learning theory and Kurt Lewin's field theory of perception. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study population was composed of 6,354 teachers and 65,969 form two students. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select students from 213 secondary schools. Purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers. Questionnaires and in-depth interview guide was used to collect data from the respondents. A pilot study was carried out to establish the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments. Qualitative data was transcribed and reported according to emerging themes while quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as the frequency counts, means and percentages. Inferential statistics such as the Kruskal- Wallis one- Way analysis of variance was applied. The perceived psycho-physiological causes of violent behavior were; being physically strong, having mental disturbances, and being older than the victims as third. The study recommends that: school induction programmes for newcomers be established; consistent disciplinary measures be enforced; and establishment and monitoring of anti-bullying policy in all schools be enhanced.

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INTRODUCTION

Disruptive behaviour in secondary schools is not a new problem. It has a long history and several

evidence point to a recent increase in its dimension. Clearly the nature of disruption changes with the norms of the school and what is expected of pupils (Lawrence *et al.*, 1985). Examples of disruptive

behaviours include: absenteeism, rioting and bullying. Bullying as a disruptive behavior has been described as a sub-set of aggressive behavior that involves an intention to hurt another person by a variety of means. It includes; physical and verbal assaults, and social exclusion (Santrock, 2003). Bullying infringes upon a child's right to human dignity, privacy, freedom and security. It also has a negative influence on both the victim's and the bully's physical, emotional, social and educational wellbeing. Every child has, however, the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation. Studies in the 1990s showed that bullying was far from harmless and actually posed serious lasting effects. Victims of bullying suffered significant negative social and emotional development. Among the short term effects, victims suffered from low self-esteem, poor grades, few friends, and school attendance problems (Eliot and Cornell, 2009). Such emotional problems as depression and anxiety could also develop and last a lifetime. In addition, those doing the bullying often progressed to more serious aggressive behavior when not confronted about their actions.

In the United States of America, Unnever and Cornell (2003) studied on the nature and extent of student attitudes toward bullying among 2,400 students in 6 middle schools. They investigated the consistency and prevalence of student attitudes across gender, race, socioeconomic status, and grade level. They also assessed whether students with positive attitudes toward peer aggression and students with higher level of anger were especially prone to support a normative structure that encourages bullying. Results of the study indicated that a culture of bullying was a pervasive phenomenon among middle school students. Similarly, Branson and Cornell (2009) examined the effectiveness of school wide anti. This study compared self-reports of bullying with peer nominations in a sample of 355 middle school students. Self-report demonstrated low to moderate correspondence with peer nominations for bullying others and for victimization. More than twice as many students were categorized as bullies using peer nomination as compared to self-report. In testing a model for understanding peer bullying as the product of aggressive attitudes and insecure

attachment, Eliot and Cornell (2009) used a sample of 110 sixth grade students to complete a self-report. Attitudes toward the use of aggressive behavior with peers were assessed. Bullying behavior was assessed using self and peer-report. Path analysis indicated that aggressive attitudes mediated a relationship between insecure attachment and bullying behavior. These findings have theoretical and applied implications for bullying prevention. Unlike, the study conducted by Eliot and Cornell which involved mainly whites, the current study incorporated both male and female African secondary school students. While comparing two methods of identifying bullies in a sample of 386 middle school students, using a peer nomination survey, Cole, Cornell and Sheras (2006) established that self-reported and peer-nominated bullies differed in their types of bullying behaviours, level of general self-concept, attitudes toward aggression, and disciplinary infractions. In general, this study raised concern about reliance on student self-report and supported the use of peer nomination as a means of identifying school bullies. A study on the peer popularity of middle school students involved in bullying was conducted by Thunfors and Cornell (2008). Bullying was assessed by peer report using the School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) and popularity was assessed through peer nominations from a student roster. Using a sample of 379 middle school students, bullies were among the most popular students in the school, receiving more peer nominations on average than students uninvolved in bullying or victims. Comparisons of popular and non-popular bullies found few differences, except that, popular bullies were less likely to be victimized whereas female bullies had a greater likelihood of being popular than their male counterparts.

In the United States of America, Unnever and Cornell (2003) conducted a survey on the influence of low self-control and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) on bullying and bully victimization in a sample of 1,315 middle school students using a survey. Students who reported taking medication for ADHD were at increased risk for bullying as well as victimization by bullies. The correlation between ADHD status and bullying could be explained by low self-control

to be the most important determinant of criminality. In contrast, the correlation between ADHD status and bullying victimization was independent of self-control. Subsequent analyses found that self-control influenced bullying victimization through interactions with student gender and measures of physical size and strength. These findings identified low self-control and ADHD as potential risk factors for bullying and victimization. In addition, Unnever and Cornell (2004) examined factors that influence a student's decision to report being bullied at school. Their survey covered 2,437 students in six middle schools. They identified 898 students who had been bullied, including 25% who had not told anyone that they were bullied and 40% who had not told an adult about their victimization. They investigated chronicity and type of bullying, school climate, familial, demographic, and attitudinal factors that influenced victim reporting to anyone versus no one, to adults versus no one, and to adults versus peers. Logistic regression analyses indicated that reporting increased with the chronicity of victimization. Reporting was generally more frequent among girls than boys, and among lower grade levels. Students who perceived the school climate to be tolerant of bullying, and students who described their parents as using coercive discipline were less likely to report being bullied.

In another study done by Williams and Cornell (2006) among 542 middle school students, they established factors that influence a student's willingness to seek help for a threat of violence. The survey also included; measures of types of bullying, attitudes toward aggressive behavior, and perceptions of teacher tolerance for bullying. Stepwise multiple regression analyses indicated that willingness to seek help is lower in higher grade levels and among males. Students who hold aggressive attitudes and perceive the school climate to be tolerant of bullying were less likely to report a willingness to seek help. In Japan, where the latter forms of bullying are most common, girls are more frequent bullies (Stassen –Berger, 2007) but in Korea they also tend to be more susceptible to suicidal ideations (Kim, Koh and Leventhal, 2005). Further, the dynamics of bullying are taking on new proportions and no longer take place

directly. For instance, the Portuguese culture or history may encourage bullies, but consider one detail of education policy: Portuguese school children must repeat 6th grade unless they pass a rigorous test. Consequently, at least 10% of all 6th graders have been held back two years or more, and these older, bigger children are almost twice as likely to be bullies as the class average (Kim et al., 2005). In addition, a higher proportion of them are immigrants and from low-income families. In Korea, a key issue has been the prevalence of suicides amongst students who have suffered from excessive pressure to perform well academically, as well as those who display suicidal tendencies as a result of bullying and violence within their educational institutions. For example, in a study of bullying in 2 middle schools amongst seventh and eighth grade students in Korea, Kim et al. (2005) found that 40% of respondents were involved in bullying (14% as a victim, 17% as a bully, and 9% as a victim-perpetrator), and that significantly more males experienced bullying. All three groups reported higher levels of anxiety than those not involved in bullying, and were more at risk of self injurious behaviour, with females and victim-perpetrators most likely to have suicidal tendencies. The authors note that their findings support those found in other studies linking bullying and suicidal ideation in Finland, the Netherlands, Australia and United States of America.

In Benin City, Edo state of Nigeria, Egbochuku (2007) studied neglected demographic variable in addition to establishing the incidence of bullying in Government and Private/Mission schools. It was found that 78% of the children have been victims of bullying on at least one occasion and 71% have lashed out at others at least once. However, more boys than girls were found to be both bullies and victims. Boys reported being kicked or hit more often than girls. The result showed that it was more common for bullying to take place in the classroom in government schools than in private schools. The result demonstrated significant differences between the schools investigated. However, significantly more private schools reported kicking and hitting taking place in the playground than in the government schools, whereas bullying was more likely to take place in the classroom in government

schools. Furthermore, Thunfors and Cornell (2008) claimed that bullying occurs in a cyclical pattern in which humiliation, aggression and violence are spread. They noted that a bully has always to be a victim first, and the bullying behavior is learned as a way of hiding or disguising this. In addition, they observed that bullying is the projection of unwanted parts of self on to another in order for that other to carry away the shame, fear, humiliation and guilt from the originator. This of course brings only temporary relief since the unresolved internal feelings still exist in the bully. Consequently, bullying will continue and often intensify until it is challenged and resolved. Thunfors and Cornell suggested that this cycle needs to be broken and painful feelings confronted, otherwise the bullying can appear to go when suppressed but will reappear in another and usually more distorted form. Ohsako (2007) examined bullying by administering a survey to students in grades 7 through 12 from schools in three Midwestern states. Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that victims of bullying actually brought on the bullying. Less than half believed bullying was done in an attempt to teach a lesson. Students also perceived bullies to be more popular than victims. Interestingly, Ohsako found students believed most teasing they witnessed had been done with no malicious intent, but that victims perceived the teasing as bullying.

In their national study of 15,686 students in grades 6 through 10, Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Raun, Simons-Morton and Scheid (2001) reported that 30% of students indicated more than occasional involvement as a bully and/or victim of bullying. Males were more frequently involved as both bullies and victims, as were students in grades six through eight. In addition, Hispanic students reported slightly higher involvement as bullies than White or African American students, while African American students reported being bullied less frequently than both White and Hispanic students. Finally, more students from rural areas reported bullying than did individuals from suburban and urban areas. As part of a larger study, Casey-Cannon, Hayward and Gowen (2001) conducted a qualitative investigation of the experiences and perceptions of relational bullying among middle school girls from Northern California. The majority

of the participants reported experiencing either overt or relational bullying. Participants also reported emotional reactions including; sadness, anger, and rejection. Behavioral responses included; ignoring the bully, approaching an adult for help, being assertive and bullying back. Other consequences included; losing friends, negative thinking, and changing schools. In the case of the present study, both boys and girls participated in establishing other forms of violent behaviour experienced among students. In their study, Seals and Young (2003) gathered data addressing the prevalence of bullying among 454 students in grades seven and eight representing urban, suburban, and rural school districts, and most were African American and White. Twenty-four percent of students reported either bullying or being bullied. Males were involved in bullying significantly more often than females, and significantly more seventh grade students than eighth grade students were involved as well. Nearly 14% of students reported being called mean names, and others reported being hit or kicked, being teased, or being threatened. Most incidents of bullying occurred at lunch or recess, but many occurred on the way to or from school as well as in class.

After a survey of 15,686 students in grades 6-10 in public and private schools within the United States of America, Nansel *et al.* (2001) reported that 29.9 % of the sample had been involved in bullying, 13% of the students acknowledged they were bullies, 10.6% reported being victims, and 6.3 % admitted being both a bully and a victim. While bullying was commonly associated with a bully and a victim, Gross (2002) introduced the idea of a bystander. The bystander appeared to be a key element in shaping school culture. He concluded that bystanders joined in the bullying, observed in a passive manner, or tried to stop the bullying. In Malaysia, Yahaya and Sidek (2005) studied teachers' and students' perception towards bullying in 8 secondary schools in Batu Pahat District in Malaysia. Besides that the study attempted to identify students' perception about safety issues at secondary schools. In this study, 80 teachers and 480 students were randomly selected. All information was gathered through Peer Relations Questionnaire - PRQ and The Nature and

Prevalence of Bullying in Schools Questionnaire. The alpha cronbach for these two instruments were 0.7010 and 0.8097. Results showed that there was a different perception about the prevalence of bullying among secondary school students and teachers. Students reported that the overall rate of the bullying prevalence were at moderate level whereas, teachers reported the bullying prevalence overall rate were at low level. There was no significant difference on the prevalence of bullying between male and female students but there was a significant difference on the prevalence between verbal bullying and physical bullying. Verbal bullying was seen more frequent as compared to physical bullying. In the current study, it was established that there was no significant difference of the perceptions of the factors contributing to violent behaviour between male and female students. In South Africa, Nita (2005) studied on aspects of bullying in schools situated in the Free State province. Using the Delaware Bullying questionnaire, it was established that bullying was to a lesser or greater extent a problem at most schools. Only 16.22% of the respondents indicated that bullying was not a problem at their respective schools. Although the majority of respondents were very rarely, if ever, victims of and/or aggressors in bullying situations, many of them witnessed incidents of verbal bullying in particular. It was also evident that victims of bullying rather confided in their friends than adults when they had been victimised. The was attributed to the fact that, 31.97% of the respondents indicated that fellow learners helped them during bullying situations and on the other hand, only 19.73% were helped by their teachers.

In the Kenyan secondary schools, bullying is one of the students' practices that have particularly scared form one students and other newcomers. Up to the late 1970s, it was a sort of compulsory disciplinary drill in most schools (Kuchio & Njagi, 2008). But it became so violent that some students even suffered permanent injuries and others died. Because of this, the then Ministry of Higher Education realized the dangers involved and banned it as a criminal offence for a student to bully another. Apparently, after this ban only physical beating reduced. A new psychological form of torture which encompasses humiliation

through name-calling, taunting, theft, teasing, threats and intimidation emerged. In addition, Ndeti, Ongecha, Khasakhala, Syanda, Mutiso, Othieno, Odhiambo and Kokonya (2007) conducted a study on the prevalence and frequency of bullying in Nairobi public secondary schools. A self-report sociodemographic questionnaire and the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire of 1991 were administered to 1, 012 students from a stratified sample of public secondary schools in Nairobi. Students reported various types of bullying, both direct and indirect, with significant variations found for sex, age, class and year of study, whether in day or boarding school, and the place they were bullied. Being bullied was significantly associated with becoming a bully in turn. Generally, researches on the causes of bullying have been conducted in Europe and America. In Kenya, no academic research to the researcher's knowledge has been undertaken on psycho-physiological causes of bullying among students even though this practice is prevalent and devastating to the learners. Since causes of bullying could be used as the basis on which solutions could be sought. Hence it was quite pertinent for the research to investigate the teachers and students perceptions.

METERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Western Province that has 21 Districts .The study was based on the social learning theory and field theory of perception. Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1977) and Kurt Lewin's field theory of perception (1935) formed the basis of the study. The social learning theory emphasizes that learning of any behavior such as violence by students is due to reinforcement, imitation and identification. Kurt Lewin's field theory of perception (1935) underscores that every object exists in a field of forces that more define it and organize, it to a degree of substance and stability. Behaviour of any person at a given moment is the net effect forces operating simultaneously in his or her psychological field. The attitudes, feelings and needs of any individual constitute internal forces and help determine his response. The theory was seen to be relevant to thus study because students and teachers operate within a system where they

are constantly receiving interpreting and acting on information at hand. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design covering a population of 6,354 Secondary School teachers and 65,969 form two Secondary School students from 638 public secondary schools. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select public secondary schools. In addition, a formula recommended by Fisher, Laing and Stoeckel (1983) was used to calculate the number of selected form two students on the basis of their gender and type of secondary school. Purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers from the sampled public secondary schools for the study. Therefore, 165 teachers and 370 form two students from 213 public secondary schools participated in the study. In the current study both questionnaires and in-depth interview guides were used to collect data. A pilot study was carried out in four schools of girls and boys to establish reliability of the research instruments. To establish face validity, the research instruments were given to three experts from the Department of Educational Psychology to verify their validity. Qualitative data was transcribed, put into various categories and thereafter reported according to the emergent themes. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as percentages mean and frequency counts were used while inferential statistics such as Kruskal- Wallis one- Way analysis of variance also used. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 version for windows.

RESULTS

The study established the psycho-physiological causes of bullying among public secondary school students in western province as perceived by teachers and students. Table 1 show that boys (Ba) perceived being physically strong as the most serious psycho-physiological cause of bullying, followed by having mental disturbances and being older than the victims as third. On the other hand, girls (Ga) ranked being physically strong first, being older than the victims second and having mental disturbances third. Both groups of respondents rated being talkative as the least

serious cause. With reference to Table 2, teachers (TC) ranked being physically strong as the most serious psycho-physiological cause of bullying, followed by being older than the victims and having overconfidence was third. On the other hand, students perceived being physically strong as the most serious cause. It was followed by having mental disturbances and the third was being older than the victims. Both groups of respondents ranked being talkative as the least serious cause. Looking at Table 3, boys (Ba) and girls (Ga) perceived being physically weak as the most serious cause, followed by lack of self-confidence, being younger than the bullies was third and having communication problems was last. Table 4 shows that students (S) and teachers (Tc) perceived being physically weak as first psycho-physiological cause of bullying, followed by lack of self-confidence and being younger than the bullies was third. Both groups of respondents also ranked having communication problems as the least serious causes.

DISCUSSION

The main psycho-physiological causes of being a bully were as follows: being physically strong, followed by being older than the victims, having overconfidence, having mental disturbances, being older than the victims, and being talkative. These findings concur with those of Nita (2005) who established that victims of violence had low esteem, were subjectively maladjusted and experienced their peer relations negatively. Similarly, Seals and Young (2003) gathered data addressing the prevalence of bullying among 454 students in grades seven and eight representing urban, suburban, and rural school districts, and most were African American and White. Twenty-four percent of students reported either bullying or being bullied. Males were involved in bullying significantly more often than females, and significantly more seventh grade students than eighth grade students were involved as well. Nearly 14% of students reported being called mean names, and others reported being hit or kicked, being teased, or being threatened. Most incidents of bullying occurred at lunch or recess, but many occurred on the way to or from school as well as in

Table 1. Perceptions of psycho-physiological causes of becoming a bully between Boys (Ba) and Girls (Ga).

Causes of becoming a bully	Mean Rank (Ba)	R1	R2	Mean Rank (Ga)	R2	R3
Being physically strong.	2.290	1	1	2.390	2	1
Being older than the victims.	3.035	3	4	3.295	5	2
Having an average appearance.	4.705	5	10	4.415	9	5
Having mental disturbances.	2.855	2	3	3.395	6	3
Having overconfidence.	4.095	4	8	3.510	7	4
Being talkative.	5.305	6	12	4.750	11	6
Total		21	38		40	21

H = 0.026; $\alpha = 0.05$ (3.841); df= 1.

Table 2. Perceptions of psycho-physiological causes of becoming a bully between Teachers (Tc) and Students (S).

Causes of becoming a bully	Mean Rank (Tc)	R1	R2	Mean Rank (S)	R2	R3
Being physically weak.	2.073	1	1	2.340	2	1
Being older than victims.	2.624	2	3	3.165	5	3
Having an average appearance.	4.442	5	9	4.560	10	5
Having mental disturbances.	3.673	4	7	3.125	4	2
Having overconfidence.	3.612	3	6	3.803	8	4
Being talkative.	4.606	6	11	5028	12	6
Total		21	37		41	21

H = 0.103; $\alpha = 0.05$ (3.841);df= 1.

Table 3. Perceptions of psycho-physiological causes of being a victim of bullying between Boys (Ba) and Girls (Ga).

Causes of becoming a victim	Mean Rank (Ba)	R1	R2	Mean Rank (Ga)	R2	R3
Being physically weak.	2.505	1	1	3.105	3	1
Lack of self confidence.	2.765	2	2	3.120	4	2
Being younger than the bullies.	3.210	3	6	3.180	5	3
Having a physical deviation (s).	4.135	5	10	3.775	8	5
Experiencing anxiety problems.	4.045	4	9	3.750	7	4
Having communication problems.	4.290	6	12	4.185	11	6
Total		21	40		38	21

H = 0.026; $\alpha = 0.05$ (3.841);df= 1.

Table 4. Perceptions of psycho-physiological causes of being a victim of bullying between Teachers (Tc) and Students (S)

Causes of being a victim	Mean Rank (Tc)	R1	R2	Mean Rank (S)	R2	R3
Being physically weak.	2.813	1	2	2.805	1	1
Lack of self confidence.	2.928	2	3	2.943	4	2
Being younger than the bullies.	3.175	3	5	3.195	6	3
Having a physical deviation(s).	3.973	5	10	3.955	9	5
Having anxiety problems.	3.880	4	7	3.898	8	4
Having communication problems.	4.258	6	12	4.238	11	6
Total		21	39		40	21

H= 0.000; $\alpha = 0.05$ (3.841);df= 1.

class. In addition, Perry, Kusel and Perry (1988) studied student rejection by peers. They found out that victimization was not significantly related to age, sex and the victims' level of aggression, but there was significant positive correlation between victimization and peer rejection. This is dissimilar to the findings of the current study that established other psycho-physiological causes of bullying factors in secondary schools as perceived by students. The main psycho-physiological causes of being a victim of bullying were: being physically weak; followed by lack of self-confidence; being younger than the bullies; and having communication problems. The findings in the current study are in agreement with those of Unnever and Cornell (2003) who conducted a survey on the influence of low self-control and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) on bullying and bully victimization in a sample of 1,315 middle school students. Students who reported taking medication for ADHD were at increased risk for bullying as well as victimization by bullies. The correlation between ADHD status and bullying could be explained by low self-control to be the most important determinant of criminality. In contrast, the correlation between ADHD status and bullying victimization was independent of self-control. Subsequent analyses found that self-control influenced bullying victimization through interactions with student gender and measures of physical size and strength. These findings identified low self-control and ADHD as potential risk factors for bullying and victimization

Conclusion

In relation to the findings of the study, it is concluded that bullying is still a challenge in secondary schools. Respondents were able to identify the psycho-physiological causes of bullying in secondary schools. The perceived psycho-physiological causes of being a bully were; being physically strong, followed by being older than the victims, having overconfidence, having mental disturbances, being older than the victims, and being talkative. The main psycho-physiological causes of being a victim of bullying were: being physically weak; followed by lack of self-confidence; being younger than the bullies;

and having communication problems. Since bullying is probably the greatest source of distress among secondary school students today, a concerted effort from teachers and parents is highly needed to control or stamp it out of schools. Victims of bullying ought to be counseled. If they are hurt, then they should be referred to medical doctors for treatment. Importantly, they should be referred to psychiatrists, school counselors, if any mental and psychological disorders were detected. In addition, guidance and counseling be enhanced in schools in order to reduce cases of bullying.

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