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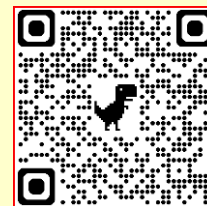
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CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CYBER BULLYING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF ESWATINI.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored on the causes and effects of bullying amongst learners in selected primary schools in the Kingdom of Eswatini as it has become an area of concern. It has become a nationwide worry because of school drop outs, academic decline, some getting hurt and sustains injuries in schools. Bullying submit learners to physical, social and psychological distresses. The paper looks at the various factors that contribute to cyber bullying amongst primary school learners. Bullying is rife in schools. This study emerged as a result of related literature, observation of circumstances on the ground, personal experience and general discussion with school learners from schools in the country. The study involved different stakeholders in the education system that directly or indirectly affected by this issue. Two private schools and one public school in the Hhoho Region of Eswatini were used in the study. Data generation tools such as in-depth face to face interviews and document analysis were used in this study. A sample of 15 learners, 6 teachers, 6 parents and 3 principals was used to conduct the study, making a total sample of 30 participants. A comprehensive purposive sampling method was used to select principals while learners and parents were selected randomly and convenient respectively, and lastly teachers were purposively selected, where selection of individual was to yield a great understanding of the phenomenon interest. The conclusion was that learners bullying was still dominant in mixed gender and single sex schools. Learners' background and social media being the main contributing factors to cyber bullying among other reasons. These however, affect the behavior, self-esteem, mental, emotional, psychological, social life and academic performance of either the bully or the bullied one. It is further found that the existing policies in schools are not comprehensive enough to deal with cyber bullying. Recommendations made were, The Ministry of Education and Training need to encourage schools to have anti-bullying policy that seeks to protect all children in the schools. Government through the Ministry of Education and Training should orient parents and guardians on the rights of children, particularly the importance of respect for one another and self-respect. Parents are urged to be more involved in the life of their children and check some abnormalities in the behavior of their children especially the way they use their electronic gadgets.

KEY WORDS: bullying; cyber bullying; primary school; and academic performance.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Bullying in schools has emerged as a significant issue that negatively impacts students' psychological well-being, academic achievements, and overall school experience. Gender Issues in Education and Children's Rights" (2000) emphasizes that children are inherently innocent and vulnerable, and therefore, they require special protection and care. It highlights the importance of creating safe and supportive educational environments where children can thrive without fear of violence or discrimination. Schools in Eswatini are regarded as places where children learn, have joy, peace, play, grow mold themselves into someone they want to be. However, they have turned out to become battle fields where their rights are being violated. Teachers assume that learners are often teasing, name calling and even pinching others without a valid and solid reason. All these can be transferred further to online since learners can afford to have electronic gadgets hence cyber bullying. It is therefore, the responsibility of educators, policymakers, and society at large to safeguard children's rights and ensure their well-being.

Cyberbullying has rapidly become a pervasive issue among primary school children, driven by the increasing accessibility and use of digital technologies. Cyberbullying is defined as a repeated activity that takes place for a prolonged period of time and targets individuals, usually in the context of a specific community such as a school or a peer group (Smith 2008). Thus, cyberbullying is an aggressive intentional act carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself. As the use of digital devices and internet access continues to grow, so does the risk of children being exposed to harmful online behaviors. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, which are often confined to physical spaces like schools, cyberbullying can occur at any time and place, following the victim into the sanctity of their homes. This form of bullying involves the use of electronic communication to intimidate, harass, or humiliate individuals, and can have severe emotional and psychological consequences. Understanding the underlying causes of cyberbullying is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. This research aims to investigate the various factors that contribute to cyberbullying among primary school learners.

Research has identified multiple factors that contribute to the occurrence of cyberbullying among young learners. Individual characteristics, such as a desire for power and control, aggressive tendencies, fights at school, parents' attitude/ involvement, social media and low self-esteem, are significant contributors. Additionally, peer dynamics, including social hierarchies and the pressure to conform, play a crucial role in the manifestation of cyberbullying behaviors. Family environment also influences the likelihood of a child becoming involved in cyberbullying. Factors such as lack of parental supervision, exposure to violence at home, and inconsistent discipline can increase the risk of both perpetration and victimization. According to Anti-Bullying Alliance (2015), children live with what they learn. Thus they learn behaviors and tendencies that take place in the homes and are likely to become bullies at school. A high number of learners with bullying tendencies are more likely to have family or parental problems. Janice (2010), found that for both bullied and victims, the parenting they experienced was linked to their peer interaction. Learners who have positive relationships with their parents are less

likely to bully. This makes parents attitude a major cause of cyber bullying.

Furthermore, societal influences, including media portrayals of aggression and cultural norms that condone bullying, further exacerbate the problem. Understanding the causes of cyberbullying is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Addressing the root causes requires a manifold approach involving educators, parents, policymakers, and the broader community. By creating a supportive and vigilant environment, children can be protected from the harmful effects of cyberbullying and promote safer online spaces for them to learn and grow.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Cyberbullying among primary school learners is a growing concern that poses significant threats to their mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. Despite the increasing awareness of its harmful effects, the underlying causes of cyberbullying remain inadequately understood. Factors such as the anonymity of the internet, peer pressure, family dynamics, and broader societal influences contribute to this complex issue. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research specifically focused on primary school learners, who are particularly vulnerable to online harassment. This study aims to identify and analyze the various contributing factors to cyberbullying among young learners, providing insights that are essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies to ensure a safe and supportive digital environment for all students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes and effects of cyberbullying among primary school learners.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To investigate the causes of cyber bullying among primary school learners.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the causes of cyber bullying among primary school learners?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study used the qualitative methodology/approach in which a variety of qualitative multi-methods were used to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. The qualitative methodology/approach was anchored on a philosophy of phenomenology and Interactionism paradigm to guide the methodology. Data generation was done using two instruments that are in-depth-face-to-face interviews with victims, bullies, and bystanders to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives and participant observation. For data analysis, the thematic analysis was used. Sampling technique used was purposive sampling. The targeted participants were learners, teachers and school administrators who had the required knowledge and relevant experience about cyber bullying amongst primary school learners. Qualitative methodology was refereed to be particularly effective for exploring the causes of cyber bullying among learners in primary schools, as it allows for a thorough understanding of the causes of cyberbullying and develop effective strategies to prevent and address it. Ethical and legal considerations that were observed in this study included anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to investigate the causes and

effects of cyber bullying amongst primary school learners. In the efforts to establish that, the researchers sought informed consent forms from those who participated in the study on the following aspects: whether parents' attitude encourages cyber bullying; whether jealousy of each other's material things leads to cyber bullying; whether fights at school plays a part to cyber bullying among primary learners or social media platforms helps to prevent cyber bullying. In order to achieve the objective, the researchers first asked whether School Principals and teachers have educated their learners on cyber bullying and its effects. Below are the findings. The outcome of the study indicated that cyber bullying is common in schools. The major cause of cyber bullying is the social media platforms especially Facebook and Tik Tok. The analysis shows media has a great influence when it comes to cyber bullying among youngsters. 90% of the respondents testified that media portrayals of aggression and violent behavior can normalize bullying, making it appear more acceptable to learners. Some respondents had sentiments that their parents at times post some old photos/pictures of them that they are not happy with without their consent. For example, old baby photos then they are exposed to their friends on the platforms especially on Facebook. When their friend get access to the photos, they give negative and embarrassing comments from the peers hence cyber bullying. Some friends even post ugly pictures of the mates them after a small fight just to spite them. 10% believed that social media platforms can help prevent cyberbullying. Facebook can be a double-edged sword; while it connects us with friends and family, it also provides a shield for bullies to attack from the shadows (Allman 2009). Thus it can also be a place for positivity, for helping one another, for creating communities, and for speaking up against injustices like cyberbullying. According to respondents, 80% agreed to have encountered incidents where they had to deal with cyberbullying while 20% disagreed. The respondents have handled cyberbullying reports and followed the procedures written from the school disciplinary policy. With regards to learners, they have been bullied and have also bullied regardless of gender. Learners pointed out that both boys and girls are involved in cyber bullying. One maybe be tempted to concur with that statement in the sense that most female learners are found crying most of the time. Jakubiak (2009), agreed that the internet has become a breeding ground for negativity.

The study showed that the majority (75%) of the research participants agreed that parents' attitude towards their own children at home contribute towards bully behaviour. The attitude pushes the children to get involved in cyber bullying in so many ways. This include such parents who neglect their children by not paying attention to their needs because they are always busy at their work. As a result, learners find attention on social media where they can transfer their anger to someone in order to feel better. Some parents compare their children to others, hence learners get hurt and get angry and feel reduced. Their self- esteem is lowered as a result they engage into cyber bullying attacking those children admired by their parents to boost their esteem. Hafer (2010) posited that victims or the bullied learners tend to be physically weak, introverted with low self-esteem. Thus bullies do not have the ability to regulate their emotions and when provoked accidentally they may lose their temper and hurt someone. 25% were not in agreement, they believed that they are not neglecting the children because they are the same parents to work so that the can pay school fees for their children.

Anonymity and lack of consequences also stood out as a contributing factor to cyber bullying. The statistics showed that

85% respondents strongly agree as they found this very true and interesting, 15% said they were not in agreement but do acknowledge the influence of anonymity and lack of consequences to cyber bullying. According to Valerie (2012), anonymity on social media platforms can give people a sense of power and freedom, which, when used wrongly, can lead to harmful behavior like cyberbullying. In support, the researcher confirmed that to be true because the internet provides a level of anonymity that emboldens bullies, making them feel they won't be caught or punished. Most learners nowadays have electronic gadgets that enables to go online for different reasons at any given time as long as there is internet available. Sitting behind a computer gives people a sense of anonymity, but everyone needs to realize that words-even the ones they write online- have a strong power to hurt people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There were four major recommendations from the study. Below are the recommendations:

- The Government through the Ministry of Education and Training should develop and enforce clear anti- bullying policies with consistent consequences. Ensure that all educators are trained to recognize and intervene in bullying situations.
- Schools should adopt holistic programs that address bullying at multiple levels individual, peer, family, and societal.
- Government through the Ministry of Education and Training should orient parents and guardians on the rights of children, particularly the importance of respect for one another and self-respect.
- Encourage parents to be more involved in their children's lives by offering workshops on effective parenting strategies and the impact of family dynamics on bullying behaviour.
- Schools should provide Support Services: Offer Guidance and Counselling services for both victims and perpetrators of bullying to address underlying issues and promote emotional well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study established that the anonymity of the internet is the major factor among others that plays a crucial role in cyberbullying hence shaping a child's behavior in a bad way. The internet provides a level of anonymity that emboldens bullies, making them feel they won't be caught or punished and this has become a major cause of bullying amongst learners in schools. Family environments, social media addiction, domestic violence, and inconsistent discipline are some of the familial factors that contribute to cyber bullying behaviour. Children who experience a chaotic home environment may be more likely to externalize their frustrations through aggressive actions toward peers. It was also concluded that societal factors, including media portrayals of aggression, can also contribute to the normalization of bullying behavior amongst learners in schools.

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