

## The nature and extent of bullying in Free State secondary schools

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Bullying infringes upon the 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. However, every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation. Against this background a research project was conducted to investigate the experiences of a group of Free State learners who were victims, aggressors as well as spectators and listeners of bullying. The research instrument was the Delaware Bullying questionnaire. This article reports on the investigation against the background of a literature review. It was clear from the investigation that bullying is a problem at most schools in the Free State, to a lesser or greater extent. Only 16.22% of the learner respondents indicated that bullying was not a problem at their respective schools. Although the majority of respondents had been very rarely, if ever, victims of and/or aggressors in bullying situations, many of them had witnessed incidents of verbal bullying, in particular. It was also evident that boys more often than girls are/were the victims and/or aggressors in bullying situations.

### Problem statement

The Charter of Human Rights (RSA, 1996: Act 108 of 1996, section 28[1][d]) clearly states that every child has the right "to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation". Section 10 of the Charter also states that "everybody has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected". In addition to this, the Department of Education (1998:6) states that every learner has the right to "non-violence and the freedom and security of a person".

Bullying infringes upon the child's right to human dignity, privacy, freedom, and security. Bullying has an influence on the victim's physical, emotional, social, and educational wellbeing. Physical consequences include: headaches, bed-wetting, loss of appetite, poor posture and stomach problems. Bullying can cause the following emotional problems in victims: depression, suicide tendencies and actual suicides, tension, fear, as well as feelings associated with posttraumatic stress — confusion, anxiety, anger and grief. Social consequences of bullying include amongst others isolation and loneliness, victims have problems in mixing with other children and adults, and are/become very shy. Educational consequences include the following: absenteeism, withdrawal from social activities at school, victims are afraid to ask questions in class, loss of concentration, hide the fact that they do not understand the work for fear that they will be ridiculed, and underachievement which underestimates their intelligence (Bully B'ware, 2004:4; Gordon, 2003:1-2; Vorster, 2002:29-32; Zeelie, 2002:281; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001:1; Nkosi, 2001:80; Treml, 2001:112; Banks, 1997:3; Elliot, 1997:4; Elliot, 1991:10).

Bullying has various short- and long-term consequences for the bully. Although bullies are often popular in their peer group, they are seldom able to conclude real friendships and rarely do well at school. Educators do not like them. Bullying is sometimes the first stepping stone to juvenile crime and criminal activities. The bully abuses alcohol and drugs more readily than other adolescents. Some of them come to school armed. Bullies are often anti-social adults; some of them abuse their children, marriage or life partners (Bully B'ware, 2004:6; Vorster, 2002:31; Zeelie, 2002:281; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001:1; Nkosi, 2001:80; De Haan, 1997:5). Roland (2002:62-65) found that not only victims but also bullies have suicide thoughts and symptoms of depression more regularly than learners who are not involved in bullying. Zeelie (2002:280) writes that bullying is a "loss experience", a "loss of safety, loss of self-esteem (they bully you, then you bully yourself). Bullies experience a loss of belonging and lose control over their own life."

Against this background, the aim in this study was to investigate the nature and extent of bullying at schools in the Free State.

### Literature study

#### What is bullying?

Research on bullying in schools was conducted for the first time more than thirty years ago by Dan Olweus in Norway (Heinemann 1973 in

Roland, 2002:55; Olweus, 1994:1). From the literature review (Treml, 2001:107; Garcia, 1998:2; Limper, 1998:1; Olweus, 1994:14), it appears that bullying is a problem not only in Nordic countries, but also, amongst others, in the USA, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan. Although research on bullying since the 1980s has led to various international publications, little has, according to Nesor, Ovens, Van der Merwe, Morodi and Ladikos (2003:1), been published on the subject in South Africa. From the literature research (Booyens, 2003:353; Bezuidenhout, 2002:28-35; Vorster, 2002:84-122; Nkosi, 2001:52-77 amongst others), it is evident that interest in the subject has increased in South Africa since the start of the 21st century.

Olweus (1994:9), the leading figure in research on bullying, defines bullying as follows: "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative action on the part of one or more students". Olweus (1994:9) explains the term "negative action" as follows: "a negative action is when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another". The negative action can be verbal, e.g. threatening, teasing, ridiculing or swearing at someone. It can also be physical contact when someone is, for example, beaten, knocked, kicked or pinched. It is also possible to bully someone without using words or physical contact — pulling faces, making ugly signs or intentionally ignoring someone (Olweus, 1994:9). Zeelie (2002:280) defines bullying as "a deliberate, conscious desire to hurt, threaten and frighten someone". Roland (2002:56) defines bullying as a "long-standing, negative behaviour conducted by an individual or a group and [it is] directed towards a somehow helpless victim". A Dutch psychologist, Van der Meer (quoted by Limper, 1998:1), gives the following definition: "Bullying is a systematic, psychological, physical or sexual act of violence by a pupil or a group of pupils with respect to one or more classmates, who are not (any longer) in a position to defend themselves."

From the above definitions it is clear that bullying always includes the following three elements: the intentional use of aggression, an unbalanced relationship of power between the bully and the victim, and the causing of physical pain and/or emotional misery.

Although there are considerable similarities between bullying and other forms of aggression, bullying, according to De Haan (1997:1), has the following characteristics: the bully acts purposefully rather than accidentally. The aim of bullying is to get control over another person by means of physical or verbal aggression. Bullies attack without reason, except that they see victims as easy targets. Bullies are usually more popular among their peer group than children who are merely aggressive.

#### Different types of bullying and bullies

Olweus (1994:10) distinguishes between direct and indirect bullying. Direct bullying includes physical aggression, offensive words and degrading looks (faces) and signs. Indirect bullying includes ignoring,

isolation, spreading rumours and refusing someone's requests. A distinction can also be drawn between physical, blackmailing, emotional, sexual and verbal bullying. Physical bullying includes the demand that someone hand over his/her money and/or possessions, the demand to copy someone's homework, and threatening someone with violence if the victim or onlookers report the bullying. Emotional bullying includes spreading rumours, excluding someone intentionally from activities, influencing someone not to like a person, making a fool of someone, and trying to dominate someone. Sexual bullying includes exhibitionism, sexual harassment, and abuse. Verbal bullying includes ridicule, teasing, degrading remarks on someone's appearance, verbal threats, threatening or offensive signs, insulting someone's family, gender, race and religion, calling someone names, and writing degrading letters to someone (Booyens, 2003:37; Zeelie, 2002:280-281; Elliot, 1997:4). The electronic era has created new possibilities for verbal bullying—victims are victimized by e-mail and cellular phone messages (Beckerman & Nocero, 2002:38). E-mail and cellular phone messages are often more vicious than face-to-face bullying (Stierhler, 2002:7). On-line anonymous conversations are, according to Beckerman & Nocero (2002:40), the ideal forum from which smearing campaigns can be conducted. The victim has no defence, and cannot even solicit the help of the legal system, due to the anonymity of internet communication (Beckerman & Nocero, 2002:41). The distinction between the various types of bullying is not rigid; to spread rumours about someone is for instance both verbal and emotional bullying.

Pearce (1991:73) distinguishes between three types of bullies. Most bullies can, according to Pearce (1991:73), be classified as aggressive bullies. They direct their aggression towards educators, parents, other adults, and children, amongst others. They do not consider their aggression wrong. The following typifies the aggressive bully: aggressive towards any person, irrespective of the person's position of authority; poor impulse control; violence is regarded as a positive characteristic; the desire to dominate; physically and emotionally strong; not sensitive to other people's feelings; and a good self-image. According to Pearce (1991:74), the anxious bully shares various characteristics with the victims of bullies. The anxious bully is anxious and aggressive; has a poor self-image; is uncertain and has few friends; directs his/her bullying to victims who do not mean much to him/her (e.g. someone who has more power than him/her); elicits attacks by other bullies and is emotionally unstable. In most incidents of bullying, more people than merely the bully and the victim are involved. Bullies surround themselves with adherents. These adherents join the group in order to protect themselves and/or to obtain status. These adherents become passively involved in bullying. Such passive bullies have the following characteristics: are easily dominated; are passive; are not really aggressive; show empathy with others; and feel guilty after bullying incidents (Pearce, 1991:74). Treml (2001:111) found that there is an important distinction between bullies in Japan and the rest of the world: Japanese bullies always act in a group. However, the group members are not, as in the above explanation of the passive bully, passive spectators, but they take an active part in the bullying. This results in bullying being especially brutal.

#### Extent of bullying

Learners often hear their parents and educators utter the following remarks: "Being bullied is just part of growing up. You need to stand up for yourself. Boys will be boys. You need to toughen up. Don't be so sensitive. They tease you because they like you. They're just jealous" (Will & Neufeld, 2002:51). These remarks, implying that bullying is part of the developmental process, are uttered by adults whom learners love and respect. This results in victims not being willing to tell their parents and educators that they are being bullied. It is also clear that victims fear revenge from the bully or even classmates, who will regard the disclosure as telling tales. If the bullying is severe or continues over a long period of time, the victims fear that it will upset their parents, especially when they think that their parents cannot change the situation. Children are sometimes not willing to admit that

they have given expensive items or money to bullies. Parents set not only academic expectations but also social expectations of their children, consequently victimized children, who feel rejected and unpopular, are not willing to admit that they are being bullied. In their endeavour towards greater independence, adolescents often feel that they should be able to cope with the problem themselves. The child-parent/learner-educator relationship during adolescence is also often tense, and communication channels are not always what they should be (Besag, 1991:103-104). Therefore many parents and educators are unaware of the levels of bullying to which their children and/or learners are exposed. From the following research results it is clear that bullying is a relatively common phenomenon.

According to Bully B'ware (2004:4), 40% of all children in the USA were involved either as victims or as aggressors in bullying. Noll (2002:1) found that 25% of American learners have been victims of bullying; 20% of learners have victimised other learners. In a 1985 investigation on bullying conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles (quoted by Gordon, 2003:1), it was found that 7% of the youth who took part in the investigation victimised their fellow learners; 9% indicated that they were victims of bullies. Six percent indicated that they were victims and bullies. In a Norwegian study, in which 568 000 learners participated during 1983-1984, it was found that 9% of the participants were "now and then", "relatively regularly" or "regularly" victims of bullying; 7% were found guilty of bullying (Olweus, 1994:13). According to Limper (1998:1), one out of 12 secondary school children in the Netherlands is "very regularly" or "regularly" bullied. Nesor *et al.* (2003:5) found that 60.9% of the 207 participants in a research project in Gauteng indicated that they were bullied during the 2002 school year. Colin Northmore (quoted by Stierhler, 2002:7) of the Johannesburg Centre for School Quality and Improvement (CSQI) points out that 90% of learners at a Johannesburg school told CSQI that they were bullied in the previous year. From the above it would seem that the extent of bullying differs considerably from country to country. The differences can be attributed, amongst other things, to the use of different measuring instruments and definitions. It is difficult to formulate a universal definition of bullying, because bullying differs from situation to situation and from child to child. For example, there is a very fine line between teasing and verbal bullying (Treml, 2001:107-108; Frost, 1991:30; Pearce, 1991:70).

Gender and age rather than factors such as size of the school, racial composition and school locality influence the extent of bullying (Banks, 1997:1; Olweus, 1994:19, 23-25). Boys are more generally found guilty of bullying than girls. The largest percentage of girls who are bullied are bullied by boys. The majority of boys that are bullied are bullied by other boys. Boys are also more often either the victims or the aggressors, according to Olweus (1994:19). According to Bully B'ware (2004:3), Olweus (1994:19) and Pearce (1991:70), direct bullying occurs more generally among boys and indirect bullying among girls. Although boys are more often guilty of physical forms of bullying than girls, Olweus (1994:19) found that non-physical harassment, e.g. ugly signs and swearing, is the most common form of bullying among boys and girls.

From the literature review it is clear that learners can be directly and/or indirectly verbally and/or physically bullied. The bullying includes, amongst other things, physical aggression, sexual harassment, social isolation, degrading looks (faces), crude language, as well as spreading rumours, and the refusal of someone's requests. It is also clear that learners are not only victims, but also listeners and spectators of incidents of verbal and physical bullying, and are actively and/or passively involved in teasing other learners. But what is the nature and extent of bullying at schools in the Free State?

#### Empirical investigation

##### Research instrument

An investigation was conducted to determine the experiences of a group of Free State learners who were victims, aggressors, as well as

spectators and listeners of bullying. The research instrument was the Delaware Bullying Questionnaire (State of Delaware, undated). Section A of the structured questionnaire provides biographical details of the respondents. In Section B questions are asked about the respondent as possible victim (Table 2), bully (Table 3) and observer and/or listener of bullying (Table 4). In section C an attempt is made to obtain information on who the persons were who, if applicable, bullied the respondents (Tables 5 and 6). In section D an open-ended question attempts to obtain qualitative data on respondents' experiences and/or observations of bullying. This question is as follows: "If you want to, describe a specific incident of bullying at your school which you witnessed or experienced (without using names) which you reckon others should know about and about which something should have been done." This questionnaire was adapted for the South African situation (compare questions on the use of taxis as means of transport). The questionnaire was available in both English and Afrikaans. (The researcher translated the questionnaire into Afrikaans.)

### The test sample

The universum consisted of learners of secondary schools in the Free State. A random test sample of 60 of the 335 secondary and combined schools in the Free State was drawn from an address list supplied by the Free State Department of Education. Six hundred questionnaires, 10 per school, were sent by post. Of the returned questionnaires, 339 (56.5%) were suitable for processing. The average age of the respondents, 160 (47.2%) of whom were boys and 179 (52.8%) girls, was 16 years and 3 months. Table 1 summarises the grade distribution of the respondents.

**Table 1** Grade variables of the respondents

Grade	Boys		Girls	
	N	%	N	%
8	11	6.88	14	7.82
9	29	18.12	19	10.62
10	43	26.88	30	16.76
11	23	14.37	59	32.96
12	54	33.75	57	31.84
Total	160	100	179	100

### Processing of data

In Section B of the questionnaire, respondents had to make use of the following response: 1 = daily, 2 = once or twice a week, 3 = once or twice a month, 4 = once or twice a year, 5 = never. The respondents' answers were then determined by mathematical calculations. Furthermore, the average gradation of each item was determined and the rank order established. The respondents' responses to questions on who bullied them, if applicable (Tables 5 and 6), were determined by means of mathematical calculations. A significant number of respondents, 79 (36.87%) girls and 66 (41.25%) boys, met the request to describe a specific incident of bullying. Due to the limited space available, only a few of their answers will be used to explain the quantitative data.

### Results and discussion

Table 2 summarises the respondents' experiences as victims of various types of bullying in sequence of the most common to the least common type of bullying to which they were exposed.

Respondents of both genders were mostly exposed to direct (Table 2, item 2) and the second most to indirect (Table 2, item 4) verbal harassment. Only 27.37% and 30.17% of the girls were never exposed to direct and indirect verbal harassment, respectively. A relatively large percentage of boys (48.75%) are/were attacked by fellow learners, 17.5% of them were beaten and/or kicked weekly by fellow learners, knocked and/or physically injured in another way. Direct, physical aggression is the third most common form of bullying to

which boys were exposed (Table 2, item 1). Although physical bullying is fifth out of a sequence of 6 among girls, 11 (6.15%) girls were attacked either daily or at least once a week by other learners.

It is clear from Table 2 (item 3) that male respondents are sexually harassed more regularly than their female counterparts: 27.5% of the boys in comparison with 12.8% of the girls indicated that they were exposed at least once a month to this form of bullying. From the two descriptions below it is clear that victims experienced sexual harassment as severely traumatic. A girl wrote:

*I feel broken down by sexual remarks and touching. I cannot avoid it, the boy does not want to stop. I am terribly afraid of the boy and try to avoid him as best I can. I feel emotionally broken.*

A Grade 11 boy gave the following description of his harassment by a classmate:

*This girl in my class keeps telling me that I have a big bottom (behind). She keeps slapping my behind and never listens when I tell her to stop. It's a very traumatic experience for me. I'm too ashamed to tell someone.*

Some of the respondents not only wrote about their own experiences of sexual harassment, but also provided information on their perceptions of other learners who are bullied. It is apparent from their descriptions that firstly learners, who on the surface are either homosexual or lesbian, are regularly the victims of verbal sexual harassment. Furthermore, it seems that those who are guilty of sexual harassment are sometimes crude and cruel. A Grade 12 girl wrote the following on an incident she observed:

*I heard a group of boys telling one girl that she's not beautiful and she doesn't have a future, because she cannot live without a boyfriend. They said she will go crazy if she doesn't have sex. I saw the girl crying because they were abusing and bullying her.*

Not only in the open-ended questions, as is apparent from the above examples of sexual harassment, but also in the structured section of the questionnaire, the respondents were afforded the opportunity to provide information about their own observations of incidents of bullying. These quantitative data are summarised in Table 3.

It appeared from the respondents' responses that few of them had heard incidents of direct verbal bullying (Table 3, item 1). Furthermore, more boys heard and saw how fellow learners were being bullied on a more regular basis than girls. A relatively large percentage of boys (35.0%) saw for instance daily or at least once a week how fellow learners were injured physically. On the other hand, only 15.08% of the girls saw either daily or weekly incidents of physical bullying.

That direct verbal (Table 3, item 2) and indirect verbal (Table 3, item 3) bullying are the most common forms of bullying witnessed by the respondents, was apparent not only from the quantitative data but also from the descriptions by respondents (section D). Various respondents described incidents of verbal bullying which they saw and heard. The two descriptions that follow illustrate what they heard and saw. Three Grade 9 girls at the same school gave nearly identical descriptions of the direct verbal bullying of one of their classmates. One of them wrote:

*There is one specific boy in Grade 7 who is ridiculed or mocked approximately every day. He lives in his own world and is not very handsome. He looks like a Grade 3 boy and does rare things at breaks, for instance plays with sand, beating the grass with a stick and does not mix with anyone. Children are usually nasty to him.*

A Grade 10 girl wrote:

*In our school there is the case of a girl who is in a higher standard than me, she looks very neglected and is not at all beautiful! Nobody values her and she is very lonely. I am honest when I say that I do not want to mix with her either. But I feel sorry for her.*

This quotation is an example of passive bullying — the respondent shows empathy with the victim, but is not prepared (or able) to stop the bullying, and she experiences guilt feelings regarding her passivity. From the following description it appears that learners not only bully other learners but also educators:

**Table 2** The extent of respondents' exposure to different types of bullying

Item	RO	MR	Questions	1		2		3		4		5	
				N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Boys</b>													
2	1	3.48	How often do other learners bully you by saying mean things to you (things that hurt your feelings)?	15	9.37	25	15.62	39	24.38	31	19.38	50	31.25
4	2	3.69	How often do other students bully you by spreading mean rumours about you?	12	7.50	22	13.75	25	15.63	46	28.75	55	34.37
1	3	4.00	How often do other learners bully you by laying their hands on you (hitting, kicking, or pushing or hurting your body) in school or on the school bus/taxi?	10	6.25	18	11.25	16	10.00	34	21.25	82	51.25
3	4	4.06	How often do other learners bully you by making sexual comments that bother you? For instance, commenting on your body, calling you gay, talking to you about sex, etc.	11	6.88	18	11.25	15	9.37	23	14.37	93	58.13
5	5	4.25	How often do other learners bully you by leaving you out of their activities to hurt your feelings at school or on the school bus/taxi?	7	4.37	10	6.25	16	10.00	30	18.75	97	60.63
6	6	4.70	How often have you been bullied into giving up lunch/pocket money, food, drinks or snacks?	3	1.88	3	1.88	7	4.37	13	8.13	134	83.75
Av.		4.03											
<b>Girls</b>													
2	1	3.59	How often do other learners bully you by saying mean things to you (things that hurt your feelings)?	10	5.59	24	13.41	44	24.58	52	29.05	49	27.37
4	2	3.75	How often do other students bully you by spreading mean rumours about you?	14	7.82	13	7.26	31	17.32	67	37.43	54	30.17
5	3	4.25	How often do other learners bully you by leaving you out of their activities to hurt your feelings at school or on the school bus/taxi?	7	3.91	6	3.35	20	11.17	48	26.82	98	54.75
3	4	4.46	How often do other learners bully you by making sexual comments that bother you? For instance, commenting on your body, calling you gay, talking to you about sex, etc.	5	2.79	8	4.47	10	5.59	33	18.44	123	68.71
1	5	4.63	How often do other learners bully you by laying their hands on you (hitting, kicking, or pushing or hurting your body) in school or on the school bus/taxi?	3	1.68	8	4.47	8	4.47	14	7.82	148	81.56
6	6	4.88	How often have you been bullied into giving up lunch/pocket money, food, drinks or snacks?	2	1.12	2	1.12	3	1.67	2	1.12	170	94.97
Av.		4.26											

**Table 3** What the respondents have seen and/or heard with regard to bullying

<b>Boys</b>													
2	1	2.59	How often have you heard another student bully others by saying mean things, teasing or calling other learners names in school or on the school bus/taxi?	42	26.25	42	26.25	34	21.25	24	15.00	18	11.25
3	2	3.01	How often have you heard another learner spreading rumours or leaving learners out of activities to be mean at school or on the school bus/taxi?	29	18.13	39	24.38	28	17.50	30	18.75	34	21.25
1	3	3.01	How often have you seen another learner bully others by laying hands on them (hitting, kicking, pushing or physically hurting) them at school or on the school bus/taxi?	28	17.50	28	17.50	41	25.63	41	25.62	22	13.75
4	4	3.21	How often have you heard another learner bullying others by making sexual comments to be mean to other learners?	26	16.25	34	21.25	24	15.00	32	20.00	44	27.50
Av.		2.96											
<b>Girls</b>													
3	1	2.80	How often have you heard another learner spreading rumours or leaving learners out of activities to be mean at school or on the school bus/taxi?	39	21.79	35	19.55	48	26.82	37	20.67	20	11.17
2	2	3.03	How often have you heard another student bully others by saying mean things, teasing or calling other learners names in school or on the school bus/taxi?	30	16.76	31	17.32	44	24.58	52	29.05	24	12.29
4	3	3.75	How often have you heard another learner bullying others by making sexual comments to be mean to other learners?	13	7.26	26	14.53	25	13.79	44	24.58	71	39.69
1	4	3.83	How often have you seen another learner bully others by laying hands on them (hitting, kicking, pushing or physically hurting) them at school or on the school bus/taxi?	8	4.47	19	10.61	26	14.25	68	38.00	58	32.40
Av.		3.35											

1 = daily; 2 = once or twice a week; 3 = once or twice a month; 4 = once or twice a year; 5 = never  
 RO: Rank order; MR: Mean rating

**Table 4** How the respondents treat their fellow learners

Item	RO	MR	Questions	1		2		3		4		5	
				N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Boys</b>													
2	1	3.88	How often do you bully others by saying mean things, teasing or calling them names at your school or on the school bus/taxi?	12	7.50	15	9.37	23	14.38	40	25.00	70	43.75
1	2	4.23	How often do you bully others by laying your hands on them (hitting, kicking, pushing or otherwise hurting the bodies of other learners) at school or on the school bus/taxi?	6	3.75	9	5.62	22	13.75	29	18.13	94	58.75
4	3	4.44	How often do you make sexual comments about other learners whom you know are likely to be bothered by it?	6	3.75	7	4.38	16	10.00	13	8.12	118	73.75
3	4	4.47	How often do you spread mean rumours or leave other learners out of your activities to be mean?	4	2.50	5	3.13	10	6.25	34	21.25	107	66.87
Av.		4.26											
<b>Girls</b>													
2	1	4.49	How often do you bully others by saying mean things, teasing or calling them names at your school or on the school bus/taxi?	4	2.23	3	1.68	10	5.59	45	25.14	117	65.36
3	2	4.51	How often do you spread mean rumours or leave other learners out of your activities to be mean?	5	2.79	3	1.68	9	5.03	40	22.34	122	68.16
4	3	4.84	How often do you make sexual comments about other learners whom you know are likely to be bothered by it?	2	1.12	1	0.56	4	2.23	9	5.03	162	91.06
1	4	4.84	How often do you bully others by laying your hands on them (hitting, kicking, pushing or otherwise hurting the bodies of other learners) at school or on the school bus/taxi?	4	2.23	2	1.12	2	1.12	6	3.35	165	92.18
Av.		4.67											

1 = daily; 2 = once or twice a week; 3 = once or twice a month; 4 = once or twice a year; 5 = never

RO: Rank order; MR: Mean rating

*Boys, especially in Grades 8 and 9, are very impolite with the soft-spoken teachers at school and threaten them with the police or that they will go to court. With the masters they are like lambs.*

The above is a confirmation of Pearce's view (1991:74), namely, that the aggressive bullies are aggressive towards any person, irrespective of the person's position of authority.

From Table 4 it is clear that some of the respondents had not only been victims of bullying but also guilty of bullying.

The most common form of bullying to which respondents were exposed, namely direct verbal bullying (Table 4, item 2), is also the type of bullying used by the majority of respondents (Table 3, item 2). Reasonably more male (56.25%) than female (34.25%) respondents had harassed other learners by saying mean things to them or by mocking or insulting them. Whereas few of the girls (7.82%) had physically injured other learners, 41.75% of the boys who completed the questionnaire had attacked other learners; 15 (9.38%) of these boys did it weekly or even daily (Table 4, item 1). Not one of the respondents mentioned in the open-ended question how they bullied other learners. They were mainly passive bullies, as was apparent from their descriptions of what they perceived and/or heard.

Tables 5 and 6 summarise the respondents' answers to questions concerning who they bullied and the grades in which the bullies were.

From Table 5 it is clear that learners were usually bullied by members of the same gender. However, not only boys were guilty of physical harassment: eight boys indicated that one or more girls had injured them physically, 13 girls were injured by members of the same gender. Some of the boys described in the open-ended question how they were kicked and beaten by other boys on a regular basis. One of them was kicked in the face regularly by his hostel roommate, he was too afraid to do something about it, because "his family was known for assaulting people". Another boy mentions that the bullies regularly put sand in his mouth. It is clear from the descriptions that there is an unbalanced relationship of power between the bullies and the victims.

The victims are powerless and cannot defend themselves against physical injury.

According to a Grade 12 girl, learners are verbally bullied on a regular basis not only individually, but also as a group (*cf.* Van der Meer's definition in which the group dynamics of some acts of bullying are explained). She wrote:

*At our school there are these boys who are racists. They act mean against black people in our school. There is this particular group of boys in our Maths class. When the teacher is out they take a red pen and write on the projector and spray it with spirits. It looks like blood and they would say it is AIDS and me and my friends have it.*

By contrast with the opinions of Banks (1997:1) and Olweus (1994:19, 23-25) that racial composition in schools does not influence bullying, it seems to play a role in some Free State schools, as is apparent from the above description. Besides this Grade 12 girl, 25 respondents described explicitly racist incidents.

From Table 6 it is clear that bullies target mainly learners in the same grade, but not necessarily in the same class as them. Victims are also bullied by learners in a higher grade rather than by learners in a lower grade. For instance, five boys at the same school wrote in the open-ended question that senior learners forced them to perform personal tasks — among others, they had to wash their senior learners' shirts and socks. If they refused, they were beaten.

Table 7 summarises the respondents' views on whether bullying at their respective schools is a problem or not.

Data in Table 7 can be regarded as a summary of the quantitative data (Tables 2 to 6). Only 16.22% of the respondents indicated that bullying is not a problem at their respective schools. From Table 3 it is clear for instance that few respondents have heard of incidents of direct and indirect verbal harassment (Table 3, items 2 and 3). It is also clear from Table 5 that more than half of the respondents (63.72%) had been to a lesser or greater extent victims of verbal harassment; 25.07% were victims of physical harassment.

**Table 5** The person(s) who bullied the respondents

Bullies	Verbal bullying*				Physical bullying**			
	Male respondents		Female respondents		Male respondents		Female respondents	
	N***	%****	N***	%****	N	%	N	%
Both boy(s) and girl(s)	29	18.13	36	20.11	1	0.62	4	2.23
Several boys	46	28.75	14	7.82	21	13.13	3	1.68
A boy	19	11.88	6	3.35	28	17.50	4	2.23
Several girls	5	3.13	38	21.23	6	3.75	6	3.35
A girl	6	3.75	27	15.08	2	1.25	7	3.91
An adult who works for the school	6	3.75	2	1.12	2	1.25	1	0.56
Nobody	61	38.12	62	34.64	100	62.50	154	86.04
Total	163		185		160	100	179	100

\* Who has bullied you by saying mean things to you, teasing you, calling you names, spreading rumours about you or leaving you out to be mean at school or on the bus/taxi?

\*\* Who has bullied you by laying hands on you (hitting, kicking, pushing or hurting your body) at school or on the bus/taxi?

\*\*\* Some respondents indicated more than one category of bullies

\*\*\*\* Percentage of respondents

**Table 6** Grade level of the learners who bullied the respondents

	Male respondents		Female respondents		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I haven't been bullied	74	46.25	81	45.25	155	45.72
In my class	22	13.75	32	17.88	54	15.93
In the same grade as me, but in a different class	21	13.13	43	24.02	64	18.88
In a lower grade	8	5.00	5	2.79	13	3.84
In a higher grade	35	21.87	18	10.06	53	15.63
Total	160	100	179	100	339	100

**Table 7** The respondents' views on whether or not bullying is a problem at their respective schools

	Male respondents		Female respondents		All the respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
A huge problem	24	15.00	20	11.17	44	12.98
A big problem	31	19.38	32	17.88	63	18.58
Somewhat of a problem	79	49.37	98	54.75	177	52.21
No problem at all	26	16.25	29	16.20	55	16.22
Total	160	100	179	100	339	100

From a comparison of the quantitative data with the literature study the following is apparent: Free State boys are guilty like their American (Pearce, 1991:70) and Norwegian counterparts (Olweus, 1994:19) of bullying more often than girls. Furthermore, a large percentage of the Free State girls who are bullied are also, in accordance with international findings, bullied by boys (Table 5). There is also a correlation between Olweus' and Pearce's findings and the following research results of the study into bullying by Free State learners. Most boys who are bullied are bullied by other boys (Table 4). Boys are also more often than girls either the victims (Table 2) or the aggressors (Tables 4 and 5). Boys are also guilty of physical forms of bullying more often than girls (Tables 4 and 5). It is also apparent that non-physical harassment, not only internationally but also in the Free State, is the most common form of bullying among both boys and girls (Tables 2, 4 and 5). By contrast with international findings, not only direct verbal bullying but also indirect verbal bullying occurs more among boys than among girls (Table 2).

Despite the fact that some respondents indicated that bullying is not a problem at their respective schools, no respondents indicated that bullying is not a problem at all at their school. Bullying is therefore,

to a greater or lesser extent, a problem at the schools that took part in the research.

### Recommendations and concluding remarks

Bullying will only be combated if educators, learners and parents regard bullying as a problem that should be addressed (Limper, 1998:2). However, a change in mentality will first have to occur among all role-players. Although only 55 (16.22%) respondents (Table 7) indicated that bullying is not a problem at all at their respective schools, there is probably a code of silence or a culture of denial at some of these schools. This is clear first from the quoted answers to the open-ended question (specifically the one about sexual harassment and physical bullying) that victims of bullying are too afraid or too shy to tell others of the bullying. Secondly, some of the listeners and spectators contribute to this denial by means of their passivity. Thirdly, it would seem that some of the respondents deny that bullying occurs at their schools, although it appears from their answers to the open-ended question that bullying does take place. The following answer serves as an example:

*Well, I'm at a girl's school, so no bullying ever takes place. But girls do tend to spread nasty rumours, say nasty things, and act nasty. So that is about as bad as it gets, girls will be girls.*

In the introduction to the questionnaire, there are two definitions of bullying — the one more complicated, the other less complicated (State of Delaware, undated). The girl whose answer is given in the above paragraph should have known that what she described is verbal bullying. Yet she backs out of it by stating "girls will be girls".

Every child, even those who live in a culture of denial, has the right to education in a bully-free school milieu. The first step in combating bullying is to establish an anti-bullying programme. An effective anti-bullying programme should involve the entire school community rather than focus on the perpetrators and victims alone. Olweus, Limber and Mihalic (1999:9-10) detail an anti-bullying programme that involves interventions at the school, class and individual level. Schools that have implemented this programme have reported a 50% reduction in bullying (Banks, 2000:3). Education leaders in the Free State should therefore consider adopting some or all of the components of the Olweus *et al.* anti-bullying programme. This anti-bullying programme (1999:9-10) includes the following components:

- An initial school wide questionnaire that is distributed to learners and adults. The questionnaire helps justify intervention efforts, helps learners and adults become aware of the extent of the problem, and serves as a benchmark to measure the impact of improvements in school climate once other intervention components are in place.
- A school wide parental awareness campaign that can be conducted during parent-educator conference days, through parent newsletters and parent-educator meetings. The goal is to increase parental awareness of the problem, point out the importance of parental involvement for programme success, and encourage parental support of programme goals. An important part of the campaign involves making parents aware of the results of the initial school wide questionnaire.
- A classroom programme that includes a list of rules against bullying that educators and learners develop together.
- Individual interventions for bullies and victims.

From the preceding synopsis of the Olweus *et al.* anti-bullying programme it is apparent that role-players' acknowledgement that bullying is a problem at their respective schools is a core element of the programme. A questionnaire, for instance the Delaware Bullying questionnaire can therefore provide schools and education departments with important information regarding the nature and extent of bullying at individual schools and in provinces as a whole.

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