

Bullying in public secondary schools in Nairobi, Kenya

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Background: The prevalence and frequency of bullying in Nairobi public secondary schools in particular and in Kenyan schools in general is not known. Knowledge of the extent of the problem is essential in developing effective interventions.

Aim: To study the prevalence and frequency of bullying in Nairobi public secondary schools, Kenya.

Methods: 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.

Results: Between 63.2% (640) and 81.8% (828) of 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 where bullied. Being bullied was significantly associated with becoming a bully, in turn.

Discussion: Bullying is highly prevalent in Kenyan schools. Further studies are needed to characterise bullies and victims in terms of personality and environmental factors that may be associated with or conducive to bullying, as well as to determine the long-term prognosis for both bullies and victims. Further research is also required to determine the most appropriate intervention.

Introduction

There is growing consensus among researchers that bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can negatively impact the general school climate and a student's right to attend school safely and free of fear (Banks 1997). Bullying refers to repeated oppression, either physical or psychological, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group, the essential ingredient being a power imbalance that makes possible the ill treatment of a victim (Rigby 1997, Smith *et al.* 1999). It comprises direct behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting and stealing, which are initiated by one or more students against the victim, as well as indirect behaviour, by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion (Gibson 1998).

Various studies have established that approximately 15% of students are either bullied regularly or are initiators of bullying behaviour (Olweus 1993, Wolke and Samara 2004). According to Cohn and Canter (2003), bullying is the most common form of violence in society; between 15% and 30% of students in the US are bullies or victims of bullying. In an extensive review of the Australian literature, Slee reported a prevalence of 15–20% (Slee 2006). Direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years in the US, peaks in middle school, and declines during high school years (Olweus 1993). Bullying more often takes place at school rather than on the way to and from school (Olweus 1993). Studies also suggest that schools in socially-disadvantaged areas have higher bullying rates (Farrington 1993).

While the incidence of direct physical assault seems to decrease with age, verbal abuse appears to be constant among teenagers in the US (Gibson 1998), where school size and setting

do not seem to be distinguishing factors in predicting the occurrence of bullying. Boys engage in bullying behaviour and are victims of bullies more frequently than girls (Olweus 1993, Batsche and Knoff 1994, Gofin, Palti and Gordon 2002, Wolke and Samara 2004, Slee 2006), although this difference decreases when considering indirect aggression. While boys typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are more likely to utilise more subtle and indirect strategies, such as spreading rumours and enforcing social isolation (Ahmad and Smith 1994, in a literature review covering Scandinavian countries, UK and Japan).

It has been observed (Smith and Sharp 1994) that girls value social relationships more than boys do. Girl bullies, therefore, set out to disrupt social relationships with indirect forms of bullying. Further, girls tend to bully girls, while boys bully both boys and girls (Smith and Sharp 1994, Gofin *et al.* 2002, Wolke and Samara 2004). Bullying most often occurs where adult supervision is low or absent, such as in dormitories and playgrounds (Farrington 1993). There is an inverse relationship between the number of supervising adults present and the number of bullying incidents (Clarke and Kiselica 1997). Most bullies victimise students in the same year or class, although 30% of victims report the bully being older, while approximately 10% report the bully being younger (Farrington 1993).

Electronic literature searches reveal that little research has been done on bullying in schools in Africa. De Wet (2005) from Free State of South Africa noted that only 5% of teachers and 16% of pupils interviewed at Free State secondary schools said bullying was no problem, suggesting that 95% of the teachers and 84% of the pupils thought bullying was a problem. Many of them had witnessed incidents of verbal bullying, in particular. It is also evident that victims of bullying would rather confide in friends than in adults when they have been victimised. This may be ascribed to the fact that 31.97% of the respondents indicated that fellow learners helped them during bullying situations; on the other hand, only 19.73% were helped by their teachers (de Wet 2005). As for the type of bullying, de Wet reported only physical bullying: 'more than 32% of learners said that another learner had hit them in the past and a further 11.21% said they had been physically hurt at least once a week by another learner' (de Wet 2005). This report, based on a lecture given by de Wet, does not give sample size and is limited in terms of the details it provides on methodology and therefore in terms of definite conclusions.

Batsche and Knoff (1994) and Olweus (1993) have described certain characteristics of bullies and their victims. Bullies seem to have a need to feel powerful and in control, derive satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering on others, and have little empathy for their victims, whom they blame for being provocative. Bullies also tend to come from families where physical punishments are used, and are taught to defend themselves physically, and where parental involvement and emotional warmth are frequently lacking. They are generally defiant or oppositional towards adults, antisocial and apt to break school rules. They have little anxiety and strong self-esteem.

On the other hand, victims are typically anxious, insecure, suffer from low self-esteem and rarely defend themselves or retaliate. They lack social skills and are often socially isolated. They tend to be close to their parents, who in turn are overprotective. They tend to be physically weaker than their peers (Olweus 1993, Batsche and Knoff 1994).

There are ramifications to bullying, both for the bullies and their victims. Scandinavian studies have shown strong correlations between children bullying other students during the school years and experiencing legal or criminal troubles as adults, with 60% in one study being convicted of a crime by age 24 (Olweus 1993). Chronic bullies have difficulties in the development and maintenance of positive relationships (Oliver, Hoover and Hazler 1994).

Victims of bullying fear school as they consider it unsafe, suffer increased isolation and have increased risks of depression and low self-esteem — problems that continue into adulthood (Olweus 1993, Batsche and Knoff 1994).

Charach, Pepler and Ziegler (1995) in Canada suggested that bullies' aggression occurs in social contexts in which teachers and parents are generally unaware of the extent of the problem and where other children are reluctant to get involved or simply do not know how to help. Smith and Sharp (1994) have emphasised the need to develop school bullying policies, implement circular measures, improve the school-ground environment and empower students through conflict

resolution, peer counselling and assertiveness training. Teachers could also work with students at the class level to develop rules on bullying and ways to assist victims, and work together to create a school climate where bullying is not tolerated (Sjostrom and Stein 1996, Salmivalli 1999).

Olweus (1993) has also suggested anti-bullying programmes that involve individualised interventions with bullies and victims, the implementation of co-operative learning activities to reduce school isolation, and increasing adult supervision at key times like lunch times. The comprehensive intervention plan should involve parents, the student community and school staff, to ensure that all students learn in a safe and fear-free environment (Olweus 1993).

Interventions can only be put together if the prevalence and nature of the bullying problem are adequately known. There are no data on bullying in Kenya. It is against this background that the authors wanted to establish the prevalence of bullying, if any, and thereafter in future to study the contributory factors and see how best to develop intervention strategies. The research questions are, therefore: what is the prevalence of bullying in the sampled schools; what are the different types of bullying; how do they vary in terms of gender, type of school and neighbourhood?

Methods

This was part of a broader study on mental health issues and associated factors that was conducted amongst secondary school students from 17 out of the 49 (i.e. 34.7%) public secondary schools (Forms 1–4) within Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. This stratified sample was categorised to be representative of all schools in terms of type of students admitted (national or provincial, explained below), gender (boys only/girls only/mixed), whether students reside in school or not during school terms (boarding/day/mixed), geographical location of the school from the central part of Nairobi city (east/west/north/south), and the neighbourhood economic class depending on rent costs (high/middle/low).

The school system in Kenya is such that after spending eight years in primary school, those who qualify in their final examinations join secondary schools. The national schools enrol the top performers in the national examinations from schools all over the country through a quota system that ensures that all the eight administrative provinces (including Nairobi) are represented. The provincial schools only enrol students from schools within the city of Nairobi, which is also Nairobi province. They enrol the next-best performers who missed gaining places in the national schools, provided they had sat the examinations in Nairobi. A previous census has shown that ethnicity is not an issue in the Kenyan youth (Kenya Population Council 1999). Further, the Kenyan system does not, as a matter of policy, recognise ethnic background in any official documentation, except in terms of where one was born.

The secondary school-going age in Kenya is 14–18, but one school offers vocational training for its former students. Further, depending on the part of the country from which the students were admitted, it is not unusual for children to start school late, by as much as four to six years.

Those who gain admission to these schools are the top scorers in English, amongst other subjects. This is besides the fact that English is the medium of learning at primary education before secondary education, and all through to tertiary level. All the students in this study were therefore fluent in both written and spoken English. There was therefore no need for the questionnaires to be translated from English into any other language.

Instruments

The instruments for the overall study were in eight different sets, all arranged sequentially, so that only one-eighth of randomly-selected students out of all the students got only one and the same set of the instrument. Each set of instruments had an introductory letter from and signed by the principal investigator, explaining the purpose of the study (for that particular set of instruments), the voluntary nature of participating, confidentiality and the right not to participate without being known, and the anonymous nature of the study. Each set enquired about age, gender, year (form) of study and whether the child was a boarder or day scholar. This was then followed by the specific

questionnaire to measure different aspects of mental health, in this case bullying. All the students in all the sampled schools and those present in all the classes therefore filled in the eight different sets of questionnaires at the same time, but one-eighth filled a different set from the others.

The Olweus Bullying Questionnaire used in the study was developed by Dan Olweus, a Norwegian psychologist (Olweus 1991). It is a self-administered questionnaire. All the questions refer to the student's own experience at any time in his/her present school over the previous six months. It has been used extensively, and in several countries including Scandinavian countries, and in cross-national comparative surveys (Olweus 1999) and in Israel (Wolke and Samara 2004). It requires either a 'yes' or 'no' answer to any question on whether bullying has occurred or not in the last six months. Frequency over the last six months is measured as follows: 'seldom' = one to three times, and 'frequent' = four times or more. However, if the students felt that four times or more was not descriptive enough, they were given the choice of scoring 'very frequently'. The questionnaire is composed of Sections A and B. Section A asks questions related to direct bullying symptoms/signs, such as being called unpleasant names, having belongings taken, having lies told about oneself, having nasty tricks played on oneself, and being threatened/blackmailed, beaten up or hit, and whether one had done the same to colleagues. The questionnaire also enquires about the frequency and location of bullying and the class and gender of the bully. Section B deals with the so-called indirect bullying, like refusing to play with you, said would not be your friends anymore, telling nasty stories that are not true about you, and spoiling other students' games.

Ethical issues and administration of the questionnaire

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Kenyatta National Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Because of the logistical problems of reaching all the parents/guardians at the same time, permission was granted by the Ministry of Education to seek the consent of the head teachers, on behalf of the parents. There were no physically invasive procedures and the questions only touched on events related to the child and, in this particular set of instruments, related only to bullying. The head teachers were then visited to explain the study and to get their permission for the study in the different institutions. They were all very receptive. By prior arrangement, each of the 17 sampled schools set a particular time and day when the questionnaires would be administered to the whole school. All the schools participated in the study within the same week in July, when all the newcomers had settled in and there were still some months to the end of the school year or national examinations. Every eighth student in each of the classes and in all 17 schools from Form 1 to Form 4 and those in vocational schooling therefore participated in completing the bullying questionnaire, except for those who were absent from school on that particular day. The class teachers/research assistants who had been trained by the principal investigator on confidentiality participated in the distribution of the questionnaires when the whole class was seated. The roles of the class teachers were specified: distribution of the questionnaires to every eighth student, all seated at their usual desks, so that every eighth student got the same set of questionnaire; request that students first read the instructions on the questionnaire before completing it; show the students the location of the ballot box. The questionnaires took between 15 and 25 minutes to complete, inclusive of the time to read the instructions. The teacher provided the total number of registered students, those who were present during the exercise, and those who were absent.

The research assistant from the Africa Mental Health Foundation (AMHF) collected the ballot boxes from each class in all the sampled schools and took them to the project administrator of the AMHF, who was in possession of a secret code for each of the 17 schools (this code was revealed only to the principal investigator after all the analyses were done). A description of each of the 17 schools could easily reveal the identities of the schools. It was therefore decided that any description of the 17 schools would be excluded in any subsequent public reports.

Analysis was done using SPSS Version 11.5 software, and the following statistical measures were performed: descriptive statistics, t-tests, chi-square tests, bi-variate analysis, and multivariate analysis. The results are presented in tables and narratives. The significant testing was placed at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Absent students were in the range of 0–9 in total for each of the 17 schools. The response rate (i.e. those who agreed and completed the questionnaire fully) was in the range of 97–100%, and in this particular set on bullying, 1 024 students received the questionnaires, and 1 012 (98.8%) fully completed the questionnaires (only fully-completed questionnaires were analysed). Of these, 540 were from boys-only schools, 170 (26 girls and 144 boys) were from mixed schools, and 302 from girls-only schools; 339 of the questionnaires were from national schools, while 673 were from provincial schools.

The total number of students who responded to the questionnaire was 1 012, of whom 566 (55.9%) were male and 810 (80%) were day scholars. The mean age of the students who responded to the questionnaire was 16 (range 14–26) years. All the different grades/forms 1–4 were equally represented. Vocational students were in only one school.

Table 1 summarises the prevalence of bullying in six domains while Table 2 summarises bullying by the bullies and the responses of the victims in four domains.

The prevalence and frequency of bullying

Between 640 (63.2%) and 828 (81.8%) students answered 'yes' to a bullying occurrence in various domains in the last six months. For those who answered 'yes', the number of students declined as bullying frequency increased, from 'seldom' (50–69% range), 'frequently' (0–49% range), to 'very frequently' (range 0–4.7% except one, which was 17%).

Characteristics of bullies and their victims

Both direct bullying (examples include having belongings taken, being called bad and nasty names) and indirect bullying (having lies told about oneself, for example) were equally prevalent. Boys were more predisposed to bullying (being both bully and victim) of the direct type, whereas girls were more predisposed to indirect bullying ($p = 0.000$). Girls were bullied by both sexes, unlike boys who were bullied by boys only ($p = 0.000$). The bullies were mainly from the same class as their victims, followed by parallel classes and then by a higher class. Having belongings taken was highest in the lowest grade and gradually less prevalent, so that it was the least prevalent in Form 4 ($p = 0.014$).

Having lies told about oneself was lowest in Form 1, highest in Forms 2 and 3, and showed a sharp decline in Form 4 ($p = 0.003$). Having other students tell nasty stories that were not true about oneself was highest in Form 2, followed by Form 4 ($p = 0.043$). In general, students in the lower forms suffer higher rates of direct bullying, compared to those in higher forms and vocational training classes ($p = 0.000$). The age groups of 15–16 years were most affected by being beaten up or hit, compared with other age groups ($p = 0.027$), whereas children of 17 years and above were mainly victims of other students saying nasty things about them ($p = 0.037$) or being called bad and nasty names ($p = 0.00$). These age-related differences concur with findings related to class (form), as these ages correspond to class levels.

There was a high prevalence of both boarders and day scholars being beaten and having their belongings taken away. However, the boarders had their belongings taken much more frequently than the day scholars ($p = 0.001$), whose belongings disappeared on the playgrounds, as compared to the classroom or dormitory for boarders ($p = 0.000$). The day scholars were likely to be beaten up or hit more often on the playgrounds and en route to or from school ($p = 0.025$), and their perpetrators were likely to be boys rather than girls ($p = 0.000$). Most of the bullying took part on the playground and in school corridors. Nasty tricks ($p = 0.027$), blackmail and threats ($p = 0.000$) and beating and hitting ($p = 0.000$) occurred significantly more frequently in the playgrounds.

Being bullied, in turn, led to bullying behaviour in all categories and domains of study ($p = 0.000$); that is, a higher incidence of being bullied increased the chances of victims themselves turning into bullies. However, those who had been more frequently victimised verbally ($p = 0.000$), beaten or hit ($p = 0.000$) and had had their belongings stolen ($p = 0.038$) responded by bullying less themselves,

Table 1: Prevalence and frequency of bullying

Question	Responses	n	Percentage
(i) Being called bad or nasty names: 'yes' = 70.6% (n = 714)			
How often in last six months?	Seldom	498	69.7
	Frequently	216	30.3
	Very frequently	0	0
Where did it happen?	Playgrounds	200	28.0
	Corridors	179	25.0
	Way to/from school	86	12.1
	Other areas	249	34.9
From which class were perpetrators?	Own class	311	43.5
	Parallel class	142	19.9
	Higher class	179	25.1
	Lower class	49	6.9
	Another school	33	4.6
Were they: (gender)	Boys	378	52.9
	Girls	224	31.4
	Both	112	15.7
Have you called another student bad names in last six months? If yes, how often?	Yes	426	59.6
	Seldom	482	67.5
	Frequently	131	18.4
	Very frequently	101	14.1
(ii) Had belongings taken: 'yes' = 81.8% (n = 828)			
How often in last six months?	Seldom	504	60.9
	Frequently	227	27.4
	Very frequently	97	11.7
Where did it happen?	Playgrounds	146	17.6
	Corridors	91	11.0
	Way to/from school	27	13.3
	Other areas	483	58.3
From which class were perpetrators?	Own class	233	28.1
	Parallel class	196	23.7
	Higher class	310	37.4
	Lower class	47	5.7
	Another school	42	5.1
Were they: (gender)	Boys	412	49.7
	Girls	368	44.5
	Both	48	5.8
Have you had your belongings taken by other students in the last six months? If yes, how often?	Yes	265	32.0
	Seldom	592	71.5
	Frequently	193	23.3
	Very frequently	44	5.3

as opposed to those who had experienced these to a lesser degree. Frequent victims of threats and blackmail turned into bullies of the same kind much more often ($p = 0.003$).

Boys and mixed schools had higher incidences of bullying: 352 (67%) of students from the boys' schools and 56 (32.9%) from the mixed schools — that is 57.5% of the students from both the boys-only and mixed schools — reported at least three out of the four bullying frequencies, as compared to 71 (23.5%) in the girls-only schools. These differences were significant at $p = 0.01$. Indirect bullying was unaffected by the school composition.

National school students were strongly predisposed to both direct and indirect bullying incidences, as compared to the provincial schools ($p = 0.000$ and 0.01). Of national school

Table 1: (cont.)

Question	Responses	n	Percentage
(iii) Had lies told about oneself: 'yes' = 71.8% (n = 727)			
How often in last six months?	Seldom	386	53.1
	Frequently	217	29.9
	Very frequently	124	17.0
Where did it happen?	Playgrounds	172	23.6
	Corridors	174	23.9
	Way to/from school	91	12.5
	Other areas	192	40.1
From which class were perpetrators?	Own class	249	34.3
	Parallel class	156	21.4
	Higher class	134	18.4
	Lower class	111	15.3
	Another school	80	11.0
Were they: (gender)	Boys	292	40.2
	Girls	360	49.5
	Both	75	10.3
Have you told lies about other students in the last six months? If yes, how often?	Yes	494	67.9
	Seldom	438	60.2
	Frequently	255	35.1
	Very frequently	31	4.2
(iv) Had nasty tricks played on oneself: 'yes' = 67.9% (n = 687)			
How often in last six months?	Seldom	414	60.2
	Frequently	241	35.1
	Very frequently	32	4.7
Where did it happen?	Playgrounds	309	45.0
	Corridors	172	25.0
	Way to/from school	93	13.6
	Other areas	116	16.9
From which class were perpetrators?	Own class	263	38.3
	Parallel class	155	22.6
	Higher class	122	17.8
	Lower class	122	17.8
	Another school	25	3.6
Were they: (gender)	Boys	269	39.2
	Girls	287	41.8
	Both	130	18.9
Have you played nasty tricks on other students in the last six months? If yes, how often?	Yes	369	39.2
	Seldom	341	49.6
	Frequently	310	45.1
	Very frequently	37	5.4

students, 239 (70.5%) gave a positive response to variables denoting direct bullying, as compared with 403 (60%) of students in provincial schools. A similar trend was found in indirect bullying incidences. The location of the school (neighbourhood) did not have a bearing on the bullying.

Discussion

The prevalence of bullying found in this study varied, depending on the type of bullying, from 63.2–81.8%, as compared to the range of 15–30% reported in the USA (Cohn and Canter 2003) and Norway (Olweus 1993). The range reported in Israel was 10–24% (Wolke and Samara 2004). The

Table 1: (cont.)

Question	Responses	n	Percentage
(v) Blackmailed or threatened: 'yes' = 63.6% (n = 644)			
How often in last six months?	Seldom	332	51.5
	Frequently	282	43.8
	Very frequently	30	4.7
Where did it happen?	Playgrounds	210	32.6
	Corridors	169	26.2
	Way to/from school	113	17.6
	Other areas	88	13.6
From which class were perpetrators?	Own class	130	20.2
	Parallel class	129	20.0
	Higher class	214	33.3
	Lower class	90	13.9
	Another school	81	12.6
Were they: (gender)	Boys	285	44.2
	Girls	200	31.0
	Both	160	24.8
Have you blackmailed or threatened other students in the last six months? If yes, how often?	Yes	349	54.2
	Seldom	252	39.2
	Frequently	365	56.7
	Very frequently	26	4.1
(vi) Beaten up or hit: 'yes' = 63.2% (n = 640)			
How often in last six months?	Seldom	401	62.7
	Frequently	215	33.6
	Very frequently	24	3.8
Where did it happen?	Playgrounds	309	48.3
	Corridors	102	15.9
	Way to/from school	52	7.9
	Other areas	179	28.0
From which class were perpetrators?	Own class	172	26.8
	Parallel class	147	23.0
	Higher class	139	21.7
	Lower class	83	12.9
	Another school	99	15.5
Were they: (gender)	Boys	330	51.6
	Girls	94	14.7
	Both	216	33.7
Have you beaten up another student in the last six months? If yes, how often?	Yes	321	50.2
	Seldom	285	44.6
	Frequently	32	50.9
	Very frequently	29	4.5

prevalence in Kenya is merely a reflection of the reported at least one-time occurrence in the specified period of time. However, the high prevalence of bullying in Kenya is similar to that suggested by de Wet in the Free State, South Africa where 84% of students and 95% of teachers thought that bullying was a problem. The report on de Wet's (2005) work does not provide detailed data on actual prevalence or types of bullying except for physical assault ('more than' 32%) and being physically hurt (11.21%). The Kenyan sample comprised high school students, the age at which bullying in the USA would be expected to be on the decline (Cohn and Canter 2003), yet the findings of this study indicate high prevalence.

Table 2: Bullying and response of the victim (%); n = 1 012

How frequent (action by other students)				Frequency (action by self)			
Never	Seldom	Frequently	Very frequently	Never	Seldom	Frequently	Very frequently
(i) Have other students refused to play with you?							
0	658 (65.0)	354 (35.0)	0	464 (45.8)	349 (34.5)	179 (17.7)	20 (2.0)
(ii) Have other students said they would not be your friend anymore?							
704 (69.6)	228 (22.5)	65 (6.4)	15 (1.5)	647 (63.9)	280 (27.7)	60 (5.9)	25 (2.5)
(iii) Have other students told nasty untrue stories about you?							
606 (59.9)	256 (25.3)	128 (12.6)	22 (2.2)	596 (58.9)	344 (34.0)	53 (5.2)	19 (1.9)
(iv) Do other students deliberately spoil your games?							
800 (79.1)	154 (15.2)	50 (4.9)	7 (0.7)	774 (76.5)	175 (17.3)	33 (3.3)	30 (3.0)

Apart from the high prevalence, the rest of the findings are similar to findings reported from outside Africa, with a few exceptions. That boys tended to bully more than girls has also been reported by Ahmad and Smith (1994), Batsche and Knoff (1994) and Olweus (1993). That girls were more likely to be involved in indirect rather than direct bullying is similar to the findings of Ahmad and Smith (1994), in a literature review article covering Scandinavian countries, Great Britain and Japan. That students were more likely to be victimised by others of the same gender — although girls were bullied by both sexes more often than boys — is in agreement with the findings of Smith and Sharp (1994). Cohn and Canter (2003) found that bullying took place more often at school than on the way to or from school. In this study, bullying was found to occur in both these places to similar degrees. Most of the students in this study were boarders, whereas Cohn and Canter's study (2003) in the USA does not make this distinction. If one assumes that they were day scholars (a common phenomenon in the USA), then the Kenyan findings would represent a difference, whereas in Cohn and Canter's study, most of the bullying took place in school.

In the Kenyan study, both physical and non-physical abuse were equally common, unlike other studies where non-physical abuse was more common, although social bullying, a more subtle form of isolation stemming from the exclusion of children from peer friendship groups, is perhaps 'the most pernicious' (Gibson 1998).

In the Kenyan findings, the bullying took place in the dormitories, playgrounds, corridors and on the way to and from school, away from the supervision of adults, an observation also made by Farrington (1993). Similarly, Clarke and Kiselica (1997), in the USA, observed an inverse relationship between the number of supervising adults present and the number of bullying incidents.

This study found that most bullies victimise students in the same year or class, again a finding similar to that of Farrington (1993) in the USA. Farrington further observed that 30% of victims reported that the bully was older and about 10% reported that the bully was younger. In this study, most bullies were of a similar age to their victims. In this study, most bullies were of a similar age to their victims. Boarders had their belongings taken and were beaten much more often than day scholars ($p = 0.01$). This may be attributed to the fact that bullies have easier access to boarders' belongings than to those of the day scholars.

In this study, being bullied was significantly associated with bullying others. However, those who had been more frequently victimised verbally responded by bullying less themselves, as opposed to those who had been less frequently victimised verbally ($p = 0.00$). This could be a reflection of power imbalance, with the victims being less powerful than the perpetrators, a concept advanced by Rigby (1997). However, being bullied is associated with bullying, most likely for retaliation purposes. The observation that boys-only schools and coeducational schools, as compared with girls-only schools, had a higher prevalence of bullying is suggestive of boys being responsible

for more bullying, a point already discussed above, and comparable to other settings.

The national schools had more bullying than the provincial schools. National schools bring together a mixture of students from all over the country, with diverse sociocultural and both rural and urban backgrounds. Except for this diversity, the authors have no explanation for the higher level of bullying in national schools compared with provincial schools, the latter of which admit children mainly from the more urbanised and cosmopolitan Nairobi. The finding that school neighbourhood did not impact on bullying is in sharp contrast with Farrington's (1993) observation that schools in socially-disadvantaged areas seem to have higher bullying rates. In this study, most of the schools were boarding schools. Movement in and out of these schools is highly regulated and monitored, and therefore the nature of the neighbourhood may not have had much impact.

This study has limitations. It merely describes the prevalence and frequency of bullying and the types of bullying, and uses limited sociodemographic variables to study associated factors. The primary objective of this study was, however, to establish the prevalence and frequency of bullying in Nairobi public secondary schools. The study is not representative of all Kenyan schools. It has a bias towards Nairobi public secondary schools, even though well representative of this specified study population. The study did not investigate family background and psychological factors that have been demonstrated to be important for both bullies and victims (Olweus 1993, Batsche and Knoff 1994, Rigby and Slee 1999, Cohn and Canter 2003). Neither did this study look at the awareness and/or attitude of staff and parents, nor at the prevalence of reported incidents, nor at the relationship between bullying and criminal or delinquent behaviour. All these limitations should be addressed in future research, now that it has been demonstrated that bullying is an area of concern.

However, this study also has strengths. It uses the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, a self-reporting questionnaire which has been used extensively in cross-national and cross-cultural settings, thus allowing comparison with other studies from outside Africa, this being the first study reported from Africa using this instrument. Further, the use of a self-reporting method in this particular sample and questionnaire increased confidentiality and anonymity and in the process decreased bias associated with a researcher-administered questionnaire, where the respondent may feel intimidated and therefore give biased responses. This is particularly so regarding issues that touch on the school environment, such as bullying.

The sample size (made possible by the use of a self-reporting method), the complete response rate of 98.8% (1 012), the stratified random sampling of the schools (17 out of the 49, i.e. 34.7%), the random sampling of all the students in the class and in all the sampled schools, the country-wide representativeness of the national schools and the cosmopolitan nature of Nairobi — all these should suggest a fairly representative sample, at least of all public secondary schools in Nairobi.

Apart from the high prevalence of bullying, nearly all the other findings are similar to equivalent ones reported from outside Africa. Besides providing baseline data for future similar studies and information on the prevalence of bullying in different contexts, the characterisation of bullies and their victims, and the consequences of bullying in Kenya, this study does establish a basis for the need to address bullying as an ongoing concern in Kenyan schools.

Acknowledgements — The Africa Mental Health Foundation (AMHF) provided grant funding for this study. AMHF welcomes collaborators for further research in this area. Grace Mutevu is thanked for assisting with data analysis and inputs at various stages of manuscript preparation.

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