PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BULLYING IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MZIMBA NORTH DISTRICT

By

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STUDENT DECLARATION

I, James Chilima declare that this research work titled, "Phenomenological study of bullying In secondary schools in selected Mzimba North District" is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of references. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Leadership and Management by Research Report at Mzuzu University under the supervision of Associate Professor Elijah Wanda. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree or for any examination in another University.

Name of student   …………………………………………………………………

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Mackson John Kapoloza Chilima and my late mother Annie Magombo Phiri for the good work they have done. Giving me education was the best gift I have ever had. God bless you father and to you mother, may your soul continue resting in eternal peace.

ABSTRACT

Bullying is rife at Malawian schools and is one of the major issues facing educators, learners and school communities. In this study the experiences of bullying among secondary school learners in Malawi were explored. The main objective of the study was to unfold forms of bullying that are facing learners, factors that contribute to bullying, effects of bullying in the lives of learners as well as strategies which could be utilised to eradicate bullying in the school context. The study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions were used as the method of data collection while individual interview guide and Focus Group Discussion Guide were the data collection tools. Five boys and five girls participated in the study. Individual interviews with five boys and five girls were conducted which were followed by focus group interviews which included all the ten participants. The data collected was analysed thematically using open coding. The findings confirm that bullying is rampant and pervasive problem in the two selected schools. Boys usually engage in physical forms of bullying, such as hitting, punching and kicking, and girls usually engage in more verbal form of bullying such as insulting, name calling and spreading rumours. The study found out that these forms of bullying affect learners physically, emotionally and psychologically. The study also found that gender, age, economic status and sexuality contributes greatly to bullying in schools while the school playground and classrooms were identified as places where bullying usually occur. The findings indicated that gender discourses play a major role in perpetuating bullying in these schools, as boys try to exercise their power over girls. This behaviour amongst learners hampers efforts to raise educational standards and improve schools in our country. Besides, the vicious cycle of bully/victim relationships has a negative influence on individual learners. In Malawi, bullying behaviour in schools has been found to lead to problems such as a low self-esteem, low academic performance, absenteeism, depression, and consequently school dropout. The study suggested ways that could be employed to address bullying in schools. These include various stake holders working together with the aim of eradicating bullying in the school. The study suggested that teachers, parents and police are relevant people who can bring awareness of the problem and help to reduce bullying in the school. The findings of this study will guide the Ministry of Education to incorporate issues of bullying in the education system, for instance, through well formulated anti bullying policies in secondary school curriculum.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0. Chapter overview

This chapter presents an overview of the entire thesis. It provides a discussion on the background, the problem statement, purpose of the study and the research objectives. It also presents the significance of the study and its limitations. The chapter also provides an outline of the research study.

1.1. Background information to the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the learners' experiences of bullying in secondary schools of Mzimba North District, Malawi. Bullying is rife at Malawian schools and is one of the major issues facing educators, learners and school communities. Aboagye, et al (2021) reports that there is evidence from sub Saharan African countries which shows that there is bullying victimisation in the schools including Malawi. According to Winnaar and Baku (2018), high levels of bullying, safety concerns and disorderliness in many schools in South Africa were noticed. Some people believe that bullying is a normal aspect of growing up and some even believe that being a victim can build resilience in a person. Additionally, UNESCO (2019) reported that one in three (32%) children globally has been victim of bullying on one or more days. While, Gaftney (2019) adds that worldwide, the prevalence of traditional bullying ranges from 22.8% to 48.2%. Stubbs-Richardson and May (2020) has noted that currently bullying has become one of the most important problems at schools in the last two decades, as the violence has adapted different forms and approaches in order to intimidate students. While, Ahmed Abd Elhamid et al. (2021) agrees to this by exposing that bullying has risen to become one of the most important forms of interpersonal violence among adolescents worldwide in schools

Different scholars of bullying have different conceptualisation and definitions of bullying which sometimes can give challenges while defining it. However, Rezapour et al., (2019) defines Bullying as an aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners, which involves an observed imbalance of power that occurred repeatedly. In addition, Rashad et al (2023) indicate that bullying is the deliberate systematic abuse of power that occurs through repeated verbal, physical, or social behaviour that intends to cause physical or psychological harm. Bullying in schools can take different forms: it can be direct, like name calling

and hitting and indirect, like social exclusion, but it always captures an element of power imbalance between the victim and the bully.

Chen & Chen (2020) argue that students in schools are undergoing a very important stage of physical and mental health development, bullying to this stage can have significant adverse impacts on their physical and mental health. Although this is the case, bullying has been prevalent in many schools globally as noted by UNESCO (2019) that bullying is prevalent in each and every country and that almost 32% of school going children globally have been the victim of bullying on one or more days in the preceding month and that 1 in 13 (7.3%) has been bullied on six or more days over the same period.

There are identified key factors in most literature which contributes significantly to bullying behaviour and are said to be located at the level of the family, the school and the community. This was noted in a study by Mokaya et al.., (2020) in a study conducted in Kenyan secondary schools. The study found that there was a high noted incidence of bullying among adolescents who are just joining public secondary schools. This study also revealed that male adolescents had a higher rate of physical bullying compared to females. In Nigeria, however, Asibong et al.., (2021) found that the most common source of bullying was from older boys. It can be suggested that maybe older boys look at themselves as physically stronger and could therefore presume other students as weak and fertile ground for bullying. The same study also noted that repeated exposure to bullying made children to stay away from school. This eventually led to poor academic results for these children. Bullying can have some negative lasting effects on children. Mungala & Nabuzoka (2020) conducted a study in Zambia and it was established that there is quite a significant relation between bullying experiences, self-esteem and depression. This can easily affect an individual's psychological health. This study concluded that bullying affects the victims' psychological well-being. In this study it was also established that girls were affected more than boys. Bullying in the long run can affect everyone, those who are bullied, those who bully and those who do witness bullying. Furthermore, Shayo and Lawala (2019) in their study in Tanzanian schools report that the victims of bullying usually experience a number of problems, such as anxiety and depression; suicide behaviours; poor school attendance and dropout; and poor academic results. However, of all the physical, social and emotional consequences resulting from being bullied, a great concern is one of suicide.

According to Ossa et.al (2019) for bullying targets who, like all other students, spend most of their day at school, it is very difficult to predict if and when the next attack is coming. This tends to lead to a permanent state of tension and a feeling of helplessness. Since school is mandatory the daily contact with the abusers cannot be avoided.

To conclude, the causes of bullying can be classified into that which takes place inside of school and outside of school factors. The phenomenon of bullying at school may also be promoted by the personal characteristics of the offender and the victim, the attitude of teachers and the measure taken by a school to address bullying. Since bullying has adverse effects on learners, there is therefore the need for more research on the topic. With bullying being such an endemic problem for learners in the school, the question remains as to the ways in which this could be addressed in order to ensure that schools are safe and conducive spaces for teaching and learning. In order to do this, we need to understand more about bullying context. These would include the types and nature of bullying prevalent, the factors that encourage bullying and, and how learners in the schools experience bullying. These questions informed the premises of this study, which set to explore learners lived experience of bullying in secondary school in Mzimba North District in the Northern Education Division, with the aim of understanding how we could deal with bullying in the Malawian schools.

1.2.Problem statement

This study aimed to explore the bullying experiences of students in secondary schools in Mzimba North District. Bullying is probably now regarded as one of the most pressing issues affecting children in schools. Literature also reveals that bullying has been increasing globally and Malawi is not an exception despite that a lot of research has been done in the field and solutions have been suggested all along such as Anti-bullying policies. For example, UNESCO (2019) noted that bullying is prevalent almost in each and every country, and established that almost one in three (32%) children globally has been the victim of bullying on one or more days in the preceding month, and that one in thirteen (7.3%) has been bullied on six or more days over the same period. Morretti and Herkovits (2021) report that recently there has been much interest in cyber bullying, which can be broadly defined as any bullying which is performed via electronic means, such as mobile phones or the internet. One in three children reports having been bullied at some point in their lives, and 10–14% experience chronic bullying lasting for more than 6 months. This means

that the new technological developments bring with them new ways of bullying which emphasize the need for research to be undertaken to find ways of curbing bullying in schools. Regarding anti-bullying policies in Malawi schools, while the Education Act does not specifically focus on bullying, there are broader efforts to address violence and safety in educational settings (Education Act, 2013.) Schools in Malawi have put in place their own anti-bullying policies which aim to create safe and respectful learning environments. But despite all these efforts there are still continued media reports of bullying in schools such as the bullying allegation at Kalibu Academy which prompted the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to deploy a team to investigate the issue. Only last week, it was also reported of a teacher administering corporal punishment (kneeling on the floor for one hour) to a child because of making noise in class (Sunday Times, 2023).

Furthermore, the researcher who has been a teacher for over 10 years has observed and agrees that indeed bullying is rampant and exists in secondary schools in Malawi.The researcher has observed that learners absented themselves after being bullied and after bullying others and this affected their learning. In some cases parents wanted to intervene and this created problems for bullies, victims and educators. Bullying can negatively impact on learners and staff and may cause physical, psychological and emotional injury which can last a lifetime if not attended to.

Arslan (2021) claim in a study that experiences of bullying in general are associated with reduced well-being and that victims of bullying may have impaired concentration and decrease academic performance. This made the researcher realise the importance of exploring learners' experiences of bullying and the effects of these experiences on them. The study would assist in the understanding of what exactly constitutes bullying, which should inform the basis for the strategies to be employed to alleviate bullying in the schools. The researcher also drew from other researchers views (Temko, 2019) that future research in this area should include more qualitative studies of learners' perspectives of measures to stop bullying when it takes place in schools.

In line with this advice, the literature gap and all an anecdotal evidence presented, the study aimed to unearth learners' experiences of bullying and the implications of bullying on learners' social and academic lives as well as the strategies that learners suggest could be employed to address bullying in the school in Mzimba North District.

1.3. Purpose of the study

The fundamental objective of the study was to explore learners' experiences of bullying that they encounter during their secondary schooling in Mzimba North District when they are pursuing their academic studies.

1.4. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To examine learners' experiences of bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North District
2. To identify factors that perpetuate bullying in schools in Mzimba North District
3. To determine effects of bullying experiences on learners' academic and social lives in secondary schools in Mzimba North District.
4. To develop strategies that can used to address bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North District.

1.5. Significance of the study

Considering that there is little literature about the issues surrounding bullying in Malawi, there are several potential implications of this study. Policy makers and other education stakeholders can use the findings to identify areas that require attention when adopting and implementing anti-bullying policies. It is important to understand the implementation of anti-bullying policies in order to avoid not addressing the problem at hand. The study would assist in the understanding of what exactly constitutes bullying, which should inform the basis for the strategies to be employed to alleviate bullying in the schools. In addition, the significance of learners' experiences on bullying to scholarship is substantial. Research has shown that students' personal experiences with bullying can have a profound impact on their academic performance, mental health and overall well-being. By acknowledging and understanding these experiences, educators and scholars can inform evidence-based policies and interventions, create supportive learning environments, foster empathy and understanding among peers, develop effective bullying prevention programs, improve academic outcomes and student engagement, enhance mental health support and resources, promote social-emotional learning and skills development, encourage student voice and agency, build inclusive and respectful school cultures and advance social justice and equity in education

By centering learners' lived experiences, scholarship can move beyond mere theory and instead drive practical solutions to address bullying's harmful effects.

1.6. Theoretical framework

Bullying is a complex social dynamic that can best be understood by using various Theoretical Frameworks. The one adopted in this study is that of power relational theory (Radtke & Stam, 1994). Power is defined as the ability of individuals and groups of people to impose their will on others despite resistance either in the form of withholding regularly supplied rewards or in the form of punishment in as much as the former as the latter constitute, in effect, a negative sanction. Andrew et.al (2023), definition of power is consistent with Olweus's definition which asserts that for an incident to be considered as bullying there should be an imbalance of power in which the victim is unable to defend him/herself or is helpless in opposing the bully. The latter aligns with a finding Menesini & Salmivali, (2017) which states that there is a power aspect of social relationships which is based on physical size, natural strength and the ability of an intelligent learner to dominate a less intelligent person. Therefore an abuse of power leads to unhealthy human relationships in communities and at school.

A significant aspect of the power relations theory is the claim that the exercise of power is triggered by rewards expected from others (Radtke & Stam, 1994:3). Most learners who perpetrate bullying want to impress their friends or wish to be regarded as powerful. The exercise of power is a voluntary form of behaviour by an individual (Menesini & Salmivali, (2017). Perpetrators of bullying at school do it willfully and in most cases the perpetrators are happy to inflict pain on other learners. Bullying involves a dynamic interaction between the perpetrator and the victim. The bully increases in power, and the victim loses power. As a result, it is difficult for the victim to respond or to cope with the problem. It has also been suggested that school bullying requires three criteria: repetitiveness, intentional harm-doing, and a power imbalance favouring the perpetrator (Olweus, 2013). Research has shown that repetitiveness is indeed linked to a greater degree of harm (Kaufman et al., 2020). Therefore the theory of power relations has been carefully selected for this study for the following reasons:

Firstly, the definition of bullying mentioned earlier draws attention to an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1993 cited in Andrews et.al 2023) which is embedded in the power relations theory.

Thus bullying is defined and analysed in terms of the power of an individual or a group of people over others. In addition, all social practices, including traditional gender roles, are shaped by power relations because of the conflict between male and female dominance. A power imbalance is perhaps the most critical aspect of Olweus's definition of bullying (2013) and the aspect he most emphasized in differentiating bullying from other forms of aggression. Olweus argued that the bully has more power than the person being victimized, which makes it difficult for victims to defend themselves (Olweus, 1993 cited in Andrews et.al 2023). Power plays a pivotal role not only in peer relationships at school, but also across human relationships and society in general (Wolke, et.al 2015). In this light, Olweus's emphasis on the abuse of power captures behaviour that is important beyond the school context. Abuses of power lie at the heart of the human experience. Abuses of power characterize, allow for, and can even encourage sibling bullying (Wolke et al., 2015).

Secondly, gender bullying at schools is also informed by power relations. Most boys bully younger or smaller boys and girls as a result of adhering to a male domination practice which denotes that men are more powerful than women. Paradoxically there is also infra-sex bullying where some boys bully other boys and some girls bully other girls at school. This latter phenomenon makes the gender theory a limited theory in terms of which to understand bullying (Andrews et.al 2023).

Thirdly, the power relations is used to enable readers and school authorities to see the influence of an abuse of power by school authorities in addressing bullying among learners. Different disciplinary actions have been used as responses to student misbehaviour in schools and may vary by country. School disciplinary practices are widely used in North Cyprus public high schools (Ozada, 2018). Hemphill, et.al (2014) indicated that school suspension and referring the student to the principal's office is used frequently for inappropriate student behaviours such as bullying and school rule violations. However, the act of suspending students from school may worsen rather than improve their behavior. Therefore school authorities also exercise an abuse of power in addressing bullying. All bullies believe that they have power over victims. One has to go deeper and investigate the effects of this power imbalance which exists in schools among learners. The researcher believed that once effects of this are identified it would be easier to develop strategies to address the problem and to minimise or even to eradicate it from schools.

1.7. Limitations of the study

This study, just like any type of academic research has some limitations that have implications for further research. This research was limited to schools in Mzimba North District. The involvement of other schools outside the district would improve generalization of this research. Future research should consider increasing the sample size of students in order to explore more on their experience on bullying. The other study limitation was bordering on self-reports being palpable to exaggerations and underreporting as well as social desirability bias considering the sensitive nature of the research problem.

1.8. Delimitations of the study

This study was limited to two secondary schools in Northern Education Division. The Northern Education Division has eight subdivisions, but the study was restricted to Mzimba North District only.

1.9. Organisation of the study

Chapter One

This chapter provides background, statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. It also outlines objectives that guided the study. The significance of the study, limitations and delimitation of the study are also provided. The chapter also gives the theoretical framework, outline of the study and the chapter summary.

Chapter Two

In this chapter efforts have been made to review literature related to bullying in schools. It discusses some studies under the following sub-headings: understanding bullying in schools, forms of bullying in schools, factors that perpetuates bullying in schools, effects of social identities on bullying, effects of bullying on learners and strategies to combat bullying in schools

Chapter Three

This chapter focuses on the discussion of research methodology and the study design. Its purpose is to clarify the procedures which were followed when conducting research on learners' experiences of bullying in co-educational secondary schools in Mzimba North District. These procedures are discussed in detail through the following subsections; it commences with the research paradigm, research design, the study sample and sampling techniques, methods and tools

of data collection, the ethical considerations, reliability and trustworthiness, method of data analysis.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents, analyses and interprets the findings of the study. It addresses learners' understanding of bullying, learners' experiences of bullying, bullying hot spots in the school, factors influencing bullying in the school, how social identities perpetuate bullying, effects of bullying on children's schooling as well as strategies which can be employed to address bullying.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents the summary of the study findings. It also highlights the research's recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

1.10. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided the background and justification for the study. More importantly, it has explained the aims and objectives of the study. The study objectives which guided the study and the theoretical framework used have been also provided in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Chapter overview

Currently there is a growing body of literature on bullying in secondary schools globally. In this chapter efforts have been made to review literature related to bullying in schools. It discusses some studies under the following sub-headings: understanding bullying in schools, forms of bullying in schools, factors that perpetuates bullying in schools, effects of social identities on bullying, effects of bullying on learners and strategies to combat bullying in schools

2.1. Bullying overview

2.1.1. Bullying definition

Bullying is traditionally defined as repeated aggression or harmful actions directed at individuals who are disadvantaged or less powerful in their interactions with the perpetrators (Eriksen, 2018). Research on bullying began over 40 years ago and was defined as the aggressive behaviour, which is conducted intentionally by an individual or group of people frequently for some time against victims who have no ability to defend themselves (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Interest and studies on bullying originated more than 40 years ago (Olweus, 1973, 1978 cited in Menesini & Salmivali, 2017)) and defined this behaviour as aggressive, intentional acts carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself (Olweus, 1993,cited in Menesini & Salmivali, 2017).

However, there is an ongoing debate among scholars about how to define bullying. Bullying is the repeated aggressive behavior perpetuated by a bully or a group of bullies who victimize weaker peers systematically (Olweus, 2013). Bullying can be classified into physical, verbal, and social. Bullying among adolescents has gotten much attention through research studies focusing on peer-to-peer bullying in academic contexts.

Bullying is an aggressive behaviour shown by repetition and an imbalance of power. In involves a repeat abuse of power where a person repetitively abuses their power. The person being bullied who is the victim cannot defend him or herself for various reasons such as less physical strength and being less psychologically resilient than the bully (Ghani, et.al 2020). Also, bullying can be defined as the dynamic interaction between the aggressor and the victim at which the power of the perpetrators increases while the power of the victims diminishes. As the victims lose their power,

they are unable to cope with or respond to the problem (Menesini et al. 2012; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). According to Armitage (2021) bullying can either take place in the family home, this one is called sibling bullying and or at school which is called peer bullying. He further indicate that there are 3 types of bullying namely; traditional bullying, cyber bullying and sexual bullying.

Bullying can also be described as any behavior a person evident with a goal to cause pain either physically or psychologically on the victim and it involves the powerful attacking the powerless. It often takes various forms with the most frequent being physical, verbal, or social forms of bullying, such as exclusion (Efobi, 2014). So, usually bullying occurs in three forms namely the physical, the social and the verbal forms.

Bullying most often times involves engaging in repeated actions, such as physical contact, verbal assault, nonverbal gesture, or deliberate social exclusion, and intentionally designed to cause harm on individuals who are unable to defend themselves (Feldman, 2014). Bullying is a very negative offence that is described as repetitive behaviour that harms or hurts another person physically, socially or emotionally; and is an imbalance of power in which the target cannot stop the behaviour and defend themselves, National Bullying Prevention Centre, (2016). Bullying is the act of intentionally harming someone, verbally, psychologically, or physically. Bullying is often repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power. The acts of bullying include hitting, pushing, or unwelcome physical contact, teasing and name-calling, reiterated omission of an individual from games and activities, sending threatening or mean-spirited messages in the form of text, chat or voicemails, and spreading of deleterious rumours (Efobu, 2014). It could be a threat or physical use of force aiming at an individual, another person, or a specific group, which can result in injury, death, physical damage, and or mental disorder.

Bullying usually takes several forms, from direct physical harm ,physical bullying to verbal taunts and threats ,verbal bullying; to exclusion, humiliation, and rumour-spreading, social bullying to electronic harassment using text, emails, or online medium, cyber bullying. Although physical and cyber bullying is often of greatest concern, social and verbal bullying is the most common form experienced by students (Vaillancourt, 2010). Bullying is usually inherited by some individuals from their parents to achieve some goals forcefully (Mitchel, 2015). Also, interaction in the culture, school, and other socio-political settings could cause others to learn bullying in one way or the other.

Bullying involves the bully, the victim and the bystanders, and has a negative impact on the health and academic performance of teenagers involved regardless of their level of participation (Volk et al. 2017).Children who bully often suffer from low school bonding and adjustment, which can be associated with low school competence and increased truancy. Victims of bullying are more likely to feel socially unaccepted, and this weakens their ability to stand for themselves and even fight for certain positions (Volk et al. 2017). Additionally, Erikson (2018) posits that in situations where someone cannot stand for themselves, he or she becomes more prone to becoming easy targets. Some scholars refer to bullying as a combination of verbal and physical aggression directed from the agent towards the victim (Ngakane et al., 2012). In this study it is further indicated an overwhelming majority of participants in all five secondary schools attributed the escalation of bullying in schools directly to the influence at the family level. Broken homes, poor upbringing, the absence of positive role models and the influence of media violence on learners have had a negative impact on the culture of discipline, teaching and learning in the classroom and the general ethos of schools.

2.1.2. Forms of bullying in schools

School bullying can be described as victimization and intimidation of students by their fellow peers in a school environment (Adewuyi, 2023). Bullying among school adolescent is a very old and known phenomenon.School bullying and peer victimization are major social problems affecting children and adolescents in schools in all parts of the world (Hong & Espalege, 2012). About one in five elementary schools and 1 in 10 middle school students in the United States is bullied (Volk et al. 2017). Approximately 15% of Swedish school children are involved either as victims or bullies, and even a greater number are involved if assistants to the bully or defenders of the victim are included (Hong & Espalege, 2012). Research studies report high prevalence of bullying worldwide and resultant increases in somatic complaints, depression, anxiety, school refusal, and an overall lower self-esteem in students who are bullied (Volk, 2017). There are several forms in which bullying presents itself in schools;

2.1.2.1. Physical bullying

Physical bullying can involve beating, punching, kicking, tripping children, stealing money, or destroying personal properties (Kanmodi et al., 2020). Itegi (2017) in a study conducted in Kenya found that physical bullying is very common among boys while verbal bullying is the common

type among girls, and their study recommends empowerment of teachers to enhance supportive school environment and collaboration among Kenyan education stakeholders. According to Pabian and Vanderbosch (2016), physical bullying occurs when peers use their bodily strength or physique to dominate others. It is manifested through hitting, kicking, pinching, pushing, and taking or damaging victims' properties. Social bullying involves harming relationships or another person's reputation. It manifests through intentionally excluding someone from activities, persuading others not to be friends with the victim, spreading false rumours, and embarrassing the victim in public. In contrast, cyber bullying is perpetrated through use of electronic technology: mobile devices, computers and social media (Lehman, 2015). Furthermore, Lehman argues that cyber bullying is an emerging type of bullying that has not been studied adequately in developing countries. Physical bullying usually occurs when one individual physically attacks another on purpose' with the intention of harassing, intimidating or humiliating them.

2.1.2.2. Verbal bullying

Verbal bullying occurs when a learner or a group of learners use(s) language to hurt another learner or group of learners (Culpeper, 2011). Direct verbal bullying happens when the expression used by a learner does not conform to the values and norms of a cultural group (Culpeper, 2011). In a study conducted in Qatar, Kamal (2023) found that verbal bullying was the most used type of bullying by students in schools. Kamal et.al (2023) on the other hand, defines verbal bullying as referring to use of either spoken or written words to demean others. It manifests through name calling, inappropriate sexual comments, abusive language, and threats.

According to Kamal et.al (2023) verbal bullying includes such actions as hurtful name calling; persistent teasing; gossiping and racist comments. Verbal bullying could be direct or indirect and is repeatedly referred to as emotional or psychological bullying. Direct verbal bullying is done face to face. Usually it includes name-calling; insults; put-downs; harassment and intentionally ignoring an individual. Indirect verbal bullying is done behind the victim's back and includes acts such as gossiping which may result in lowered self-esteem and influence the opinion of others about the victim. Verbal bullying includes abusive phone calls, extorting money or material possessions, extortion or threats of violence, name calling, racist remarks, 12 sexually suggestive or abusive language, spiteful teasing and spreading false or hateful rumour.

Researchers agree that verbal bullying is not easy to deal with even when reported because bullies deny having uttered the words. Furthermore, she indicated that in the absence of evidence in the form of testimonies from witnesses or bystanders, verbal bullying becomes difficult to attend to. On the contrary, the researcher's understanding of bullying is when the same person is repeatedly reported on the same issue. This becomes enough evidence because it would have been reported several times and therefore cannot be denied (Kamal et.al, 2023)

2.1.2.3. Social bullying

Menesisi (2017) relational or social bullying, which is sometimes referred to as social bullying, involves the systematic ruining of a bullied child's sense of self, and the victim's subsequent exclusion from social or peer groups. Social or relational bullying takes place when the victim is intentionally excluded from group activities and socialisation. Social bullying on the other hand, often refers to any instance where bullies use indirect methods to exclude their victims from activities, spread rumors about them, or get other students to ignore them.

Torres, et al. (2020) adds that this type of bullying is aimed at manipulating relationships and includes indirect behaviours such as gossiping and spreading rumours and direct behaviours such as making racial insults or ignoring the victim. Other examples of social bullying include aggressive stares; rolling of eyes; sighs; frowns; sneers; snickers; hostile body language; shaking fists and looks or glances that contain subtle meanings of a nasty nature. In addition to social or rational 24 bullying, Menesisi (2017) indicates that this type of bullying is very common in girls by rumour spreading.

2.1.2.4. Cyber-bullying

Cyber bullying is a relatively new type of bullying in addition to the traditional forms of direct physical, direct verbal and indirect bullying. The widespread use of electronic devices has reached almost complete high among adolescents in more countries, with users checking their devices hundreds of times and for hours each day. Studies that have examined gender differences in victimization by cyber bullying have found mixed results. Cyber bullying has been defined as any aggression done using electronic media including the Internet, mobile technology and computers (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). In addition, ccyber bullying is any aggression done using electronic media including the Internet, mobile technology and computers (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Cyber bullying is broadly defined as wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of

electronic devices such as computers and cell phones, as in emailing or posting of embarrassing and humiliating internet messages about the victim (Drubina at al., 2023). Phones in schools has improved the teaching and learning environments for both teachers and students (Zuze et al., 2016). However, it has also elevated the delinquency of bullying in school grounds and challenged how school policies are executed when it comes to mobile bullying.

Some studies found that girls and boys are equally likely to be victims of cyber bullying (Kamal et.al, 2023). Trolley and Hanel (2010) assert that cyber-bullying is the traditional form of bullying that has transformed into a more dangerous form. Trolley and Hanel (2010) found that instances of cyber-bullying are increasing and have destructive consequences on learners as well. While, Drubina et.al (2023) noted that although there is a prevalence of cyber bullying in most schools but they found that more students were involved in traditional bullying than cyber bullying. For instance 23.35% of students were involved in traditional and school based bullying and only 16.84% were involved in cyber bullying. This implied that although cyber bullying is prevalent, traditional bullying is the one which is common in schools.

The researcher believes that cellular phones, in particular, because of common availability, are a powerful means with which to bully others. One can send frightening text messages, take awkward pictures of them and post them directly on the internet. Cyber-bullying can also be regarded as repetitive when a message, photograph or video-clip is taken once and sent to more than one individual who in turn forward this to other people.Cyber bullying is a challenge for teachers because they cannot easily detect when a child is being cyber bullied (Zuze et al., 2016) as it would be with the case when traditionally bullied. Cyber bullying has some similarities with traditional bullying in that the intention is to frequently harm another person but in this case through sending threatening messages, emails, or bad pictures that are captured while the victim is not aware. The difference in the two is that in cyber bullying, the bully cannot always see the reaction of their victims (Zuze et al., 2016), they can hide their real identity when online.As much as cyber bullying occurs outside school premises, it negatively impacts the learning environment for other children.

Cyber bullying has some similarities with traditional bullying in that the intention is to frequently harm another person by in this case sending threatening messages, emails, or bad pictures that are captured while the victim is not aware. The difference in the two is that cyber the bully cannot always see the reaction of their victims (Zuze et al., 2016), they can hide their real identity when

online. As much as cyber bullying occurs outside school premises, its negative impacts the learning environment for other children.

2.1.2.5. Gender bullying

Studies indicate that different genders bully differently and are exposed to different types of bullying. An exploratory research by Gudyanga, et.al (2014) reports that boys are the main perpetrators of bullying in Zimbabwean secondary schools; and their bullying behaviour is influenced by home-based factors, peers and school-based factors. While, Kallmen (2021) found that boys were the ones being bullied more frequently than girls which lead to worse mental health outcomes. This study also noted that there was an association between bullying at school and mental health of the adolescents.

While Chiu and Vargo (2022) examined the association between gender differences in bullying and suicidal behaviour, as well as examined the association between gender differences in the selected risk factors associated with suicidal behaviour among secondary school adolescents in the Philippines. Results show that the overall prevalence of adolescents being bullied was 47.9%; female students who reported being bullied were 49.8%, male students who were exposed to bullying were 45.2%.In this study it was found that male students exhibited more vulnerability to suicide attempts and less vulnerability to thinking about or planning suicide as expected.

2.2. Factors that perpetuates bullying in schools

According to literature both local and international there are various factors that perpetuate bullying in schools. Fareo (2015) identified some of the factors which perpetuate bullying as societal factors, biological factors, peer group influence and environmental factors. Terry (2010) reports that bullying in schools continues as part of a complex social and cultural phenomenon, which might be informed by a range of factors including environmental and familial influences, as well as social expectations. For example, Coyne & Monks (2011) claim that learners who witness domestic violence between adults in the homes, which most commonly occurs between spouses or partners, plays a vital role in informing bullying among learners at school. This is because children can learn to bully from incidents they observe occurring at home. Adewuyi (2023) agrees to this assertion when the study found that there is a strong connection between

bullying among secondary school adolescents, parenting process, neighborhood and school factors.

Lee (2014) explain that the physical and emotional differences between children can give rise to problems when children at different stages of development are in school together. For example, those who begin a growth stage earlier than others can place them at an advantage physically. Psychological changes in adolescence can lead them to feel more independent of adult parents and teachers. Hormonal changes can also affect sexual awareness. These complex changes may sometimes instill feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

Another theory regarding the causes of bullying was put forward by Lee (2014) who argues that learners with inadequate parenting and dysfunctional homes may exhibit aggressive and disruptive behavior at school. Learners who are exposed to violence at home often direct their anger onto their peers at school (Lee, 2014). On the other hand, other causes of bullying are social issues such as unemployment, and poor physical conditions of schools.

It has also been indicated that environmental influences can be considered in interaction with nutritional elements, to result in either positive or negative behaviours in the child (Coyne & Monks, 2011). Van Schie (2012) indicates that bullies often come from dysfunctional home environment. Similarly, the learners in this study came from impoverished informal settlements where crime and domestic violence are the order of the day since their schools at located at trading centres where drinking joints are very close. Lestari & Koto (2019) found that one of the most common contributor to bullying has been noted to be socio economic status. This determines ones risk of being bullied with children from the lower socio economic background being at a higher risk. While Lowe et al., (2020) add that communities with a high crime rate are the most likely to engage and record higher rate of bullying.

As stated above, Coyne and Monks (2011) illustrate that aggressive behaviour and inequalities of power are common in human groups. Fried and Sosland (2011) clarify that schools encourage bullying behaviours when incidents of bullying are either ignored or overlooked. The belief is that bullying is one of the issues one has to pass through when going to school. This is not true as Downer (2012) hint that there is a misperception amongst many people that bullying is just a part

of a child's development and the child will outgrow these behaviours. This is the reason why many learners keep quiet about bullying and many educators fail to respond.

At the same time Fried and Sosland (2011) report that their study discovered that teens who watched three or more hours of TV a day are five times more likely to commit aggressive acts in the next several years than those who watched TV less than one hour a day. There is a link between violence on television and violent and aggressive behaviour in young people. Children like coping and imitating what they are observing, so if children are exposed to a lot of aggressive and violent behaviour they will definitely copy and practice those actions to other learners. When children are exposed to violent behaviour they believe that the only way to solve any kind of conflict is through violence.

Language and social identity may also be the cause of bullying in schools. Marginalised groups such as immigrants or refugees are less likely to report to authorities because they are new in the school and do not know and speak the local language well. This may make them too shy to report to teachers about bullying occurring to them Also in relation to social identity, Swearer et al. (2010) found that students with for example, learning, physical and psychological disabilities are victimised more frequently than their non-disabled peers.

Other factors may include children who are born out of wedlock who are less likely to have an authority figure or role model to teach them social acceptable behaviour. This may apply in broken homes and two-income families, where one or both parents work tend to result in children being left unsupervised after school and suffer from neglect due to lack of parental involvement (Darney, 2009). Aboagye et.al (2021) found that adolescents with a history of anxiety, suicidal idealization, suicidal attempt, current use of drugs are more likely to be bullied. However, adolescents who had peer support were less likely to be victims of bullying than those who did not.

2.2.1. Effects of Social Identities on Bullying

2.2.1.1 Gender

Gender is viewed by literature as one of the factors which may relate to learners' experiences of bullying. In a report on cyber-bullying by Van Schie (2012) a high school girl was attacked by another girl after a series of online attacks by her and her friends. Van Schie (2012) reports that

Child-line received calls related to bullying at the rate of about 25 cases a day in Gauteng only. Bullying is not limited to boys or girls, townships or suburbs, poor or rich. This is experienced by learners from all environments. This indicates that bullying occurs among learners from all places and among learners from all social backgrounds and social development.

Downer (2012) states that boys and girls generally use different methods to bully fellow pupils but engage in direct bullying in a physical manner.

2.2.1.2. Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is also seen as a factor which has an impact on learners' experiences of bullying in schools. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students report victimization at school. This victimization includes physical, verbal harassment, isolation, stigmatization and physical assault (Swearer, et al., 2010). Kurki-Kangas et.al (2018) in a study aimed to explore the associations between sexual orientation and involvement in bullying as perpetrator or victim, it was revealed that Sexual minority status may be a factor that predisposes adolescents to subjection to bullying.Sexual orientation refers to the sex of those to whom an individual is erotically attracted.such people are subjected to bullying approximately twice as commonly as heterosexual youth. Bisexual youth and those questioning their orientation report as much or even more subjection to bullying than those with same-sex interests (Kurki-Kangas, et.al. 2018). The study further revealed that in both sexes in the comprehensive school sample, subjection to bullying was more common among those reporting same-sex attraction and both-sex attraction than among those reporting opposite-sex attraction.

2.2.1.3. Economic Status

According to Tippert and Wolke (2014) there is literature that examined the relationship between bullying and social economic status and findings tend to suggest that victims, bully-victims, and bullies are more likely to come from low socio- economic background. It was also revealed in this study that victimisation was positively related to low social economic status.

2.3. Effects of bullying on learners
Literature is awash with how bullying can have adverse negative impact on the school going children. In fact bullying can affect everyone, those who are bullied, those who bully and those

who witness bullying. It can be associated with many negative outcomes for instance on mental health, substance use and suicide (Dieter & Lereya, 2015).

Bimblecombe et.. al. (2018) established that bullying can contribute to absenteeism from class attendance which can result in poor grades. This study also noted that even the children who bully others may also be at risk of harm and more likely to display later violent behaviors and drug abuse. On the other hand, Ossa et al. (2019) found that the bullied adolescents suffered from symptoms like concentration difficulties, nightmares, sleep disorders, depression and fear in which affected their quality of education and their health life in general. And in a study conducted in Malaysia, Liew et.al (2023) revealed that bullying was connected with suicide attempts among school going children. In fact this study established that at least 6.8% of school adolescents had attempted suicide and 16.2% of the total 27,497 adolescents who took part in this study has been bullied.In a study dealing specifically with bullying and academic performance, it was suggested that bullying can affect the academic performance of the victim, the bully and even the bystander (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

While victims may be impacted directly by anxiety, bystanders may experience guilt and evasion as a result of witnessing violence. Furthermore, the correlation between poor academic performance and aggression has been noted as a potential factor in bullying.The physical and psychological problems associated with bullying also make it hard for learners to concentrate and can negatively affect school performance. Bullying brings negative health consequences for both bullies and victims, and it can have a negative impact on the bystanders as well (Wolke et.al, 2015).Studies have also linked victimisation to suicidal ideation (Holt et al., 2015)

2.3.1. Social Life

Several factors have been attributed to nurture bullying in a community. Deoliveira, et.al (2020) found that family systems have been noted to influence and contribute on adolescents' social behaviours at school including aggressive behaviours like bullying. Wang et.al (2021) in a study in China found that the family demographic factors were closely related to adolescents' bullying behaviours at school. This study further revealed that migrant status, migrants/local residents, was the only socio demographic factor associated with bullying witnessing, with adolescents from migrant families observing more incidents of bullying at school. Dey et al., (2016) posits that there

are various other household demographic characteristics, such as family structures and socioeconomic status that could also be related to school bullying. Oliveira, et al (2020) found that positive family interactions may protect adolescents from being involved in school bullying (both as perpetrators and victims). Evidence also shows that adolescents who have good relationships with their parents are less likely to be bullies or victims. There are initial indications in the recent studies that those who have been cyber bullied at early young age during adolescence are also likely to be suffer from mental health and well-being problems during adulthood (Nicolai et al., 2018). In a study conducted in Lebanon, Awad et.al (2021) it was revealed that bullying perpetration is significantly associated with parental status, child abuse, internet addiction, and social fear.

2.3.2. Academic Life

Academic achievement is the first aspect which influences bullying at school. Bullying has also had an impact on the victim's capacity to learn and attitude toward learning. Therefore, bullied children live within fear, self-blame, feel weak and it affects their personality traits and self-confidence, so this situation makes them unable to study well and they might hate going to school. Furthermore, they will lose their opportunities to participate with others or enjoy school activities. Hence, they will gain less academic performance and low educational attainment. Glew (2015) investigated the short and long-term effects of bullying on student achievement. The study found that the relationship among harassing and scholarly execution varied relying upon the scholastic accomplishment of the understudy. The association between bullying and primary school in Denmark was investigated by Mundbjerg et.al (2014). Bullied students had more regrettable scholarly outcome in ninth grade, and the impacts of tormenting are more noteworthy assuming that it is more serious. Tormenting is better known among young men than among young ladies.

According to Smith (2016), bullying has a harmful effect on children' academic performance. For instance, when a child has been the victim of bullying, it can be very difficult for them to focus on their schoolwork since they are often spending most of their time healing from the physical and mental trauma of the incident. Bullying is associated with approximately 160,000 adolescents missing school every day in the United States (15% of those who do not show up to school every day); One out of every ten students drops out or changes schools because of bullying (Baron, 2016); homicide perpetrators are twice as likely as homicide victims to have been victims of

bullying; suicidal thoughts are two to nine times more prevalent among bullying victims than among non-victims (Gunnison, et.al, 2016).

2.3.3. Psychological Effects

The consequences of bullying can manifest immediately and can continue to affect the bully and the victim well into adulthood. The effects of bullying on school going children are numerous. Bullying is a widespread and serious problem that might influence both mental and psychical well-being as well as school performance and social life (Mundbjerb et.al 2014). Students who are bullied usually will experience, depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy, decreased academic achievement and school participation. They are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.

Shayo & Lawala (2019) in their study in Tanzania, established that one third of the school adolescents were bullied one to more than 12 times in the past 12 months. It was further revealed that there was a strong connection between suicidal behaviors and other psychological factors such as loneliness and anxiety. Bully-victims, victims and bullies had a significantly higher risk for psychosomatic problems than non-involved age-mates (Gini & Pozzoli, 2015),

Cyber-bullying, electronic media used to harass and to intimidate others, also results in children committing suicide. Fried & Sosland (2011) agree that bullying has health implications. Youth suicide is a health issue. Many mental health professionals report increasing connections between bullying and sleep disorders and eating disorder problems for children (Fried & Sosland, 2011). Maphumulo (2012) reports that one parent gave up her cushy job and started an anti-bullying programme at school after discovering that her daughter took a bottle of pain killers, trying to commit suicide because she was harassed and bullied by her schoolmates. This is an indication that when bullying is bottled inside it can create severe damage in the life of a learner. It can destroy the future of a child because if the child is always exposed to bullying and nothing is done to control bullying the child can take wrong decisions such as quitting school. The child may grow up with this hatred and may be aggressive to people who are innocent. It is clear that even the health of the child may be impaired by bullying.

2.4. Strategies for combating bullying in schools

Literature suggests various strategies which can be used to address bullying in schools. The effects on children and young people could be disastrous if schools and communities do not address bullying behaviours.Teachers need to work with students at class level to develop class rules against bullying. Terry (2010) suggests that on-going staff development including prevention and awareness programmes, may help teachers and administrators change the culture of bullying and harassment in schools.

While Kamal et.al (2023) in their study in Qatar in order to fight the problem of bullying recommend several factors like for instance; providing adult supervision in all school areas, increasing availability of adults in the areas described as unsafe by the students, allocating different break timings for students of different age groups, designing entertaining programs during times of students' gathering and break times, integrating anti-bullying education within the school curriculum, conducting relevant competitions on anti-bullying knowledge, designing a peer mentor program for perpetrators and conducting future research that takes in consideration the aforementioned limitations of this study with especial focus on comparing governmental to private schools.

In order to have a bully free school, teachers should listen to the complaint of the learner and do not let it just pass and keep record of all incidences of bullying. Both bully and victims should know that records are kept. The school also need to provide good supervision of student activities. Adults must also be prepared to intervene quickly in bullying situations. Ncube, et al. (2015) study recommends that schools should encourage teachers to engage all learners in productive work all the time; and also liaise with parents on best ways of guiding the behaviour of learners who display characteristics of bullies. Some teachers will need specific training on bullying prevention curriculum, but all school personnel need to know how to identify and respond to bullying, as well as how to model and reinforce positive problem-solving. They should be aware of the the symptoms of victimisation, how to reach out to victims and the etiquette for contacting the appropriate staff members or a student's parents (Olweus, 2013).

Another important strategy of counteracting bullying problems and creating a better social climate is for teachers and students to agree on few rules about bullying. Bullies need to be given a clear

message that treating others badly is not okay. Parents, teachers, bus drivers and other kids need to convey this message. Victims also need to be assisted to overcome the pain of being bullied. They also need to learn how to act more assertively and confidently in general so that bullies do not see them as easy targets.
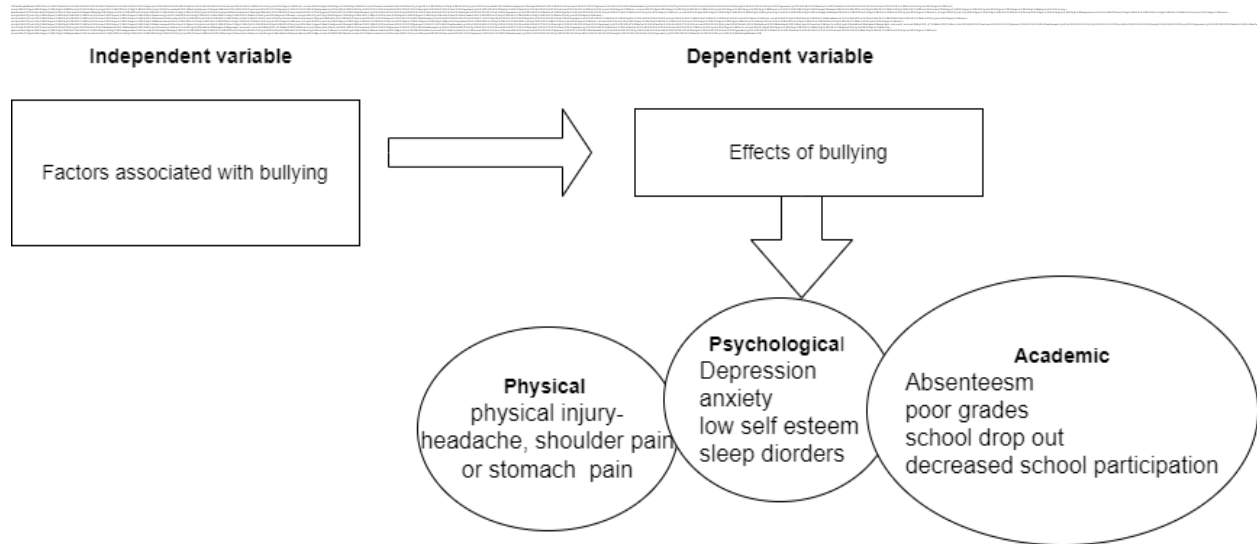
This means that all groups need to be represented in the development of anti-bullying strategies. If all groups are involved, they will own the programme, be loyal to it and be interested in its implementation and it will be easy for all the groups to arrive at any kind of agreement. Van Schie (2012) says that students indicated that they need clear anti-bullying rules and regulations, conflict resolution skills and alternatives to violence. Creecy (2012) highlights the fact that the Gauteng provincial education department is rolling out its own plans to combat bullying in all schools. Victims can be open enough and talk to parents, tell a friend, report to a teacher, talk to a guidance counsellor, stay with safe friends, playing a safe area or in the playground which is close to adults, try to befriend with the bullies, and practice using self-asserting replies in response to the bully's comments.

Olweus (2013) is of the view that praise and friendly attention from the teachers is an important means of influencing student behaviour. Generous praise, both in connection with student's behaviour towards one another and with school work, can be expected to have favourable effects on the class climate. In this way it will be easier for students to accept criticism of undesirable behaviour and to attempt change. If the student feels appreciated and relatively liked, he/she will try to change (Olweus, 2013). These strategies make it clear that everybody can make a difference in the school as well as in homes to help minimise or even eradicate bullying. It is important for all stake holders to commit and dedicate themselves in banishing incidents of bullying in the schools. Olweus, (2013) suggests the following interventions: the school should develop a student watch programme by training student volunteers to patrol and report instances of bullying, in the classroom, teachers may use stories and drama to create awareness of bullying, and bully courts can be set up for addressing bullying issues, again the school should provide training for students in problem-solving approaches, which include conflict resolution training, conflict management and quality circles.

2.5. Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework illustrates what the researcher expects to find through the research (Swaen, 2015). It defines the relevant variables for the study and maps out how they might relate to each other. This section showed the relationship between the variables in this research.

Independent variable   Dependent variable

Factors associated with bullying → Effects of bullying

Physical
physical injury-
headache, shoulder pain
or stomach pain

Psychological
Depression
anxiety
low self esteem
sleep diorders

Academic
Absenteesm
poor grades
school drop out
decreased school participation

The above conceptual framework shows the relationship between bullying and its effects. The above framework shows that bullying affects the physical, psychological and academic lives of the victims. There is a link between bullying and poor grades in school, this is so because bullying makes it difficult for a students to focus and concentrate in class due to the physical and emotional shock.

2.6. Conclusion

The literature reviewed focused on the understanding of bullying, factors that affects bullying, social identities that affect bullying, spaces that promote bullying in the schools, effects of bullying and strategies for combating bullying in schools. It is obvious that bullying is a serious problem in secondary schools; and it negatively affects learners who are either bullies, victims or bystanders. It is therefore highly important for students, teachers, school administrators and the government through Ministry of Education to ensure the control of bullying in secondary schools by employing appropriate intervention strategies. It is also discovered in literature that sometimes incidents of bullying are ignored and taken for granted by both parents and teachers. Some people believe that bullying is part of children's growing up. They do not understand that bullying has a negative

impact on learners which might cost the children's lives if ignored. It became evident that bullying is also a result of the exercise of power to show domination and the subordination of those who are powerless, something which is undesirable. This study encouraged learners to share their experiences of bullying so as to get assistance and to expose the bullying that is occurring in schools and in communities

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0. Chapter Overview

Methodology is a systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study. This chapter focuses on the discussion of research methodology and the study design. Its purpose is to clarify the procedures which were followed when conducting research on learners' experiences of bullying in co-educational secondary schools in Mzimba North District. These procedures are discussed in detail through the following subsections; it commences with the research paradigm, research design, the study sample and sampling techniques, methods and tools of data collection, the ethical considerations, reliability and trustworthiness, method of data analysis and limitations of the study.

3.1. Research Paradigm

3.1.1. Interpretive paradigm

Research paradigm is a set of beliefs that guides the researcher in the choice of research methods. Gretschel, et.al (2023) adds that a research paradigm represents how a researcher views the nature of reality and guides how they engage in research to generate knowledge from that reality. It helps a researcher to make sense of the data collected (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This study is located within the interpretive paradigm.

The researcher used the interpretive paradigm by believing that social reality is continually constructed and reconstructed meaning that there is existence of multiple realities rather than one single reality. In qualitative research, a wide variety of paradigms exist and qualitative researchers select paradigms which are theoretically aligned with their views of how power relates to knowledge, and how power operates in the actions of, and between the researcher and the research participants.

This paradigm captures the lives of participants in order to understand and interpret the meanings they attach to social issues. Interpretivism holds a firm belief that measurement is fallible and therefore a researcher should be encouraged to look for a variety of data, data sources and methods to strive for validity. This is why the researcher used interpretive paradigm to understand lived experiences on bullying from learners views and make interpretation of what have been found.

3.2. Research Design

The researcher employed a case study qualitative design. Research design is the conceptual structure within which the research is conducted and includes the collection and analysis of data which are relevant to the research (Kumar, 2018). It is the plan showing the approach and strategy of investigation chosen to obtaining valid and reliable data that achieved the research objectives and answered research questions. In this particular study, the case of bullying was studied from the experiences of secondary school leaners themselves in Mzimba North District.

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Zohrabi (2013) asserts that qualitative approach is a form of social action that stresses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals. This means qualitative research takes place within the local context in which the phenomenon occurs, therefore, helps people to understand their society.Qualitative research is also defined by Flick (2018) as intending to individualise the way in which people live in their diverse life worlds. Participants in this study were asked to describe the phenomenon of bullying in their lives including how and where it occurred and how it affected their academic performance. The researcher realised that bullying as a phenomenon needed to be described and interpreted.

The researcher chose the phenomenological case study design because bullying is a phenomenon which needs to be studied in schools. Kumar (2018) clarifies that a qualitative study approach provides an opportunity for the problem to be studied in depth Gretschel et al (2023) describes a case study as a research design that strives to generate context-dependent knowledge, knowledge.Experiences and effects of bullying in the school were cases to be understood and to be exposed. Maree (2010) explains that the case study methodology strives towards comprehensive understanding of how participants make meaning of the phenomenon under study. The researcher wanted to find out how learners experience bullying and its effects and their understanding of bullying. The researcher also intended to find out the factors which perpetuated incidents of bullying in the school. Maree (2010) explains that the case study opens the possibility of giving a voice to the powerless and voiceless children or marginalised groups. The researcher believes that in this study, learners were able to voice out their feelings about bullying. The study is also viewed as a tool of exposing how powerless children experience and view bullying. The researcher also hopes that the study has created an awareness of developing more intervention programmes

In addition, Haradhan (2018) posits that a case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a project, policy institution, programme, or system in a real-life situation. Learners' experiences of bullying in a co-educational school formed a case studied in this study. Participants discussed what they thought could be done to attend to bullying in the school. Haradhan (2018) further sheds more light on case study that it is conducted by using multiple sources such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, written accounts and audio-visual materials, the researcher selected a case study where interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis were employed.

3.3. The Study Population

According to Creswell (2018) a population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristics. The study population were secondary school learners. A sample of two secondary schools was selected from Mzimba North District. The target population for this study were learners because bullying happens in schools where students are. It would have been really important to involve school managers and teachers as they could also provide valuable insights and perspectives especially in terms of policy and practice. A balanced approach considering multiple viewpoints, would yield a more comprehensive understanding of bullying.

However, the researcher maintained target population comprised of leaners only because students are the primary stakeholders and experts in their own experiences. Their voices and insights are crucial to understanding bullying dynamics. In addition, experiences and perceptions may be more authentic and uninfluenced by adult perspectives, by centering students' voices, research can empower them to take ownership of their experiences ad become agents of change. Involving teachers and administrators would bring their own biases and assumptions, potentially influencing the research findings. Therefore this research focused on student needs, leading to more effective and targeted interventions**.** Therefore learners were in a better position to explain their experiences of bullying. Selected learners of all four classes were interviewed for a period of three months, namely June, July and September 2023.

3.4. Sampling size and Sampling Techniques

For this study, purposive sampling was adopted because it enabled the researcher to get participants that could provide the correct data since they were the people that experienced the phenomenon of bullying. According to Cresswell (2018) a sample is a small section of the total

set of objects, events or persons and it constitutes the subject of the study. Sampling is the process of choosing the subjects or participants of the study.

Kumar (2018) states that there are two methods of sampling, which are probability also known as random sampling and non-probability also known as purposive sampling methods. In purposive sampling, which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling techniques, sample members are selected on the basis of their knowledge, relationships and expertise regarding a research subject. In the current study, the sample members who were selected had special relationship with the phenomenon of bullying. Creswell (2018) states that in purposive sampling the research participants are selected from the population in a non-random manner. Purposive sampling is less complicated to set up and it is considerable less expensive and it is perfectly adequate where researchers do not contend to generalise their findings beyond the question in hand (Creswell, 2018).

Literature states that there are different kinds of purposive sampling methods. Convenience sampling method is one of purposive sampling methods. Kumar (2018) mentions that convenience sampling is a useful tool because samples are chosen from an easy accessible population. Maree (2010) argues that convenience sampling is usually quick and elements are selected based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available. The schools were selected conveniently as they are places where bullying is mostly experienced. Captive audiences such as students serve as convenience sampling (Creswell, 2018). Convenience sampling is a natural fit for the study because it does not generalise but it represent itself not any other particular group. In this study the researcher choose learners in forms 1, 2, 3 and 4 especially those who had experienced or had been involved in bullying incidents as they could articulate their thoughts, feelings and views about the phenomenon of bullying. There were 10 learners that were interviewed (5 boys and 5 girls) between ages of 13 and 20 years. In qualitative research, small sample sizes as ten is sufficient where in depth interviews or focus group provide rich detailed data. In addition, pilot study was done at first to identify the victims and the bully. The number ten was settled for as a result of reaching saturation point

3.5. Data Collection Methods and Tools

For the purposes of this research, in depth interviews were used. In depth interviews are individual and unstructured or semi structured interviews whose aim is to identify participant's emotions, feelings and opinions regarding a particular research subject. Interviews were selected to develop rich, descriptive data from the participants (Creswell, 2018). Having two to three rounds of interviews provided additional development of the participants experience as well as opportunities for validity (Maxwell, 2013). Data collection was stopped when a point of data saturation was reached. According to Saunders et al., 2018, saturation refers to the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant. This definitely signified that an adequate sample size was reached.

Questions during the interview were designed to develop rich descriptions and provide additional opportunities for probing questions. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in terms of the flow of the interview, thereby leaving room for the generation of conclusions that were not initially meant to be derived regarding a research subject. . English language was used as a means of communication in data collection because the study was conducted in secondary where English language is used as a formal mode of communication. Where participants decided to express themselves in local language, a translation was placed in bracket.

As far as data collection tools were concerned, the research involved the use of semi-structured questionnaire which was used as an interview guide for the researcher. Creswell (2018) recommends the use of semi-structured interviews to understand and interpret the views of the participants by listening intently and observing the participants responses. Some questions were prepared, so as for the researcher to guide the interview towards the satisfaction of research objectives, but additional questions were made encountered during the interviews. (A detailed form of the interview guide is presented in the Appendixes)

Individual and focus group ddiscussion interviews were conducted with selected learners in all classes. A major advantage of interview is its adaptability. Dowling and Brown (2010) emphasize that interviews enable the researcher to explore issues in detail and they facilitate the personal engagement of the researcher in the collection of data. They allow the researcher to provide clarification, to probe and to prompt. This study actually intended to find out what is in the participants' minds about issues of bullying in the school and its effects. Cohen et al. (2011) state

that interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In this study learners interpreted bullying in the school which is the world where they spend most of their time. When collecting data through interviews the researcher used a tape-recorder after obtaining permission for the taping of interviews from Parents Teachers Association committee and participants if participants are minors. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions are explained in the following subsections.

3.5.1 Individual Semi-Structured Interviews

The questions were formulated by the researcher and each participant answered all 16 questions. Tentatively, five boys and five girls participated in the individual semi-structured interviews. According to (Kumar, 2018, semi-structured interviews allow for probing and clarification of answers. This was suitable for the study as it helped to expose what learners were hiding and experiencing in schools. The researcher was very cautious in maintaining control and guiding the discussion as it was easy for the interview to be side tracked.

According to Kumar (2018), a researcher must be attentive to the responses of participants so as to identify new emerging lines of inquiry that are directly related to the phenomenon being studied and to explore and to probe these. The researcher was also very mindful because this was a very sensitive personal study which could evoke emotions and therefore during piloting a counselling was done to ease the emotions as others would be reminded of what they did not want to be reminded. The researcher also put attention to non-verbal cues which suggested that learners were uncomfortable with some areas of the discussions.

The interviews were conducted in English and Tumbuka (local language) where students had difficulties to express themselves in English. This made it easy for learners to express their views without much language constraints. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and translated into English where Tumbuka language was used. Each interview could take 40 to 60 minutes depending on the probing levels by the researcher on the participants for clarification of points.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion Interviews

At first the two groups were interviewed separately at their respective schools. Then another session was arranged where they were combined to form one group as the two schools were very

close to each other. In addition, combining the two focus groups at the very end was to help confirm or validate the findings from each group thereby increasing the reliability. In case the two groups consist of different demographics or characteristics, combining them provided a more comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences on bullying. Merging the two groups effectively also increased the sample size providing more data to analyse and potentially leading to more robust findings. In addition, combining focus groups enhanced data quality as it helped to reduce the impact of dominant participants, increased diversity of opinions and experiences, provide a more nuanced understanding of bullying. Lastly, combining focus groups was used as a form of methodological triangulation which involves using multiple methods to investigate learners' experiences on bullying to increase the validity of the findings .To maintain the integrity of the data, focus groups were similar in terms of their objectives, population and data collection methods. The final combined focus group interviews consisting of five boys and five girls were conducted and could take one hour. Boys and girls were mixed so that they could agree or disagree on some points which acted as a verification of facts. According to Gretschel (2023), this is an in-depth field method that brings together a small homogeneous group (six to twelve persons) to discuss topics on a study agenda for a few hours with a trained moderator to talk about a product, service or organization. He further discloses that the purpose of focus group is to make use of participants' feelings, perceptions, and opinions in finding out the 'how' and 'why' of human behavior. The focus group interviews were carefully planned and designed for one-hour discussions to obtain the necessary information on the topic under study. Meanwhile, responses were recorded upon participants' permission to avoid any information loss. Note taking was also used to capture non-verbal data and limited questions were prepared to allow emerging issues.The researcher in this case used focus group discussions because it is inclusive as it allows even those who are introverts to open up and share their experiences with other learners.

3.6. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis derived from the open coding was used in analysing data (Clarke & Braum, 2013). Thematic analysis was good approach in this study where the researcher was finding out about leaners' lived experiences of bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North District. It is usually applied to a set of texts such as an interview or transcripts (Caulfied, 2019). The researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes-topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly.

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that it is the first qualitative data analysis method that should be learned as 'it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis' (p.78). A further advantage, particularly from the perspective of learning and teaching, is that it is a method rather than a methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This means that, unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. This makes it a very flexible method, a considerable advantage given the diversity of work in learning and teaching.

The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it. A common pitfall is to use the main interview questions as the themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Typically, this reflects the fact that the data have been summarised and organised, rather than analysed

Open coding thematic analysis process involves six steps; become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes define themes and write up to avoid confirmation bias when formulating research analysis (Kumar, 2018). The interviews and Focus Group Discussions were recorded to provide oral data set. The oral data was subjected to oral transcription which was verbatim (word by word). The transcribed oral data produced textual data. Going through the textual data, sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph the researcher was able to ask oneself "What does the participant want to say here?" through the answer the researcher was able to make meaning and come up with terms to be called codes.

During the coding process, researcher highlighted main concepts, ideas events and then assigned different colours representing specific codes (names). These could be a word, phrase, sentence or a complete paragraph. These names were broadly assigned to these chunks of data corresponding to the research questions.

Through continued process of reduction and regrouping, noting which questions were being answered by which categories or which questions relate to which questions, themes were extracted and constructed for the study.

It was these final list of themes that formed research findings used as a basis for interpretation and research discussion around them with efficient reference framework to the codes used. Any other themes not connected to the research objectives were considered as useful outliers that will be reported as other findings in the study (Creswell, 2018).

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The researcher is ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the participants in a study. Hence the researcher adhered to ethical issues which included informed consent and gaining access to and acceptance in the research setting and others (Cohen et al. 2011). The researcher got clearance from the MZUNIREC (Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee) to conduct this study. As it was mentioned earlier, all participants reported their written acceptance regarding their participation in the research through a signed Consent and Briefing letter. At the same time, sample members were asked to sign a Debriefing and withdrawal letter, the aim of both letters was to reassure participants that their participation in the research is voluntary and that they were free to withdrawal from it at any point and for any reason.

Furthermore, participants were fully informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were assured that their answers were treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes and only for the purposes of the particular research and anonymity would be maintained by using pseudonyms. Except from the above, participants were not harmed or abused, both physically and psychologically, during the conduction of the research. In contrast, the researcher attempted to create and maintain a climate of comfort.

3.8. Validity and reliability of research instruments

This study used various strategies as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to enhance rigor and trustworthiness and to promote validity and reliability. These strategies are triangulation, adequate engagement in data collection, peer review/ examinations, audit trail and rich-thick description. Triangulation was possible by using multiple data collection methods such as questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In addition, to ensure content validity, the research instruments were piloted on one school before using them on the research sample.

3.9. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was maintained based on the four criteria: credibility; dependability; transferability and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important in establishing trustworthiness.

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility depends on the richness of the data and analysis and can be enhanced by triangulation (Patton, 2002).

Transferability is the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description. In this study a full description of the settings and descriptive characteristics of the respondents are provided in the final report to enable the readers to assess the transferability and applicability of the study findings to their own setting.

Dependability is the extent that the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. All tape-recorded interviews, transcribed notes and personal diary have been kept for audit trail to ensure that the findings are consistent and could be repeated.

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the findings and interpretations are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. In this study, an audit trail highlighting every step of data analysis made has been provided. An audit trail helps establish that the data accurately portrays participants' responses.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0. Chapter Overview

This study aimed at investigating learners' lived experiences of bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North District under Northern Education Division. The study intended to explore and to analyse how bullying occurs in the secondary schools. This study also aimed at describing and analysing the dynamics of bullying in the school, as well as who are mostly involved in bullying incidents. The previous chapter mentioned that data was collected through semi- structured individual and focus group interviews which were conducted with selected learners in forms 1, 2, 3 and 4. This chapter analyses and interprets the findings of the study. It addresses learners' understanding of bullying, learners' experiences of bullying, bullying hotspots in the school, factors influencing bullying in the school, how social identities perpetuate bullying, effects of bullying on children's schooling as well as strategies which can be employed to address bullying. The names of participants captured in the narratives are just pseudonyms or nicknames in line with ethical expectations.

4.1. Research findings
4.1.1. Learners' understanding of definition and forms of bullying

The learners in this study understood bullying to mean hurting another person physically, spiritually, psychologically and emotionally. They claimed that this entails calling a person by nasty names that he or she does not like, e.g. pig, soup, fatty and others. They further explained that bullying includes hitting, clapping, pinching, kicking, punching, tearing other learners' books, pulling other learners' hair and even insulting other learners. Boys mentioned that bullying also includes throwing dangerous things to others. For example learners said the following:

> Temwa (a girl aged 17): *It is hurting someone emotionally and physically. e. g. beating, throwing dangerous things at someone, hitting, insulting and calling someone with names he or she does not like e.g. pig, soup, fatty and others.*

> Watson (boy aged18): *Bullying is when a person treats another person badly e.g. kicking, taking her or his belongings, tearing his or her books and even calling her or him with nasty names e.g. pig.*

Another girl and boy stated the following respectively:

> Sharlon (girl aged 18): *It is something that happens to you that you do not like. This thing hurts you physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Examples are kicking, hitting, slapping and calling you with names that you do not like.*

> Mabvuto (boy aged 14): *Bullying means punching, hitting, kicking, pinching, taking other learner's lunch and even telling lies about another person.*

The above illustrates that participants had a notion of understanding what bullying is. They mentioned various actions which they associate with bullying. Both boy and girl participants displayed a good understanding of bullying in focus group discussions and in individual interviews. They explained bullying as a phenomenon occurring between two or among a group of learners.

Learners' narratives also associated bullying with teasing, insulting and violent actions. It is comprised of direct behavior such as threatening and stealing initiated by one or more students against a victim (Erickson, 2018). The data reveals that bullying is a process involving power relations, reducing other learners to powerlessness as a means of displaying might. Olweus (2013) emphasizes that for the term bullying to be used; there should be an imbalance in strength. This is illustrated in learners' excerpts above which also indicate that bullying is construed as hurtful actions carried out by learners to other learners. These actions could be hurting physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Learners also construed bullying largely in terms of how they have experienced it, with most of them referring to the acts of bullying like kicking, display of physical violence and so forth as what bullying means. This shows how bullying for these learners was not just an idealized or imagined phenomenon, but a lived experience of their everyday lives. The learners' reference to bullying as repeated form of aggression and oppression, which inflict psychological and physical harm to the less powerful person by the more powerful person or group of persons. These findings agree with Erickson, (2018) that denotes the centrality of power relations at the heart of the problem of bullying schools.

4.1.2 Learners' Experiences of Bullying

In this study it became clear that boys and girls have different experiences of bullying. Girls mentioned that they are especially bullied by other girls if they are new in the school and if they are quieter and younger than other girls. Two girls said they were shouted at by older girls, saying that they think they are better than others if they do not play, yet they did not know other learners because they were new in the school. Other learners argued that they are sometimes teased by their sicknesses. One girl said she had sores on her legs and other learners did not want to play with her. Other learners called her with nasty names saying she was eaten by the dogs or rats.

Many girls reported that they were being bullied by other big girls sometimes because of their personality traits like being quiet or being unable to play with others for whatever reasons. Such behaviour was associated with being lazy, spoiled and therefore they were being bullied to correct such behaviour. One girl was bold enough to say teachers also do bully learners but harassing them sexually. The data below exemplifies:

> Jane (girl aged 15)*: I was bullied by my favourite teacher. He used to call me at staffroom and give exercises. He would borrow me books. One day he gave me an assignment and I submitted for marking. Then he called me at staffroom to get the exercise book. As he was giving me the exercise book he scratched my palm. And stirred at me while smiling. I pulled out my hand and left in anger. I cried at hostel and felt bad. He is my teacher and I look at him as my model, brother and father. He betrayed my trust and I stopped talking to him. In class I don't concentrate because of the hatred I have developed towards him. I can't report him to the headmaster because I don't have evidence to back up my claim.*

> Temwa (girl aged 17): *I was bullied by a big girl when I was in form one because I was a quiet girl. It was after I had an accident and I was not well. I was not active and I could not play. She pushed me and shouted at me saying that I am lazy, spoiled and I think I am better than other learners because I am not playing.*

> Sharlon (girl aged 18): *When l was young l had sores on my legs. Children did not want to play with me and they said l will infect them. Now l has scars on my legs and boys always*

say l was bitten by dogs. My shoes are torn and I wear them because mother said she will buy new ones next year. One boy took my shoes and stood in front of the class and showed my shoes to the whole class. I arrived in this school when I was going to do grade 4. I did not know the children so during break I was just standing and not playing. One girl just kicked me and said "you think you are better than us, why are you standing and not playing like us?" She did that in front of other learners.

On the other hand boys claimed that bullying to them took the form of, among other things, being punched and kicked by older boys for no obvious reasons. They also said that when they reported the bullies to their teachers, the bullies would normally bunk school as a means to avoid possible punishment by teachers. Some reasons that boys mentioned as a result of them being emotionally and physically abused by old boys included their inability to play boys' sport or if they play with girls. Boys who played with girls in this school were ridiculed and called denigrating names like "Mikotchana" meaning gay, which was a highly stigmatized and negatively constructed social identity in this school. The data below exemplifies:

Watson (boy aged 18): *I was kicked by James and I reported to the teacher. He was called by the teacher but he ran away and did not come back to school until he was brought to school by his mother. When the teachers were attending to the matter, he called his friends who told lies that he did not do it. Because they were many and I was alone, teachers believed them and I was taken as a liar. I cried but no one believed me.*

Mabvuto (a boy aged 14): *This year I was punched by Kondwani and I reported to the teacher. He was called by the teacher but he run away and did not come back to school head teacher by his brother. He denied that he did it but I had witnesses, he was punished by the head teacher*

Jackson (boy aged 13): *I am always emotionally bullied. I cannot play soccer, I like playing with girls. I always stay at home with my sister so boys are calling me "Mkotcha" meaning gay. I do not like it. My bums are big so I am also called gay because of my body structure.*

Kondwani *(boy aged 14): A big boy once punched me because I refused to give him my pen. I did not report because he is old and I was afraid that he will do it again after school after having been punished.*

Participants explained that they become targets of being bullied due to many reasons. Learners were of the view that clothes that they wear sometimes are the cause of bullying. If they do not conform to a particular style worn at a particular time, others tease them. These findings agree with some scholars work (Smith, Robinson & Slonse, 2021) findings agree with Vaillancourt (2010) explains that when adults were asked why they were victimized while at school, they responded by saying it was because they wore the wrong types of clothes. This made them feel ashamed and sad. At the same time if participants have old, torn clothes, they are teased about those clothes. Others mentioned that if they cannot play certain games they are labeled as gays or lesbians. Even the structure of the body can be a source of bullying. Learners also explained that sicknesses that they have can also cause learners to be targets of bullying. This in line with the study conducted by Volk (2017) that discovered that boys and girls experience different forms of bullying.

4.1.3. Places and spaces of bullying within the school

Learners named various places where bullying takes place within the school. The study mentioned that it occurs in the playground during breaks, near and in the toilets, near the vegetable garden and near the dumping area. It also takes place in the classrooms when teachers are not in the classrooms. Boys mentioned that it also takes place after school on the way back home. The data below exemplifies these points:

Temwa (girl aged 17): *In the dumping place, in the playground, near the vegetable garden.*

Watson (boy aged 18): *In the classrooms, in the playground, after school on the way back home and when teachers are not around*

Sharlon (girl aged 18): *In the playground, in the toilets, near the dumping area and in the classrooms.*

Mabvuto (boy aged 14): *It takes place in the class rooms, behind the toilets, in the playground, near the dumping area and near the vegetable garden especially during break time.*

The above shows that bullying takes place inside the school premises and in the classrooms when teachers are not in the classroom. Bullying outside the classroom usually occurs during breaks – it is easy to be bullied because there are no teachers outside in the playgrounds, near the toilets away from the teachers' presence (Armitage, 2021). These findings indicate that school learners get a chance of bullying other learners easily in the absence of the adult control or supervision. The school playground appears to be a hot-spot of bullying; a place where in particular boys are trained by peers to become bullies (Messini & Salmivalli, 2017). It appears that the absence of adults or teachers was one factor for occurrence of bullying in the school.

This was the time when some learners got an opportunity to exercise their power over those who were regarded as weak and vulnerable. Coyne and Monks (2011) claim that another important factor that encourages the bully is peer acceptance, which also indicated in the current study that there was a general peer acceptance of bullying among the learners in the school. Olweus (2013) posits that a greater number of teachers have resorted to conducting supervision rounds during break periods in an attempt to mitigate the incidents of bullying among the learners. Peers look up to the bully as a powerful figure in and around school, and being powerful is usually linked to the dominant discourses of masculinities (Morrell, 2005; Bhana, 2009; O'Connell et al., 1999; Morojele, 2012). These authors have also indicated how boys invest in the dominant discourses of masculinities which are seen as desirable and symbolising real manhood.

4.1.4. Factors influencing bullying in the school
Learners in this study believe that bullies see themselves as powerful, tough and stronger than their victims and they also see themselves as better than other learners. Bullies want to show off to their friends that they can do and say whatever they like.

Other learners bully because they copied bullying from their parents who always bully them. Sometimes they copy this from their big brothers and sisters who bully one another at home as they shout and fight in front of the children. Most learners believe that bullies want to show off to

their friends that they are more powerful than others. They also believe that learners who bully are imitating what they observe happening in their homes and in their communities. They also think that if they bully they are better than those who do not bully, yet they are not, as exemplified in this data:

> Watson (boy aged 18): *Others want to show off that they are powerful. They can say or do whatever they like to you because you are quiet or smaller than him or her.*

> Sharlon (girl aged 118): *Others think it is normal to bully because they usually observe bullying incidents happening in their communities. They see their fathers shouting at and hitting their mothers. They also see their brothers and sisters fighting and shouting at one another.*

> Mabvuto (boy aged 14): *Learners copy what their big brothers and sisters are doing at home. They think it is the correct thing because it is done by older people.*

> Mleza (boy aged 13): *Most learners who bully want to show off to their friends that they are better than you; they are tough and stronger than you. Others do it because they copy it from other learners and they think it is a normal thing to do.*

The above data indicates that parents contribute to the development of learners who bully others in the school. Parents have a tendency of performing violent actions in front of learners at home and in communities. Lee (2014) states that witnessing of the use of physical and verbal aggression by parents towards their children may have a negative impact on children's ability to form relationships. Rigby (1996) argues that poor family functioning and especially domestic violence might promote bullying in several ways. Therefore the study found that males are very good at performing violent actions in communities. This is because males always want to play a dominant role and want to exercise their powers especially over females. Participants further explain that this makes learners believe that bullying is the proper way of behaving and of resolving any conflict they are experiencing. The bullying expressed by boys is part of boys developing power-based social relationships (Penning, 2009).

Learners further stated that learners think that if they are bullies they become stars in the school. They are of the view that bullies want to show that they are tough and strong. In that way they will be loved and respected by their peers. Learners said bullies believe that they become famous. Actually they do become famous for bad behaving and other learners are scared of them. It appears in the study that both boys and girls are convinced cautious that violent actions in the homes perpetuate bullying in the school. Community conditions and attitudes can serve to promote or discourage bullying. Children, who grow up where violence is common, learn to settle differences by violent and aggressive means (Aboagye et. al., 2021).

4.1.5.   Social Identities and Bullying
4.1.5.1.   Gender and Bullying Experiences

Girls mentioned that they are easily bullied because they are weak and powerless. Boys agreed that girls are easy targets of bullying. It is easier to chase girls out of the playground than to chase other boys. Boys said they are strong, powerful, tough and better than girls. Learners said the following:

> Temwa (girl aged 17): *Yes, gender affects learner's experiences of bullying, example, if you are a girl you are easily bullied by boys.*

> Jane (girl aged 15): *If you a girl and you like playing with boys and you like playing boys' games, you will be accused that you a not a real girl, you are gay. You are a girl and you can climb trees, you are not a girl.*

> Sharlon (girl aged 18): *Girls are easily bullied because they are powerless .Boys are strong and powerful that is why they easily attack girls.*

> Jackson (boy aged 13): *It is easy to bully a girl physically because she is weak. She will not bully you back. Even if she tries as a boy you will overpower her and she will end up crying.*

The data below sets out what was said by the boys when asked if gender affects learners' experiences of bullying;

Jackson (boy aged 13): *Yes, it is easy to bully Amanda (mentioning a girl's name) because I am stronger than her and I think I am better than her because I am a boy.*

Kondwani (boy aged 14): *It is easy to bully a girl physically because she is weak. She will not bully you back. Even if she tries as a boy I will overpower her and she will end up cry.*

Mleza (boy, aged 13): *It is easy for the boys to chase the girls from the playground. This means girls are always under boys. Once the boys arrive in the playground, girls go and look for another place to play in.*

Both boys and girls articulated that gender contributes to the experiences of bullying. Girls are easy targets of bullying because of their femininity. They are perceived by other boys to be weak, fragile and powerless. It is also evident in the study that boys always want to play dominant role over girls and girls always play a subordinate role. When girls are forced to vacate the playground, they leave the ground without argument and look for another place to play in. They cannot fight boys because boys will fight back and defeat them. It is known that boys are powerful and stronger than girls.

Van Schie (2012) alludes that violence in schools is exacerbated by social constructions of masculinity and femininity. Downer (2012) argues that violent masculinity exists in homes as well as in schools and that male dominance is a global phenomenon.

4.1.5.2. Age and Bullying Experiences

In this study learners explained that if you are older than other learners in class they tease you about your age. They call you a granny or grandpa. Junior Phase learners are also easily bullied because they are young. They cannot fight back; they cry and run to their classes. Data below illustrates what various learners said when asked if age does affect learner's experiences of bullying:

Ruth (girl aged 19): *Sometimes you are 17 years old and you are doing form 1 and 2 while others are only 14 years old. They will always tease you about your age saying that you*

are a granny, what delayed you for so many years and complaining and discouraging you saying that you are wasting your time because you will not finish school. Actually they do not know what caused your delay, maybe you were sick or your parents had a problem, e.g. they did not have school fees.

Ethel (girl aged 18): *If you are older than other learners in class they ask you why didn't you finish school long time ago .They say it means you were dodging school not knowing what delayed you ,whether you had certain sickness or you had no one to take you to school.*

Kondwani (boy aged 13): *Older ones can take the young one's lunch or money easily and run away because there is nothing she or he can do because she is young. She or he will cry, go back to class and report. It will be difficult to get the culprit because she or he does not know the culprit's class and it will be difficult to recognize him.*

Jackson (boy aged 13): *It is easy to take young ones' possessions. I once saw a big boy who is doing form 4 grabbing a form 1 boy's pen and running away with it. The young boy did not even see him.*

Jane (girl aged 13): *It is easy to kick a young boy because I am older than him. There is nothing that he can do because he is powerless.*

The above learners exposed that age has a major impact on learners' experiences of bullying. Whether they are old or young, they experience some form of bullying. They are called certain names for being older than other learners in class. They are labeled as learners who have been dodging school by other learners. A study conducted in Zambia discovered that age composition is another factor which promotes bullying. Bullying is higher in a class which has learners who are either older or younger than others (Nabuzoka, 2003).

Young learners are bullied emotionally and physically. Both boys and girls participants argued that it is easy to bully a young learner because she or he has no power to bully back. Research conducted in South Africa indicated that age has impact on learners experiencing bullying.

Victimization is found to escalate during primary school, especially in the intermediate phase, and decreases in the early years of high school (Grobler and Greeff, 2008).

4.1.5.3. Children's Economic Status and Bullying Experiences

Learners made many examples to indicate how their economic status contributes to their bullying experiences. They said if your house is not well built, other learners look down upon you. If there is no television at home it is painful when you hear other learners talking about what they were watching on television. Other learners carry money to school, if you do not carry money they chase you away and say "tikulya na iwe yaye chifukwa ukwiza na ndalama chaaa" meaning "we do not eat with you because you do not carry money". Boys said they like hanging around with boys who have posh cars at home but they ignore them because they do not have cars at their homes. Other learners wear expensive clothes with special names and others wear cheap clothes. It is very painful because others are good at scrutinizing other learners' clothes. Learners make various examples to show how one's economic status affect them, as exemplified here:

Temwa (girl aged 18): *Yes, if your house is a two roomed house or a house built with mud, other learners look down upon you. They even sometimes say 'There is nothing that you can tell us,' maybe there is no television in your house. It feels so painful and you even blame your parents and ask yourself many questions like "Why don't they have enough money to support us?*

Ruth (girl aged 19): *If your house is built with mud and their houses are built with bricks, they always say your house is leaking and falling .They do not know how you feel about that and you know your parent's situation. Sometimes they talk about stories from television and you do not add it becomes obvious that there is no television at home and feel sad.*

Watson (boy aged 18): *Sometimes when you try to hang around with the rich ones they chase you away because you have no money. "Tikugawirengengoso yaye ndamala zinthu chifukwa uukwizako na ndalama yaye" meaning that they will no more share their pocket money with you because you always do not bring any pocket money. Sometimes you like*

hanging around with those who have posh cars at home but they ignore you and you realize that you do not belong to them.

The data shows that financial status has an impact on the lives of learners, especially if the learner comes from a family or the place which other learners think it is struggling financially. Those learners who assume that they are from rich families or from better places than others treat the ones who are assumed to come from poor families badly. They assume that they are poor by checking material things such as money, cars, clothes and houses. Tippert and Wolke (2014) also state that children who live in a particular section of the town and do not wear the right brand of clothing or shoes may become targets of bullying by abusive predators. Coyne and Monks (2011) explain that experiences of poverty lead to discrimination even in older people. Learners who are associated with poverty are usually ostracized by learners who are associated with richness. This makes it clear that sometimes a learner's social status (poverty or wealth) contribute to becoming either an agent or a target of bullying.

4.1.5.4. Children's Sexual Orientation and Bullying Experiences

In this study boys and girls expressed that gays and lesbians are called names like "mikotcha" by other learners. Gays are punched and kicked by other boys. Learners mentioned that girls are usually found laughing and trying to make the actions that show how gays and lesbians behave. The respondents also revealed that learners who play with learners of the opposite sex are shouted at and called names like "mikotcha" and others. Below are some examples of the learner's statements to prove their claims:

Sharlon (girl aged 18*): I have seen boys who were kicked and punched by other boys in my neighbour hood accusing them of being gay. "Tikukumba yayi isee wantu wamathanyula" meaning they do not want gay people in their area.*

Temwa (girl aged 18): *Boys who do not belong to boys, who call themselves gays and girls who call themselves lesbians. They are called names like sissy by other learners.*

Mabvuto (boy aged 14): *They call me "D7" meaning a woman because I have big bums. Even my neighbours call me "mikotcha" meaning gay because I cannot play soccer.*

Ruth (girl aged 19): *Yes, if you are a girl who likes to play soccer. They call you "mikotcha" meaning gay. You are a girl and you like climbing trees you are not a real girl.*

The data further indicates that even if people were not sure of one's sexual orientation, they make assumptions just by seeing who one hangs out with or by checking the kind of games and sports one plays and the kind of chores that one does. This is a clear example of how gender, sexual orientation, sporting games and chores that children perform are linked to complex and profound ways to exalt the dominance of heterosexual masculinities over other forms of human identities (Morojele, 2012), including feminine masculinities and homosexual femininities.

As indicated, girls and boys were treated badly because they liked playing with learners of their opposite sex. This denotes that bullying was sometimes used by children to police gender and sexual boundaries. Given the negative stereotypes associated with gays and lesbians, the data also indicate how learners used bullying to exalt what Butler calls heteronormativity within the school (Kurki-Kangas, 2018). The use of derogative like "mikotcha" (gays) and "ngenge" (woman) by other learners also highlight the subservience with which femininities, femaleness and girlhood were constructed in this school. These findings point to the fact that bullying was used by the learners in the school as an important mechanism of social control-mainly directed at learners who did not conform to the dominant discourses of what it means to be boys and girls (Morojele, 2012), which according to the findings of this study, did not solve being gay or lesbian.

4.1.6. Effects of bullying on children's schooling experience

4.1.6.1. Effects on Children's Academic and Social Lives

Both boys and girls in this study said that they fail to focus and to concentrate on their school work because they always think about what happened to them. Others said they cry and do not listen to the teacher until the period is over. They do not finish their classwork and they are punished for

not doing their work. Different learners gave various ways of how their academic life is affected by bullying. The data below exemplifies these points:

Temwa (girl aged 18): *It becomes difficult to focus and to concentrate on your work because you always think about what has happened to you.*

Ruth (girl aged 19): *You fail to focus because you always think about what has happened to you. You think that you have been humiliated.*

Jane (girl aged 15): *I cannot concentrate on my school work. Sometimes I cry and do not even listen to what the teacher is saying until the period is over.*

Kondwani (boy aged 14): *I fail to focus and to concentrate on my school work. Sometimes I cry and forget about listening to the teacher.*

Dioliveira, (2020) states that victims of bullying who are within the school environment have impaired concentration and decreased academic performance. Ossa (2019) argues that victims of bullying do poorly at school and sometimes engage in bad behaviours like drinking, smoking and drug abuse. The study findings shows that bullying has a negative impact on children's academic work. Children who have experienced bullying found it difficult to concentrate on their school work as they tend to spend most of their time recovering from the physical and emotional shock of the bullying experience. This leads to victims being punished for not doing their work which further stresses and traumatizes such learners, thus making schooling an unfavourable environment for them. Some boys usually spend a lot of time contemplating revenge against their bullies, which distracts their attention from the academic work. Some learners might choose to bunk school as they feel weak and powerless to withstand the perpetual abuse they have to endure on a daily basis against stronger and more powerful bullies who continue their unbecoming acts unabated.

Learners explained that they become frightened to play with other learners and they see themselves as fools and failures. They think they are not good enough. They are always scared that this will happen again. They are always afraid to go out of their homes thinking that they will come across

the same situation. They said they do not talk about it because they think it is their fault that they are bullied. The data below will exemplify this:

Sharlon (girl aged 18): *I am always scared that the perpetrators will continue with this even outside the school.*

Watson (boy aged 18): *It does affect me. I remember one day when my mother was busy calling me but I did not hear her because I was thinking about what happened at school. She was so furious thinking that I was ignoring her.*

Mabvuto (boy aged14): *I am sometimes afraid of people because I think maybe it is my fault that I was bullied.*

Mleza (boy aged 13): *I feel sad, just keep quiet and I cry.*
Jackson (boy aged 14): *After school I go straight home, sit on my bedroom, keep quiet, feel sad and sometimes cry.*

The data shows that the learners were demotivated and demeaned by bullying actions which they were experiencing. This was exacerbated by the fact that few of them could talk to their parents and teachers about the incidents of bullying, as the dominant discourse was that bullying was a normal way for children to grow up (Deoliveria et al., 2016). Learners often heard their teachers and parents saying that being bullied is part of growing up and learners need to stand up for themselves and boys need to toughen up (de Wet, 2005). This resulted in bullying victims isolating themselves because they are ashamed and frightened that they will come across the same situation if they mix with other learners. UNESCO (2021) also notes that victims of bullying are anxious, nervous and insecure, and that this state impacts adversely on the learners' (victims) self-esteem, with isolation only making them more susceptible to being attacked by their bullies.

As for perpetrators of bullying when asked how they feel after bullying, both boys and girls said they felt so proud that they had fixed someone, as if to suggest that most learners bullied on the basis of revenge or to avenge some bullying experience they encountered elsewhere. Even though

the majority claimed that they felt proud for a very short period, and became sad again when they remember the pain they have inflicted on the learners, they bullied again at some point, drawing on their experience of bullying at one stage in their schooling lives. As indicated above, some boys claimed that they committed bullying due to their peer pressure to demonstrate their masculinities, in order to avoid being ridiculed as feminine and thus gay or lesbian and not men enough.

4.1 7. Addressing Bullying In the School: The Learners Speak

Learners in this study came up with many ways of addressing bullying in this school. They said the school needs to have prefects who will supervise and monitor learners during breaks. Sessions need to be organized where learners will be told about effects of bullying in the learners' lives. Learners must be taught the dangers of bullying. Motivational speakers need to be invited to the school to address all learners about importance of education and about the future of the learners. Learners must also be encouraged to report bullying incidents they have experienced or they have witnessed in school. Here are the relevant excerpts:

Ethel (girl aged 18): *The school needs to organize sessions where they talk about effects and dangers of bullying in the children's lives. The school head teacher must invite people from Plan International and parents to school to motivate, counsel, advice and encourage both victims and perpetrators to face the bullying situation positively.*

Jane (girl aged 15*): The school must invite experts to school to come and teach learners about dangers of bullying. Parents must be invited and be taught about bullying. Teachers must organize anti-bullying programs. Police must be invited to the school to alarm learners about dangers of bullying and its effects in their lives.*

Watson (boy aged 18): *The school must organize motivational speakers who will come and address all learners about their future and about different careers. They must also talk about the importance of education. Teachers should organize the following people to come and teach both victims and perpetrators. Social workers and nurses must teach them correct behaviour and humanity.*

Mabvuto (boy aged 14): *Teachers must report them to their parents and they must also involve social workers. It will be easy for learners to open up to them if they have problems. If they continue they must be expelled from school.*

Jackson (boy aged 13)*: The head teacher should organize Plan International people, social workers, people from the Ministry of Health to school to come and address learners about dangers and effects of bullying.*

Kondwani *(boy aged 14): Nurses, social workers and parents must teach and counsel both victims and perpetrators. Victims also need to be given a chance to discuss the pains that they feel when they are bullied with other learners and to let bullies know the dangers of bulling. May be that can stop bullies from pursuing this evil doing.*

Data show that children had an idea of how to address bullying in the school. This indicated that learners are aware that bullying is a problem and it needs to be attended. Learners mentioned the different ways that can be used, and different people who can assist the school to attend to the bullying problems. As stated by Tholander (2019), researchers who have attempted to change beliefs supportive of violence through prevention programmes have been successful in changing these attitudes.

It becomes clear from the data that children understand that both victims and perpetrators of bullying need assistance. Among the ways which were mentioned by learners to help both perpetrators and victims are counseling, motivation and involvement of parents, which is also supported by Olweus (2013), who states that parental awareness can assist to increase parental support of the programmes developed to attend bullying. This indicates that learners believe that perpetrators can change if the problem is attended to. It became clear that they are aware that bullying is a problem and it is affecting learners.

4.1.7.1. Supporting Victims of Bullying

Learners stated that victims need to be consoled and to be comforted so that they will feel that they are loved and they are important. They need counseling which will encourage them to continue

with their school work. They need to be taught to talk about what happened to them to the people they trust. They must be told that it is important to report bullying so that it can be dealt with accordingly. This is clear in the following data:

> Temwa (girl aged 18): *Victims need to be comforted and be encouraged to forget about what happened. They also need to be motivated to focus on their school work so as to show bullies that they are better than them and they also need to be encouraged to report bullying to other people like teachers and parents.*

> Jane (girl aged 15): *They need to be motivated and be counseled that they need to focus on their studies and try to forget what has happened to them.*

> Sharlon (girl aged 18): *They need counseling and motivation to ignore the incidents and focus on their work. They also need to be reminded that it is important to report bullying.*

> Watson (boy aged 18): *They need to be encouraged to study and to forget about what happened. They must also be consoled and they also need sympathy.*

> Jackson (boy aged 13): *They need to be consoled, counseled and to be encouraged to focus on their studies. Some programmes need to be organized by the school which will help them to heal and to forget about what happened.*

These comments indicate that the school needs to have special programmes which will assist victims of bullying to overcome the experiences of bullying they have come across. It is clarified that this will help to bring back trust, pride, and confidence in victims. Counselling is one of the strategies mentioned by learners which can be used to assist victims. Kamal et al., (2023) argue that counselling makes the bullied understand the problem, identify the solutions and decide on appropriate actions to take.

According to learners if there are programmes which attend to victims of bullying properly, the minds of victims will stop dwelling on the problem and focus on the future. These will actually assist learners to have people they will be able to confide in. They will be able to share their

experiences and their anger. Ncube et al., (2015) emphasizes the development of a bullying policy which improves the school environment and the empowerment of students through conflict resolution and peer counseling.

4.1.7.2. Supporting Perpetrators of Bullying

The study stipulated that perpetrators need to be taught that what they are doing is wrong. Some do not know because they grow up witnessing violent and bullying actions in their homes and in their communities. Social workers need to assist them so as to diagnose the cause of the problem:

> Temwa (girl aged 18): *They need to be confronted and be told that this is wrong and it is disturbing other learners in the school. I think other learners witness bullying in their homes e.g. fathers beating mothers and shouting at them and boyfriends beating their girlfriends in front of the children. So they think it is the correct thing to do.*

> Ethel (girl aged 18): *They need special classes where they will be taught that "Umuntu" and respect for one another is important. Teachers and police must help perpetrators. Nurses, social workers, teachers and parents must teach them.*

> Kondwani (boy aged 14): *They need to be taught that bullying is wrong and it is hurting to other learners. Social workers, nurses and police can teach them correct behaviour.*

> Mleza (boy aged 13): *I think they do not know that what they are doing is wrong. They think it is normal because they live in communities where violence is occurring daily. They see their fathers abusing and beating their mother's .They need to be taught. Suspending them is not helping matters as sometimes it builds anger in them towards the bullied for making them suspended. The bully thinks the head teachers is abusing powers by giving suspension as they think it's a stage one has to pass through in life.*

> Mabvuto (boy aged 14): *Perpetrators need to be taught the effects of what they are doing because they do not know that it is wrong. They think it is a correct thing because they*

sometimes see adults bullying other adults and they think it is a normal thing to do. There are men who beat, insult and slap their wives on the roads in front of children.

Ruth (girl aged 19): *They need to be told about dangers that they can experience if they continue with bullying. Others think it is the correct way of living. They grow up in violent communities, so they believe treating others violently is normal behavior. Some parents are also bully. They shout at children and punish them severely, sometimes for minor offences.*

Thus participants suggested various stakeholders who can be involved by the school to educate perpetrators about effects of bullying. Including stake holders will make learners realize how unacceptable bullying is in the school and in the community at large. Tholander (2019) also states that schools need to involve parents, through community forums as well as in private discussions, especially if their children are involved in incidents of bullying and harassment. These points stress that ignorance is the main cause of bullying in schools. Perpetrators are not aware of the effects of bullying on victims and on them as perpetrators.

Learners also emphasized that community violence also contributes to the development of perpetrators of bullying in schools. It is also mentioned that bullies think bullying is the normal solution to solve any kind of conflict. They stressed the need for educating perpetrators that bullying and violence is unacceptable and wrong and it has very negative effects in their lives and in victims. Creecy (2012) similarly posits that it is important to focus on changing the behaviour of the perpetrator and to avoid labeling the perpetrator. This will allow the perpetrator to move out of negative roles as a way of solving conflict.

4.2. Discussion of findings

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the literature review from chapter two. The discussion is also done in line with specific objectives. The section critically analyses the findings of this study in relation to previously published studies on the same.

4.2.1. Learners' experiences of bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North District

Findings on this specific objective have shown that both girls and boys are perpetrators and victims of bullying in secondary schools. The findings have shown that girls are bullied by their fellow girls who are older over reasons of different personality, age and being new at the school. Furthermore, the findings of the study have established that bullying among girls is in the form of verbal bullying, which among other things include name calling, spreading false rumours and teasing. On the other hand, bullying among boys is commonly physical, where the boys are punched, kicked, stabbed or slapped by older boys. These findings are similar to the findings of Itegi (2017) who found out that physical bullying is very common among boys while verbal bullying is the common type among girls.

The findings have also established that teachers are a source of bullying especially among girls. The girls are usually bullied by their teachers sexually. This finding is rather new on the topic of bullying in secondary schools. Not many studies have revealed teachers as perpetrators of bullying.

4.2.2 Factors that perpetuate bullying in schools in Mzimba North District

Findings on this specific objective have shown that bullying in secondary schools is perpetuated by a myriad of factors. The findings of the study have established the following factors; sexual orientation, financial status, dressing, social environment, health condition, gender and age. The findings of the study have shown that the environment in which a learner grows up perpetuates bullying. Learners usually mimic what they see their parents, elders, brothers or sisters do in their homes and communities. The study has established that a learner who grew up in a violent home or community is most likely to become a bully. Findings on this specific objective concur with the findings of Coyne & Monks (2011) who claimed that learners who witness domestic violence between adults in the homes, which most commonly occurs between spouses or partners, plays a vital role in informing bullying among learners at school. The findings also agree with those of Adewuyi (2023) who found out that there is a strong connection between bullying among secondary school adolescents, parenting process, neighbourhood and school factors.

Furthermore, the findings of the study have also shown that the financial status of learners also perpetuates bullying. Leaners who come from well to do families look down on those that come from impoverished homes, hence the financial status of the victims becomes a basis for bullying. These findings are similar to those of Lestari & Koto (2019), who found out that one of the most

common contributor to bullying has been noted to be socio economic status. According to Lestari and Koto (2019), the socio economic status of a learners determines ones risk of being bullied with children from the lower socio economic background being at a higher risk.

Gender is also another factor that perpetuates bullying. The findings of this study have shown that girls are the most vulnerable to bullying because of their gender. The findings of the study have also established that the age of the victims perpetuates bullying. Young leaners are also vulnerable to bullying in secondary schools.

The study has further revealed that sickness can also perpetuate bullying among leaners. The dressing of a victim also sometimes perpetuates bullying. Leaners who wear cheap, torn and clothes that do not conform to the set standards of the bullies get bullied.

4.2.3. Effects of bullying experiences on learners' academic and social lives in secondary schools in Mzimba North District.

Findings on this specific objective have established that bullying affects the academic and psychological lives of the victims. On the academic part, the findings have discovered that bullying makes the victims lose focus, interest and concentration in school work, hence affecting their performance in class. The findings have further shown that victims of bullying develop low self-esteem, depression, fear, anxiousness and feelings of shame. The findings have shown that leaners who experience bullying feel that they are not good enough and they are afraid to associate at school and even in the communities.

Findings on this specific objective concur with the findings of Ossa et al. (2019) who found out that the bullied adolescents suffered from symptoms like concentration difficulties, nightmares, sleep disorders, depression and fear in which affected their quality of education and their health life in general. The findings also agree with the findings of Bimblecombe et al. (2018) who established that bullying can contribute to absenteeism from class attendance which can result in poor grades.

4.2.4. Strategies that can be used to address bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North District.

Findings on this specific objective have shown that learners have an idea on some of the strategies that can be put in place in an effort to address bullying in secondary schools. Among other things, the study has revealed the following strategies: having prefects who can supervise and monitors learners during breaks; having sessions on the effects and dangers of bullying ins school; motivational talks on the importance of education; and encouraging leaners to report bullying incidents they experience or witness.

The strategies suggested by student are similar to those of Olweus, (2013) who suggested that schools should develop a student watch programme by training student volunteers to patrol and report instances of bullying.

4.3. The summary of the research findings

The participants in this study showed that they have understanding of what the word bullying consists. Participants mentioned acts which they associate with various forms of bullying such as name calling, kicking, hitting and others. The study discovered that bullying acts are mostly perpetrated by boys towards girls. The study also discovered that acts of bullying are also carried out by both girls and boys towards learners who are new in the school. It became evident in the study that both boys and girls sometimes do come across some form of bullying. Boys and girls engage in bullying behaviours in different ways. Boys are usually engaged in physical forms of bullying and girls are mostly engaged in indirect form or verbal form of bullying. Physical forms of bullying include punching, kicking, heating, stabbing, slapping and pinching. Verbal or indirect bullying constitutes teasing, name calling and spreading rumours.

The study raised the issue of socialisation. Boys are socialised to be dominant and girls are socialised to be subordinates. Van Schie (2012) also states that bullying is part of being a boy. Bullying is linked to structuring of boys who are showing power and also demonstrating their masculinities (Van Schie, 2012). Participants made it clear that victims of bullying are usually learners who are physically weak, vulnerable and young in age. This shows that the study found out that bullying is manifested in power, powerlessness, aggression, domination and oppression

The study also clarifies that the common hotspot for the occurrence of bullying is the school playground. This shows the lack of supervision of learners during breaks in the school. Some

incidents are reported and some are not reported. Learners do not report because they are scared that this will happen to them again. The sexual orientation or assumed sexual orientation of learners sometimes becomes the focus for being bullied. The study found out that there are other factors which promote bullying in the school such as media, forms of discipline administered by parents, economic status of the learner, health status as well as socialisation. The findings of this study confirm the high bullying rate in the school. The impact of this phenomenon on the learners is revealed in the study. Learners feel unsafe in the school and their confidence and their self-esteem are destroyed by bullying which eventually affects the academic performance.

The learners in the study suggested a number of strategies to curb the malpractice such as involvement of prefects in supervision and monitoring during break time, encouraging leaners to report cases of bullying, providing guidance and counselling to the bully and bullied and involvement off different stakeholders such as parents, chiefs and police.

4.4. Concluding Remarks

This chapter attempted to acquire understanding of learners' experiences of bullying and examine responses of learners about their experiences of bullying and the different forms of bullying they come across in a secondary school. The findings which are presented in this chapter are arranged according to the themes emerging from data collected. The themes which emerged are learners' experiences and understanding of bullying, forms of bullying which are experienced by boys and girls in the school, factors that perpetuate bullying in schools, effects of bullying on the lives of learners and strategies which could be employed to eradicate bullying in schools. The next chapter deals with the conclusions and the implications of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0. Chapter overview

This chapter presents the conclusion, recommendations and implications for further study made regarding learners lived experiences of bullying in selected secondary schools in Mzimba North District.

5.1. Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring learners lived experiences of bullying in secondary schools and the study was specifically looking at selected secondary schools in Mzimba north district. Based on the findings presented in chapter four and discussed in chapter five, it shows that there is a high level of bullying incidents in Secondary Schools.

The study had four specific objectives, and conclusions for the study will be based on the findings of each specific objective. The first specific objective aimed at establishing learner's experiences of bullying in secondary schools. The findings of the study have established that bullying is prevalent in secondary schools. The findings have shown that both girls and boys are perpetrators and victims of bullying. The findings have also shown that physical bullying is common among boys, whereas verbal bullying is common among girls.

The second specific objective aimed at identifying the factors that perpetuate bullying in secondary schools. Findings on this specific objective have shown that sexual orientation, financial status, social environment, gender, age, health condition, physical attributes and dressing are some of the factors that perpetuate bullying in secondary schools.

The third specific objective aimed at determining the effects of bullying experiences on learner's academic and social lives. The findings of the study have shown that bullying affect the academic life of a learner in such a way that it makes the learners lose focus, concentration and interest in school thereby affecting the learner's performance in class. Further to that, the findings of the study have also established that bullying affects the psychological life of the learner. Among other things, the study has shown that bullying makes the learners develop depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear and felling of shame.

The last specific objective aimed at outlining strategies that can be used to address bullying in secondary schools. The study has outlined the following strategies; having prefects who can

supervise and monitors learners during breaks; having sessions on the effects and dangers of bullying ins school; motivational talks on the importance of education; and encouraging leaners to report bullying incidents they experience or witness.

In light of the above discussed findings, it can be concluded that bullying is prevalent in the secondary schools of Mzimba north district. Basing on the findings, it has been discovered that teachers are also perpetrators of bullying especially on girl child. For instance a leaner nicknamed Jane narrated has a male teacher she trusted so much bullied herby scratching her hand, stirred at her while smiling. In addition, participants also raised a new form of bullying called cyber bullying due to technological advances which needs to be addressed urgently. There is need of examining the impact of technology on bullying and exploring effective strategies for addressing online harassment. By exploring these areas, this research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of bullying's impact on learners and inform effective strategies for creating safer, more supportive learning environments.

5.2. Recommendations

The study revealed that bullying has a negative impact on learners in their secondary school learning. Schooling needs to take place in a free and safe environment. Bullying has a social, academic and psychological impact on the lives of learners. The secondary school curriculum caters for children's rights through life orientation teaching. This learning area has topics which address issues of bullying in the school. According to the Malawian Education Act (No 21 of 2013) a school code of conduct is aimed at establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment and this is dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of learning process. The Malawian Education Act (2013) also stipulates that a learner may be suspended from school if he /she misbehave. The researcher associate bullying with misbehaviour but the code of conduct does not specify kinds of misconduct. The study discovered that bullying persists in the school. Therefore, study came up and recommends the following examples of strategies which can be developed to address bullying.

1. Ministry of Education needs to come up with Anti-bullying policy which schools should be compelled to implement.

2. The Ministry of Education needs to include bullying topics to widen leaners knowledge on the issue since many students and parents think bullying is normal and stage one has to pass through in life.

3. Motivational speakers need to be invited to address issues of bullying with learners in the school because some learners think there is nothing which could be done about this problem. They believe it to be the correct way of living.

4. Supervision of learners during breaks should be given a priority by the school administrators and teachers.

5. Learners must be taught to report bullying to both parents and teachers.

6. Prefects must also be taught how to handle bullying in the school.

7. Experts like people from Malawi Police Services may also be invited to the school to talk to both perpetrators and victims of bullying about the dangers of the phenomenon.

5.3. Implications for Further Research

Based on the results of this study, the following are the areas provided by the researcher for future research

Firstly, the study focused on learners' experiences of bullying. Only learners' views about bullying were stated in this study. Educators' and parents' opinions about bullying were not researched. The researcher is of the view that further research needs to be conducted where educators and parents will be included in the research in this site.

Secondly, the study was conducted in public schools only situated in the rural area where students' exposure to openness and media is limited because of cultural and poverty related reasons. If the same study could be conducted in an urban area and private schools, it could help to bring about comparisons of learners' experiences of bullying in various institutions and in various areas.

Thirdly, the study was conducted in co-educational secondary schools. Further studies could be conducted in single sex educational secondary school and in tertiary schools to further understanding of bullying in schools.

Fourthly, the research also utilised a qualitative approach which is encompassing a small scale study and it only included 10 learners from two schools in Mzimba North District. This means the study could not be generalized to all secondary schools. For future research a larger scale is recommended to check if this problem is widely experienced in the school and in other schools. This can help to bring on board the Ministry of Education to attend to the problem.

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APPENDIX I: Permission letter from Mzuzu University
MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

MZUZU UNIVERSITY

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
L u w i n g a
M z u z u 2
M A L A W I
TEL: 01 320 722

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/56   12/06/2023.

James Chilima,

Mzuzu University,

P/Bag 201,

Luwinga,

Mzuzu 2.

chilimajames@gmail.com

Dear James,

**RESEARCH ETHICS   AND REGULATORY   APPROVAL AND PERMIT
FOR PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/56: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BULLYING EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MZIMBA NORTH DISTRICT.**

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) in a format that is available at the

Secretariat. Once the study is finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee with a final report of the study. The Committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,

Gift Mbwele

SENIOR RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR

For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIREC

 Committee Address: *Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2; Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw*

Appendix II: Letter of introduction

Mzuzu University

Private Bag 201
L u w i n g a
M z u z u   2
M A L A W I

Tel: (265) 01 320 575/722
Fax: (265) 01 320 568
mdolo.mm@mzuni,ac.mw

MZUZU UNIVERSITY

Department of Teaching, Learning and

Curriculum Studies

13th June 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MR JAMES CHILIMA

Mr James Chilima is a registered Master of Education (Leadership and Management) Program student at Mzuzu University. He has been cleared by the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to collect data for the research study he is conducting as a requirement for the program.

Kindly assist him accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo

Program Coordinator

Appendix III: Informed consent form

Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC)

Informed Consent Form for Research in

Masters of Education in Leadership and Management

Introduction

I am **James Chilima**, a Master of Education in Leadership and Management student from Mzuzu University**.** I am doing research titled "*A Phenomenological Study of Bullying Experienced by Learners in Secondary Schools in Mzimba North District"*

 This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me or of another researcher.

Purpose of the research

This research aims to explore learners' experiences of bullying in secondary schools in Mzimba North.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in answering a questionnaire/interview questions.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are one of the learners in Mzimba North District.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate nothing will change. You may skip any question and move on to the next question.

Duration

The research may take a period of about 3 months from April to July 2023.

Risks

You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview/survey if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

Sharing the Results

The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you and your community before it is made widely available to the public. Following, we will publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact: Mr. James Chilima. Phone (+265) 884257915/ 993613803.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find about more about the Committee, contact Mr. Gift Mbwele, Mzuzu University Research Ethics (MZUNIREC) Administrator, Mzuzu University, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2, Phone: 0999404008/0888641486

Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent

*I have been invited to participate in research about **"A Phenomenological Study of Bullying Experienced by Learners in Secondary Schools in Mzimba North District"**.* **I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study**

Print Name of Participant: **James Chilima**

Signature of Participant

Date: **8th March, 2023**

                         Day/month/year

If illiterate [1]

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Print name of witness_____   **Thumb print of participant**

Signature of witness   _____

Date _____

       Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

---

[1] A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team). Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the research project. I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent

Date _____

              Day/month/year

APPENDIX IV: Individual Semi-Structured Interviews

 1. What do you understand by bullying?

2. What are your experiences of bullying?

3. Which are the areas within your school where bullying takes place?

4. Why do you think bullying takes place in these areas?

5. What are factors that you think influence bullying in your school?

6. Who are normally the perpetrators of bullying in your school?

7. Who are normally the victims of bullying in your schools?

8. Could you narrate a story where you:

- Witnessed a bullying incident within your school.
- Were told about a bullying incident within your school.

9. Explain how the following affect learners' experiences of bullying:

- One's gender - One's age
- One's economic status/ background
- Sexual orientation
- Please provide specific examples in each case

10. Give examples how teachers in your school react to: -

- Incidents of bullying
- Victims of bullying
- Perpetrators of bullying

11. Please explain how bullying affects the following? –

- Your academic work/ life
- Your social life

12. Explain how you feel after being exposed to a bullying experience, for example:

- After being bullied

- After bullying

- After hearing about a bullying incident

13. What do you think the school needs to do to prevent bullying? Give specific examples.

14. What support do you think victims of bullying in the school require?

15. What support do you think perpetrators of bullying in the school need?

16. On question 14 and 15, please be specific on who should do what, how and why

APPENDIX V: Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What do you understand by bullying?

2. What are your experiences of bullying?

3. Which are the areas within your school where bullying takes place?

4. Why do you think bullying takes place in these areas?

5. What are factors that you think influence bullying in your school?

6. Who are normally the perpetrators of bullying in your school?

7. Who are normally the victims of bullying in your schools?

8. Could you narrate a story where you:

- Witnessed a bullying incident within your school.
- Were told about a bullying incident within your school.

9. Explain how the following affect learners' experiences of bullying:

- One's gender - One's age
- One's economic status/ background
- Sexual orientation
- Please provide specific examples in each case

10. Give examples how teachers in your school react to: -

- Incidents of bullying
- Victims of bullying
- Perpetrators of bullying

11. Please explain how bullying affects the following? –

- Your academic work/ life
- Your social life

12. Explain how you feel after being exposed to a bullying experience, for example:

- After being bullied

- After bullying

- After hearing about a bullying incident

13. What do you think the school needs to do to prevent bullying? Give specific examples.

14. What support do you think victims of bullying in the school require?

15. What support do you think perpetrators of bullying in the school need?

16. On question 14 and 15, please be specific on who should do what, how and why