

# **Bullying perpetrators and victims and associated factors among high school learners in Tshwane District, South Africa**

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The global increase in mental disorders includes a significant proportion of children and adolescents, and bullying in school is reported to be a contributory factor to mental disorders among children. Although bullying in Sub Saharan Africa, including South Africa, is anecdotally acknowledged, this public health, developmental and education challenge has mainly been limited to the rite of passage for children, and not much has been done to identify risk factors for being bullying perpetrators and victims in a school environment.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to screen learners in Tshwane District, Pretoria, for bullying behavior

### **Methodology**

A cross sectional quantitative survey was used to determine the profile of bullying perpetrators and victims among high school learners at a township in Pretoria. The Illinois Bully Scale was used to screen for bullying perpetration and victimization, whilst the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 and the Beck Anxiety Inventory were used to screen for depression and anxiety symptoms respectively among the sample of learners. STATA version 14 was used for data analysis.

### **Results**

The sample of 460 consisted of 69% females with a mean age of 15 years. The 73,91% of learners who fitted the categories of bullying consisted of 21,96% victims, 9,57% perpetrators and 42.39 perpetrator-victims. The Pearson Chi<sup>2</sup> test of association found a significant association between being a bullying victim and reported lack of people who loved and cared for the learner. Being a bullying perpetrator was associated with anxiety symptoms of the learner and home alcohol use, while being a perpetrator-victim was associated with lack of family love and care, the school attended, as well as depression and anxiety symptoms. Using multivariate logistic regression, being a perpetrator-victim was associated with depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms and home use of alcohol ( $p=0.000$ ,  $0.001$  and  $p=0.012$  respectively) whilst being a perpetrator was associated with absence of anxiety symptoms ( $p=0.020$ , coef -1.708862).

## Conclusion

Anxiety, depression and the home environment are strongly associated with bullying, and most learners fitted the category of being both perpetrators and victims.

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### 50-word abstract

Although bullying contributes to mental disorders among children, not many studies focus on risk factors for both perpetrators and victims. A quantitative survey was used to identify risk factors for bullying behavior. Most participants are both perpetrators and victims, and risk factors for both are associated with the home environment.