

## **THE IMPACT THAT BULLYING AT SCHOOL HAS ON AN INDIVIDUAL'S SELF-ESTEEM DURING YOUNG ADULTHOOD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Limited research has been conducted in South Africa regarding the possible long-term effects of chronic bullying at school. This research study aimed to explore and describe the possible long-term effect that chronic bullying at school has on victims' self-esteem during young adulthood. The sample consisted of one hundred and one young adult participants who had completed their school education in the Nelson Mandela Metropole within the past sixteen years. Participants were requested to complete a short Biographical Questionnaire, the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire as well as James Battle's Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults. Results indicated that ninety-one percent of the sample had been involved in bullying behaviours during some stage of their school careers: Three percent as bullies, thirty-one percent as victims and fifty-seven percent as bully-victims (those who are both bullies and victims of bullying). General findings indicated that the participants had an intermediate level of overall and personal self-esteem, and high levels of general and social self-esteem. The results for the self-esteem scores of bullies in the sample could unfortunately not be computed as bullies made up just three percent of the overall sample. When divided into groups of victims, bully-victims and bystanders, findings indicated that there were significant differences in all four of the sub-scale scores for these three groups. The bystanders in the sample had the highest overall, general and personal self-esteem scores followed by the victims and bully-victims.

**Keywords:** aggression; bullying; long-term effects; self-esteem; socio-emotional development; victimization.

## INTRODUCTION

High self-esteem and positive self-concept are important characteristics of an individual's well-being (Santrock, 2004). According to Taylor, Peplau and Sears (2006), people with high-self esteem have a clear sense of their own personal qualities. They think well of themselves, set appropriate goals, use feedback in a self-enhancing manner, savour their positive experiences and cope successfully with difficult situations. These individuals also tend to remember their daily experiences more favorably- a memory bias that may itself strengthen high self-esteem.

People with low self-esteem however, have a blurred self-concept, think poorly of themselves, often select unrealistic goals or shy away from goals altogether, tend to be pessimistic about the future, remember their past more negatively and wallow in their negative moods. People with low self-esteem also tend to have more adverse emotional and behavioural reactions to criticism or other kinds of personal negative feedback. These individuals are less likely to generate positive feedback for themselves, are more concerned about their social impact on other people and are more vulnerable to depression or rumination when they encounter setbacks or stress (Taylor et al., 2006).

Children's experiences in schools are fundamental to their successful transition into adulthood. In school, children negotiate and re-negotiate their relationships, self-image and independence. They cultivate interpersonal skills, discover and refine strengths and struggle with vulnerabilities (de Wet, 2007). As such, schools must provide a safe environment for children to develop academically, relationally, emotionally and behaviourally (Wilson, 2004). However, the converse is apparent.

Individuals' sense of their own self-worth is often bound up in the quality of their relationships with others so that signs of rejection can threaten self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). This study therefore aimed to explore and describe the possible long-term effects that chronic bullying at school has on the victims' self-esteem during young adulthood. This article will begin by defining bullying behaviour. The types, emergence and consequences of bullying in schools will follow. A brief overview of the research methodology utilized in the study will then be provided. The results and discussion of this study will then form the conclusion.

## DEFINING BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

Defining the term 'bullying' can be challenging as authors' views on the topic seem to vary significantly. Deliberate and unjustified physical violence appears to be universally accepted as bullying. However, other more covert behaviours that are insidious and spiteful, such as name-calling, mockery or being isolated, ignored or rejected from the friendship group, whilst viewed as unpleasant, are not universally accepted as bullying (Lines, 2008). Swart and Bredekamp (2009) describe bullying as a group phenomenon within which children play a variety of roles, including that of aggressor, victim, observer, defender and bully-victim.

In order to fully understand the concept of bullying, it is necessary to have a clear and concise description of what bullying behaviour entails. According to Sullivan (2000), bullying is a conscious and willful act of aggression and / or manipulation by one or more individuals against another individual or group. It takes on multiple forms that can be categorized as verbal, physical and relational (Coloroso, 2003). Bullying is a repeated action rather than a one-time occurrence (Sanders & Phye, 2004). Olweus (1993) adds that bullying is evident when it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend him- or herself. Bullying is therefore characterized by two conflicting parties that are imbalanced in terms of power, physically and / or mentally (Oyaziwo, 2006). It can last for a short period of time or continue for years, and is an abuse of power by those

who carry it out. Bullying is either pre-meditated or opportunistic and may be directed towards one victim or occur serially and randomly (Sullivan, 2000).

Victims of bullying therefore experience injury or distress in the face of repeated attacks against which they are unable to defend themselves. The ultimate outcome of bullying behaviour is empowerment and gratification for one party and suffering or distress for the other (Oyaziwo, 2006).

### **Types of Bullying**

Bullying can take place in a number of ways. Roland and Munthe (1989) state that bullying can include physical attacks, verbal attacks and severe, but subtle, psychological bullying. Victims of bullying experience behaviours such as hitting, kicking, pushing, name calling, abusive language, spreading rumours, manipulation of friendships, being excluded or ignored, and being threatened by individuals who are older, stronger, and more powerful (Dulmus & Sowers, 2004). Sullivan (2000) adds that when bullying occurs between children of the same age, it is referred to as horizontal bullying. When older children bully those younger than themselves, this is referred to as vertical bullying.

According to Anderson (2007), different sub-types of bullying can be broadly defined in terms of their directness. There are two categories for describing bullying behaviour: direct bullying and indirect bullying. Direct forms of bullying are defined as relatively open attacks on a victim that are carried out face to face. Indirect forms of bullying are described as more subtle and less direct (Boulton, Trueman & Flemington, 2002). Lee (2004) adds that indirect forms of bullying usually involve a third party. This type of bullying may include behaviour such as social isolation and exclusion from a group (Boulton et al., 2002). Some bullying behaviours fall under just one of the above mentioned categories, whilst others can be seen as both direct and indirect forms of bullying.

### **The Emergence of Bullying Behaviour**

According to Childline (2009) bullies are found in most schools and communities. The emergence of bullying behaviour is related to the way in which children learn to express themselves and learn to empathize with each other as members of the same social group. These behaviours can however only be termed bullying once children have reached a certain level of awareness and understanding. Behaviour can only be referred to as bullying if there is an intention to hurt or upset, if the perpetrator has an awareness of cause and effect, an understanding of norms and social rules and an ability to empathize with others' feelings (Thompson, Arora & Sharp, 2002). Many of the methods of reducing bullying behaviours depend on children being aware that their interactions are an unacceptable way to behave because of the consequences for the victims and other children in the group. Some researchers suggest that bullying can be conceptualized as "a special form of aggression which is social in nature" (Bjorkqvist, Ekman & Lagerspetz, 1982, p. 308).

According to Atlas and Pepler (1998), gender is another individual factor that relates to bullying interactions. Studies have shown that different genders bully differently. Boys as young as two years old may exhibit aggressive behaviour. As they get older, they may develop a tendency to use aggression as a means of acquiring status, whereas girls generally do not (Thompson et al., 2002). For girls, dominance within the group is usually not as important as the establishment of affiliation and co-operation. Girls therefore tend to feel guilty if they use direct aggression towards another child. They are therefore more likely to become involved in verbal or relational bullying, including the use of actions such as spreading rumours, social exclusion and gossiping, to increase their status within the group (Jacobs, 2006).

Garrett (2003) mentions that a study conducted by Olweus and Limber (1999) found that males tend to bully and become victims of bullying more often than females. Ma (2002) adds that boys usually bully both boys and girls whereas girls tend to only bully other girls. Within a bullying situation one finds that boys will often take on the role of bully or encourager of the bully, while girls will take on the role of bystander or defender. Whether the bullies tend to operate in groups, or singly, appears to vary from school to school. Victimized boys more often point to an individual as the bully, but quite often the bully has a group of supporters who help to sustain the behaviour (Oyaziwo, 2008). There is a tendency for girls to report being bullied more by groups (Rigby, 1997). While both boys and girls say that others bully them by making fun of the way they look or talk, boys are more likely to report being hit, slapped or pushed. Teenage girls are more often the targets of rumours and sexual comments (Oyaziwo, 2008).

According to Sullivan (2000) the incidence of bullying generally decreases as children get older. He believes that this occurs as a result of the development of better anti-bullying skills as well as a reduction in the number of potential bullies. Research does, however, indicate that the incidence of bullying is highest when children start secondary school, because each new group is vulnerable to the predations of older children who know the school culture and have already experienced the process of acceptance and initiation into it (Rigby & Slee, 1995). This is particularly the case for boys. Oyaziwo (2006) confirms that teenage boys are most likely to become victims of bullying. It has also been found that, as bullies get older, they tend to show less sympathy for their victims, and that in a culture where bullying is part of the status quo they are more likely to be hardened in this role. Although there may be a statistical pattern of an overall decrease in bullying as children mature, there are also individual reported cases in which bullying becomes more severe over time (Rigby, 1996).

Bullying is viewed as a primarily proactive form of aggressive behaviour, with concepts such as intention, motivation, punishment and reward all playing a role in its complex process. A certain level of development of thought, as well as social and emotional development is required in order to bully (Thompson et al., 2002). Sullivan (2000) asserts that all types of bullying result in psychological damage.

### **Consequences of Bullying**

Many individuals believe that bullying is a normal part of childhood. However, research shows that bullying can result in negative academic, physical, social, emotional and psychological consequences for the children who bully, the children who are bullied and the witnesses of violence. Bullying can also greatly affect the overall climate of a school. These consequences can be short-term or long-term (Banks, 2000).

The isolation and exclusion that often accompany bullying not only deny children company, friendship and social interaction, but also cause them to feel incompetent and unattractive. Those who have been bullied often have difficulty forming relationships and tend to lead less successful lives (Sullivan, 2000). Victims of bullying may feel sad, unhappy, hurt, or rejected as a result of peer victimization. They often feel bad about themselves based on comments that were made by bullies and some even report losing friendships as a result of the victimization. Persistent bullying may erode the victim's self-confidence, induce serious health problems and even ruin the victim's career. Victims may also experience headaches, sleeplessness, anxiety and depression. Some may even develop post-traumatic stress disorder (Awake, 2003).

Duncan (1999) states that victims of bullying, when compared with other children, tend to manifest the following conditions: low self-confidence, low self-esteem, poor self-worth, depression, anxiety, insecurity, incompetence, hypersensitivity, experience the feeling that they are

unsafe, nervousness, panicky behaviour at school, recurrent memories of bullying to the point that concentration becomes impaired, rejection by peers, socially avoidant behaviour, more introverted behaviour and fewer friendships. In addition, victims of bullying often bring home their frustrations at school and lash out at their parents who, unfortunately, are most likely unaware of their children's victimization at school. As a result, family relationships are also likely to deteriorate (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

According to Oyaziwo, (2006), the most extreme consequence of bullying for victims and society is violence, in the form of both murder and suicide. The sense of powerlessness experienced by children who are victimized may be so profound that some victims of bullying react with self-destructive acts or lethal retaliation.

## **BULLYING AND SELF-ESTEEM**

Adolescence is a period in which there are many dramatic changes, and as a result of such changes an individual's perception of the world is altered. It is well documented that there are many 'ups and downs' during this period (Adams, 1995). According to Harter (1993), one of the most important concepts during adolescence is that of self-esteem. Interaction with other people is important for an adolescent and plays a vital role in the development of self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to a developed attitude about one's personality (Kaya & Sackes, 2004) and is an important factor in directing behaviour throughout the various aspects of life (Hamarta, 2004).

Self-esteem refers to "individual's evaluations of their own self-worth, that is, the extent to which they view themselves as good, competent and decent" (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2001, p. 19). In this respect, social support is an important factor in the formation of self-esteem during adolescence. It is also well known that the relationship of parents and peers with the adolescent supports the development of self-esteem (Hoffman, Levy-Shiff & Ushpiz, 1988; Kulaksizoglu, 2001). According to Coopersmith (1967), the attention an individual receives from other people and the degree of acceptance and respect he or she feels play a role in self-esteem development.

The theory of 'the looking glass self' asserts that individuals view themselves from the perspective of others and integrate these perceptions into their existing self-concept (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). This is important because the amount of perceived acceptance obtained from others may be incorporated into an individual's personal feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 2000). The current research study therefore aimed to explore and describe the possible long-term effects of chronic bullying at school on victims' self esteem during young adulthood.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The current research study employed a quantitative research approach. The quantitative data was collected by means of a survey research technique, whereby data was sourced through the use of self-report questionnaires. In survey research, the researcher uses a written questionnaire or formal structured interview to gather information on the backgrounds, behaviours, beliefs, or attitudes of a large number of people (Neuman, 2006).

### **Participants and Sampling**

The current researchers utilized a non-probability sampling technique in order to select young adult participants from the target population. The respondents were required to be young adults, between the age of 18 and 34, who had completed their school career within the past sixteen years and who had at least a Grade 7 level of English language proficiency. Suitable candidates were identified from the author's social network and a snowball technique was used to identify more participants for the current research study. The study was conducted among a sample of one hundred and one participants.

Forty-two males and fifty-nine females took part in the current research study. In this sample, the majority of the participants were White (81%), the second largest ethnic group was Black (8%), followed by Coloureds (7%), and Others (4%). The 'Other' category referred to the remaining South African ethnic groups as well as international ethnicities.

## **RESEARCH MEASURES**

### **The Biographical Questionnaire**

A brief Biographical Questionnaire was utilized in order to obtain essential demographic information from the participants. The participants were requested to provide the following details: Name, contact number and e-mail address (so that the author could thank them for their participation and provide them with a copy of the research results), name(s) of school(s) attended, age, current occupation, date of birth, date on which questionnaire was completed, gender, ethnicity, marital status and home language.

### **The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ)**

The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ), developed by Dan Olweus in 1996, is utilized in the measurement of bully/victim problems such as: exposure to various direct and indirect physical, verbal, racial or sexual forms of bullying/harassment; various forms of bullying among other students, the location of bullying incidents, pro-bully and pro-victim attitudes, and the extent to which the social environment (teachers, parents and peers) is informed about, and thus reacts to the bullying (Olweus, 2007).

The R-OBVQ is an anonymous self-report instrument and consists of 40 group administered paper and pencil items. The participants in the current study were requested to answer the questionnaire in a retrospective manner according to their past bully/victim experiences at school. According to Kyriakides, Kaloyirou and Lindsay (2006), the R-OBVQ has satisfactory psychometric properties, namely, validity correlations within the 0.60 to 0.70 range and internal consistency reliabilities in the 0.80's. The Revised Olweus Bully-Victim Questionnaire was successfully utilized in a previous South African study by Greef (2004).

### **Battle's Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults (CFSEI)**

The Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory (CFSEI) for Adults was utilized with the participants in the present research. Battle's (1981) CFSEI for adults contains 40 items and the following four subscales: a) General self-esteem items b) Social self-esteem items c) Personal self-esteem items and d) Lie items (which indicate defensiveness). The instrument without the lie scale consists of 32 items intended to measure an individual's general, personal and social self-perception.

The items in Battle's questionnaire are divided into two groups: those which indicate high self-esteem, and those which indicate low self-esteem. The built-in lie scale enables the researcher to determine how authentic the reported self-esteem is. The participant marks either 'yes' or 'no' for

each item. The inventory, which can be administered to groups or individuals, usually requires 15 to 20 minutes for administration. These scales have been used effectively with adults over a wide age range (Battle, 1981). James Battle's CFSEI was also effectively utilized in a previous South African study by Daniels (2007).

## **DATA COLLECTION**

During the data collection stage of the current study, one hundred and one young adult participants were identified and provided with information and consent forms. They were then asked to complete the Biographical Questionnaire, the Retrospective Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults. The participants were requested to complete their questionnaires at home and return the completed questionnaires to the researcher within a specific time-frame. These participants were also provided with a contact number for psychological services should they require individual counseling as a result of their participation in the study.

Once all of the completed questionnaires had been returned to the researchers, the participants were informed that the results, of the group as a whole, would be provided in the form of a brief report to be e-mailed to their respective addresses. The data from the questionnaires was then captured and analyzed, with the assistance of a qualified statistician.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

All participants were informed about the nature, goals and possible advantages of the research. They had the freedom to choose not to participate in the study and were requested to provide informed consent should they have chosen to participate in the study. The research had no known risks or discomfort for the participants. Data was gathered under the supervision of a qualified psychologist and participants' confidentiality was guaranteed. All the material and data was dealt with in the strictest confidence.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the biographical data from the study. A nominal-level of measurement was used to describe the results in terms of the participants' age, gender, ethnicity and home language. Frequency distributions, medians, means, standard deviations and alpha coefficients were calculated and analyzed by a qualified statistician.

The first aim of this particular research study was to determine the prevalence of previous chronic bullying at school among a sample of young adult participants in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. The data was then analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Pearson-R correlation coefficients were later utilized to describe the relationship between the independent variables (such as bullies, victims, bully-victims and bystanders) and the dependent variables (such as experience of bullying and attitudes towards bullying).

The second aim of the current study was to explore and describe the impact of chronic bullying at school on self-esteem among the young adult participants. Data obtained from Battle's Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory was interpreted with descriptive statistics as well as a Pearson-R correlation coefficient in order to establish the relationship between independent variables (such as bullies, victims, bully-victims and bystanders) and dependent variables (personal, social and general

self-esteem scores). ANOVA statistics were also utilized to compare the scores of those who were bullied with those who were not bullied.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results for Aim 1: The Prevalence of Previous Bullying at School

It is important to note that the young adult participants were asked to complete the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (R-OBVQ) based upon their *overall* experience of bullying during their junior and secondary school careers.

According to Sullivan (2000), bullying incidents tend to involve three different groups of learners: bullies (those who carry out the bullying behaviours), victims (those who become the target of bullying behaviours) and bystanders (those who are neither bullies nor victims but are present during the bullying incident). The current researchers have included an additional category within this section which refers to bully-victims (those who are both bullies and victims of bullying). Descriptive statistics served to facilitate insight regarding the distribution of bullies, victims, bully-victims and bystanders within the young adult sample. These findings are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

Table 1 shows that the largest group in the young adult sample was bully-victims (those who are both bullies and victims of bullying). This group included more than half of the participants (57%). Victims were the second largest group in the sample, with almost a third (31%) of the participants falling into this category. Bystanders (those who are neither bullies nor victims of bullying) made up approximately one tenth (9%) of this sample, whilst very few of the young adult participants were classified as bullies (3%). A very small percentage of participants acknowledged that they were just bullies, never victims. Overall findings in the current research study indicate that 91 percent of the young adult participants had been involved in bullying behaviours.

These results, indicated by young adults, differ in terms of the percentage of bully-victims from a study with school learners conducted by Holan, Flisher and Lombard (2007). The study conducted by Holan et al. (2007) examined the prevalence of bullying behaviour amongst adolescents in South Africa and found that over a third of learners were involved in bullying behaviours. The study involved 5074 adolescent school children at 72 Government schools, in Cape Town and Durban. Results indicated that 36.3 percent of the learners were involved in bullying behaviour, 8.2 percent as bullies, 19.3 percent as victims and 8.7 percent as bully-victims (those individuals who are both bullied and who bully others).

The number of victims and bully-victims in the current study's sample is exceptionally high when compared with the prevalence of bullying in Holan et al.'s (2007) study. However, the number of bullies in the current young adult sample does appear to be lower than the number of bullies in Holan et al.'s (2007) study.

### Results for Aim 2: Impact of Chronic Bullying at School on Self-Esteem

The results of the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults are presented in this section. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to establish the internal consistency and reliability of the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults. These results are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

Overall, the internal consistency within the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory suggests that the constructs in these scales are fairly homogenous and relatively tapped into. The Cronbach's alpha

for the social scale was the lowest relative to the other scales, however its readings were still noteworthy.

The participants' levels of defensiveness were measured by using a built-in lie scale which formed part of the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory. The young adult participants' self-esteem questionnaire contained 8 lie-scale items. The level of defensiveness within the young adult sample is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 here

The mean score for the lie scale in the young adult sample was 5.8 out of 8.0, with a standard deviation of 1.7. These findings indicate that only about 11 percent of the young adult participants appear to have answered the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults in a defensive manner.

Four scores were computed from the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults based on the following subscales: General Self-Esteem, Social Self-Esteem, Personal Self-Esteem and Total Self-Esteem. The means, standard deviations and descriptions of the overall self-esteem (S.E.) results for the young adult sample are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 here

The General and Social self-esteem scores in the overall sample are described as high whilst the Personal self-esteem scores for the overall sample are intermediate. The means, standard deviations and descriptions of the overall self-esteem results for bullies, victims, bully-victims and bystanders in the young adult sample are presented in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 here

The mean score of the total young adult sample for the total subscale was 24.0 out of a possible score of 32.0. According to Battle's (1981) rating scale this indicates that the overall self-esteem of the young adult participants is intermediate or average. When divided into groups of bullies, victims, bully-victims and bystanders, it was established that the total scores of bullies, victims and bully-victims could also be described as intermediate, whilst the total self-esteem score for bystanders could be described as high. These findings are consistent with those of the literature which states that bullying has long-term effects on both those who bully and those who are bullied (Kelly, 2009).

Overall results indicate that bystanders have the highest total self-esteem score (29.1), followed by victims (25.7), bully-victims (22.5) and bullies (20.0). The results of the ANOVA (See Table 6) and POST-HOC analysis (See Table 7) confirm that there were statistically significant differences between the total self-esteem scores of the four groups. The most significant difference in scores occurred between bully-victims and bystanders in the young adult sample, as the bystanders had significantly higher total self-esteem scores.

The mean score of the total young adult sample for the general sub-scale was 12.7 out of a possible score of 16.0. It therefore fell into the descriptive category of high, which also serves to describe the mean scores for the victims, bully-victims and bystanders in the current sample. The bullies in the current sample obtained a lower general self-esteem score, which may be described as intermediate or average. Of the four groups, bystanders once again obtained the highest mean score (15.0), followed by victims (13.8), bully-victims (11.8) and then bullies (11.3).

The ANOVA (See Table 6) and POST-HOC analysis (See Table 7) results for this subscale confirm that the differences between the groups were significant. The most notable differences occurred between bystanders and bully-victims as well as victims and bully-victims. The bystanders in the current sample were therefore found to have a much higher self-esteem than the victims and bully-victims for the general subscale.

The mean score of the total young adult sample for the social subscale was 6.4 out of a possible score of 8.0. Therefore the participants' overall social self-esteem can be described as high. The

overall self-esteem scores for victims, bully-victims and bystanders could also be described as high, whilst the bullies in this sample obtained an intermediate social self-esteem score. Of the victims, bully-victims and bystanders, victims obtained the highest social self-esteem mean (7.1), followed by bystanders (6.9) and bully-victims (6.0). It is interesting to note that the victims in the current sample had the highest social self-esteem score of the four groups which indicates that their history of being bullied at school does not appear to have had a significant impact on their current perceptions of the quality of their relationships with others (Battle, 1981).

The ANOVA statistics (See Table 6) confirm that there were statistically significant differences in the social self-esteem scores of the groups. The POST-HOC analysis (See Table 7) indicates that the most significant difference occurred between victims and bully-victims in the young adult sample. The bully-victims' social self-esteem was significantly lower than that of the victims' in the current sample.

The mean score for the total young adult sample for the personal subscale was 4.9 out of a possible score of 8.0. It therefore fell into the descriptive category of intermediate, which also serves to describe the mean scores for victims and bully-victims. The bystanders in the current sample obtained a high personal self-esteem score of 7.2, whilst the bullies obtained a low personal self-esteem mean of 3.3. Of the four groups, bystanders had the highest personal self-esteem score (7.2), followed by victims (4.8), bully-victims (4.7) and bullies (3.3). It is of interest to note that the personal self-esteem scores of victims and bully-victims were very similar. This serves to indicate that these individuals have similar perceptions of their personal self-worth.

ANOVA (See Table 6) and POST-HOC analysis (See Table 7) results indicate that the bystanders' self-esteem was significantly higher than that of the victims' and bully-victims' in the current young adult sample.

The results of the ANOVA and POST-HOC analysis for the young adult sample are presented in Table 6 and Table 7 respectively.

Insert Table 6 here

Insert Table 7 here

The results of the ANOVA and POST-HOC analysis indicate that a significant difference exists between the self-esteem scores of the participants on all four of the subscales in the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Adults. The bullies in the current sample were unfortunately not included in the POST-HOC analysis as they only made up 3 percent of the total young adult sample. However, significant differences in the scores of bystanders, victims and bully-victims were noted.

Overall findings indicate that important differences occurred between the total self-esteem scores of bystanders and bully-victims, with bystanders obtaining a much higher score for overall self-esteem. General self-esteem was also highest among bystanders followed by victims and bully-victims. Social self-esteem scores were however significantly higher for victims than bully-victims. Finally, personal self-esteem scores indicated that bystanders had the highest personal self-esteem followed by victims and then bully-victims.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the literature, there is evidence to suggest that a relationship exists between bullying at school and self-esteem in later life. Sullivan (2000) states that those who have been bullied often have difficulty forming relationships, feel incompetent and unattractive, and tend to lead less successful lives. It is also well known that the relationship of parents and peers with an individual during adolescence supports the development of self-esteem which remains fairly stable over time (Hoffman et. Al., 1988; Kulaksizoglu, 2001). The results of the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficients in

the current study confirm that a definite positive albeit small relationship exists between bullying at school and overall self-esteem in later life. This is important because little is being done in South African schools to address the phenomenon of bullying.

The current researchers propose the following avenues for future research: 1) A longitudinal study to measure the stability of victims' self-esteem levels over time. 2) A large-scale study to determine the prevalence of bullying within junior and secondary schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. 3) A comparison of the prevalence of bullying among students in an all-girls and all-boys school. 4) A comparison of the prevalence of bullying at school among individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. 5) A study of bullying intervention strategies within the South African context.

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TABLE 1  
Distribution of Bullies, Victims, Bully-Victims and Bystanders

Category	N	Percentage
Bullies	3	3%
Victims	31	31%
Bully-Victims	58	57%
Bystanders	9	9%

TABLE 2  
Internal Consistency and Reliability of the Self-Esteem Inventory

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
General	.84
Social	.69
Personal	.82
Total	.84

TABLE 3  
Defensiveness within the Young Adult Sample

Score out of 8	<u>N</u>	Percentage
0	0	0%
1	2	2%
2	2	2%
3	7	7%
4	9	9%
5	19	19%
6	19	19%
7	27	27%
8	16	16%

TABLE 4  
Self-Esteem Results for the Total Young Adult Sample

Scale	<u>M</u>	Minimum	Maximum	<u>SD</u>	Description
General	12.7	2.0	16.0	3.3	High
Social	6.4	1.0	8.0	1.7	High
Personal	4.9	0.0	8.0	2.6	Intermediate
Total	24.0	4.0	32.0	6.8	Intermediate

TABLE 5  
Self-Esteem Results for Bullies, Victims, Bully-Victims and Bystanders

Group	Scale	M	Minimum	Maximum	SD	Description
<b>Bullies</b>	General	11.3	9.0	14.0	2.5	Intermediate
	Social	5.3	3.0	7.0	2.1	Intermediate
	Personal	3.3	3.0	4.0	0.6	Low
	Total	20.0	18.0	24.0	3.5	Intermediate
<b>Victims</b>	General	13.8	7.0	16.0	2.5	High
	Social	7.1	4.0	8.0	1.2	High
	Personal	4.8	0.0	8.0	2.7	Intermediate
	Total	25.7	13.0	30.0	5.6	Intermediate
<b>Bully-Victims</b>	General	11.8	2.0	16.0	3.6	High
	Social	6.0	1.0	8.0	1.9	High
	Personal	4.7	0.0	8.0	2.5	Intermediate
	Total	22.5	4.0	32.0	7.5	Intermediate
<b>Bystanders</b>	General	15.0	13.0	16.0	1.1	High
	Social	6.9	5.0	8.0	1.1	High
	Personal	7.2	5.0	8.0	1.0	High
	Total	29.1	25.0	32.0	2.3	High

TABLE 6  
Results of ANOVA

Self-Esteem Sub-Scale	P
Total	.007*
General	.002*
Social	.009*
Personal	.021*

\*Significant p-value ( $p < 0.05$ )

TABLE 7  
Results of the POST-HOC Analysis

<b>General Self-Esteem Sub-Scale</b>	Bystander	Victim	Bully-Victim
Bystander		.597	.022*
Victim			.023*
Bully-Victim	.022*	.023*	
<b>Social Self-Esteem Sub-Scale</b>	Bystander	Victim	Bully-Victim
Bystander		.927	.347
Victim	.927		.013*
Bully-Victim	.347	.013*	
<b>Personal Self-Esteem Sub-Scale</b>	Bystander	Victim	Bully-Victim
Bystander		0.47*	.023*
Victim	.047*		.972
Bully-Victim	.023*	.972	
<b>Total Self-Esteem Sub-scale</b>	Bystander	Victim	Bully-Victim
Bystander		.408	.025*
Victim	.408		.099
Bully-Victim	.025*	.099	

\*Significant p-value ( $p < 0.05$ ).