



Social cohesion: A recipe to reduce bullying in secondary schools of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the critical role of social cohesion in creating a bullying-free environment in South African secondary schools. This study used a positivist paradigm and quantitative methodology to investigate bullying behaviour in schools, gathering data from 6 school principals, 240 parents, 320 learners and 30 teachers across six secondary schools in the OR Tambo Inland Education District, South Africa, to inform evidence-based conclusions. When promoting a culture of respect and harmony, schools can provide an optimal learning environment for learners. Using a social-ecological framework and social disorganization theory, this study investigated the causes of bullying in schools. Key findings indicate that bullying in South African schools is linked to several factors, including the lack of positive teacher-learner relationships, weak bonds between educators and learners, and inadequate parental support. They also include environmental factors such as family dynamics, community violence, and socioeconomic conditions that influence learners' behavior. These findings emphasize the need for a multi-faceted approach to address bullying, involving educators, parents, and the broader community. To reduce bullying in schools, this paper suggests fostering positive behavioral change, improving teacher-learner relationships, and building stronger, more cohesive communities.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, Bullying, Social Disorganization, Positive Behavioural Change, Multicultural Education, Toxic Environment.

INTRODUCTION

South African (SA) schools have recently experienced several incidents of bullying and violence.¹ A school should have a happy, safe, respectful, and optimal learning environment. The blatant disregard for learners' rights in the context of bullying suggests that quality basic education is unlikely to thrive in such environments. The prevalence of violent behavior among young people is disturbing and deserves urgent attention. Schools assume a critical role in shaping learners' lives, and they must prioritize creating a safe and supportive environment that promotes overall well-being and quality of

¹ S. Mlambo, "Justice for Lufuno: Limpopo Pupil Dies by Suicide after Violent School Bullying Incident," *IOL*, 2021; Riaan Grobler, "Violence and Killing in SA Schools: These Stories Shocked Us in 2018," *News24*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/violence-and-killing-at-sa-schools-these-stories-shocked-us-in-20181122>.

life.² To achieve quality basic education in South Africa, schools need strategies that promote behavioural change among learners and foster social cohesion.

Social cohesion refers to the bonds that unite people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs, fostering a sense of community and cooperation towards shared goals. It is about creating a harmonious society where individuals feel valued, respected, connected and working together to achieve common objectives.³ Members of the society should be connected and united as members of the society.⁴ It also means people's resilience whenever diversity, racism, violence, crime, and bullying strike. Education plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion by integrating new generations into society, equipping them with essential knowledge, skills, and values that enable their active participation and contribution to the community.⁵ Consequently, it is incumbent upon all individuals to unequivocally, condemn the egregious acts of bullying and violence that occur in South African schools.⁶

South Africa's demographic shifts have led to a significant increase in cultural diversity among learners in schools. As a result, multicultural policies and practices have become crucial and debated topics in educational institutions.⁷ To foster a harmonious society, it is essential to promote equity and inclusivity for all cultures, races, sexual orientations, and genders.⁸ Social cohesion plays a vital role in achieving this goal, as it cultivates a strong sense of community and connection among citizens from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses.

Ultimately, social cohesion is critical to the success of a society, enabling individuals to work together towards a common objective and promoting a healthy, robust, and inclusive community.⁹ A community's prosperity is deeply rooted in the strength of its connections among citizens and their willingness to engage in local initiatives.¹⁰ As integral members of society, individuals must collaborate, share ideas, and work collectively to develop innovative solutions that drive the community towards its aspirations and foster a positive, thriving environment.

Social cohesion is the situation that occurs when people willingly work and cooperate despite existing differences in their demeanour, culture, and beliefs.¹¹ Culture encompasses race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, and sexual orientation. To be socially cohesive is to have a sense of belongingness and build good relationships with community members.

Schools are microcosms of society, reflecting and amplifying the complex issues and challenges that exist within communities. They are not isolated from the broader social and political tensions, and as such, they grapple with a range of difficult behaviors and attitudes, including sexism, racism, cyberbullying, homophobia, and religious intolerance. Furthermore, differences in values and expectations between parents and educators can create additional challenges. Given these complexities, everyone involved in the educational ecosystem must bear the responsibility of identifying and removing barriers that hinder learners from diverse cultural backgrounds from accessing equal educational opportunities and achieving success.

Studies have consistently shown that low-income and disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to experience higher crime rates. These areas often display characteristics of social disorder and low collective efficacy, including weakened social connections among residents, fragmented

² Manuela Pulimeno et al., "School as Ideal Setting to Promote Health and Wellbeing among Young People," *Health Promotion Perspectives* 10, no. 4 (2020): 316.

³ Mbuyiselo Bonani Mlaba, Gedala Mulliah Naidoo, and Marathane Reggy Metso, "Locally Produced Television Programmes Designed for Social Cohesion in a Democratic South Africa," *Journal of African Film & Diaspora Studies (JAFDIS)* 5, no. 2 (2022).

⁴ Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez, "Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51, no. 1 suppl (March 8, 2010): S54–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510383501>.

⁵ Zebun Nisa Khan, "Role of Education in Building Social Cohesion," *Online Submission* 4, no. 2 (2016): 23–26.

⁶ Sakumzi Poswa, "Combating Bullying in Secondary Schools of South Africa" (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa, 2025).

⁷ Daniela Semião et al., "Teachers' Perspectives on Students' Cultural Diversity: A Systematic Literature Review," *Education Sciences* 13, no. 12 (December 6, 2023): 1215, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13121215>.

⁸ Semião et al., "Teachers' Perspectives on Students' Cultural Diversity: A Systematic Literature Review."

⁹ Christoph Sommer, "Social Cohesion and Economic Development: Unpacking the Relationship" (Briefing Paper, 2019).

¹⁰ David Schiefer and Jolanda Van der Noll, "The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review," *Social Indicators Research* 132, no. 2 (2017): 579–603.

¹¹ Sommer, "Social Cohesion and Economic Development: Unpacking the Relationship."

neighbourhood relationships and inadequate mechanisms for maintaining social norms and promoting community goals. These factors can create an environment conducive to increased criminal activity, highlighting the need for community-based initiatives that foster social cohesion and collective efficacy.

School bullying has severe consequences, including higher dropout rates, which in turn lead to higher unemployment rates and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. To break this cycle, it is essential to address bullying and its root causes through a comprehensive understanding of social dynamics and relationships. An effective strategy to reduce bullying is to foster a deeper understanding of human behaviour, promote social cohesion, and cultivate a culture of harmony and inclusivity. In doing so, people can create a supportive and nurturing environment that encourages learners to thrive and reach their full potential.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Education Social Partners in Building Social Cohesion

Community-based organizations play a vital role in fostering social connections by hosting various events and programs that unite people from diverse backgrounds.¹² Examples include cultural festivals, sporting events, and social clubs, which serve as vibrant platforms for community members to connect, interact, and build meaningful relationships. Social cohesion is critically driven by three key factors: economic equality, trust, and a shared sense of identity. Furthermore, nurturing relationships is essential for maintaining both physical health and psychosocial well-being, highlighting the vital importance of social connections in promoting overall quality of life.¹³ Building social cohesion occurs on three different levels:

1. Perceived inequalities within the same social group influence intragroup relationships.
2. Intergroup relationships foster societal trust across diverse groups.
3. Relationships between individuals, groups, and governmental institutions shaping national identity and allegiance.

The first two levels in peacebuilding are often called horizontal social cohesion, which emphasizes the bonds between community members and civil society organizations. The third level is characterized as vertical cohesion, focusing on the relationship between the state and society.¹⁴ Enhancing horizontal and vertical social cohesion is essential to promote sustainable development and peace. This can be achieved by addressing inequalities, a key driver of conflict, and cultivating social capital, thereby fostering a more harmonious, resilient, and prosperous society.¹⁵ The focal point for peacebuilding interventions in schools is collaborative partnerships and intervention strategies between schools and social partners such as Social Development, South African Police Services, local community leaders, Community Policing Forums, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) to address drug abuse and bullying in schools.

Nurturing healthy families and communities lays the foundation for a supportive environment that fosters growth and development. The social backdrop of a learner's life profoundly influences his

¹² Arnim Langer et al., "Conceptualising and Measuring Social Cohesion in Africa: Towards a Perceptions-Based Index," *Social Indicators Research* 131, no. 1 (2017): 321–43.

¹³ Peggy A Thoits, "Mechanisms Linking Social Ties and Support to Physical and Mental Health," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 52, no. 2 (2011): 145–61; Lisa F Berkman and S Leonard Syme, "Social Networks, Host Resistance, and Mortality: A Nine-Year Follow-up Study of Alameda County Residents," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 109, no. 2 (1979): 186–204; Corey L M Keyes and Barret Michalec, "Viewing Mental Health from the Complete State Paradigm," *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health: Social Contexts, Theories, and Systems*, 2010, 125–34; Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B Smith, and J Bradley Layton, "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review," *PLoS Medicine* 7, no. 7 (2010): e1000316.

¹⁴ Joseph Chan, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan, "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research," *Social Indicators Research* 75, no. 2 (2006): 273–302; Fletcher D Cox and Timothy D Sisk, "Peacebuilding: A Social Cohesion Approach," in *Peacebuilding in Deeply Divided Societies: Toward Social Cohesion?* (Springer, 2017), 13–31.

¹⁵ Michael J Brown and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and Beyond," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 10, no. 1 (2015): 10–24; Elisabeth King, Cyrus Samii, and Birte Snilstveit, "Interventions to Promote Social Cohesion in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 2, no. 3 (2010): 336–70.

or her upbringing, influencing his or her well-being, opportunities, and, ultimately, future prospects.¹⁶ There is a crisis of moral degeneration in SA schools.¹⁷ The dysfunctionality of many parental homes is sometimes due to the death of parents, where children have to head the family, and that contributes to bullying.¹⁸ Therefore, involving all stakeholders in the community may improve school safety and revive moral regeneration programs for learners.¹⁹ The presence of gangs and illicit markets, especially those involved in drug trafficking, creates an environment where young people are frequently exposed to bullying and violence. Furthermore, these networks often promote negative role models and provide incentives that reward and glorify aggressive behavior, perpetuating a cycle of violence.²⁰

The Role of Local Leadership

South Africa is actively seeking innovative educational and administrative solutions to address and combat the pressing issue of substance abuse within its school communities.²¹ South Africa is implementing a multi-faceted approach to address substance abuse in schools.²² Educational initiatives include incorporating health education curricula that raise awareness of the risks associated with illicit drugs and alcohol.

From a managerial perspective, strategies to combat drug possession and use include random searches of lockers, school bags, and even strip searches, with some schools employing canine searches.²³ Teachers and principals are increasingly taking proactive measures to confiscate harmful items from students.

In particular, search and seizure procedures and drug tests are relatively recent introductions in South African schools. As a result, school administrators and education officials are navigating and interpreting the relevant legal provisions outlined in the South African Schools Act (SASA) to inform their implementation of these measures.²⁴

There is a consensus among law enforcement officials, education authorities, and substance abuse researchers that the illicit drug trade has undergone a significant increase since the 1990s, marked by a substantial increase in drug trafficking, consumption, and related issues.²⁵ The issue of substance abuse in South African schools is far more urgent than is generally realised. Despite undergoing significant political and social changes, as well as establishing new trade and international connections, South Africa is grappling with a concerning rise in drug abuse. This trend perpetuates a troubling surge in school violence and bullying, ultimately undermining the safety and security of educational environments.²⁶

A significant number of students have access to and engage in the use of illicit substances and alcohol on school premises.²⁷ To address this issue, schools must take proactive measures to reestablish

¹⁶ Jacquelynne S Eccles and Robert W Roeser, "Schools as Developmental Contexts during Adolescence," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 21, no. 1 (2011): 225–41.

¹⁷ Anass Bayaga and Louw Jaysveree, "Moral Degeneration: Crisis in South African Schools?," *Journal of Social Sciences* 28, no. 3 (2011): 199–210.

¹⁸ Delbert S Elliott, "Environmental Factors Contribute to Juvenile Crime and Violence," *Opposing Viewpoints: Juvenile Crime*, 1997, 1–7.

¹⁹ Kenneth S Kendler et al., "Genetic and Family and Community Environmental Effects on Drug Abuse in Adolescence: A Swedish National Twin and Sibling Study," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 171, no. 2 (2014): 209–17.

²⁰ Kendler et al., "Genetic and Family and Community Environmental Effects on Drug Abuse in Adolescence: A Swedish National Twin and Sibling Study."

²¹ Rika Joubert, Jennifer Sughrie, and David M Alexander, "Search and Seizure of Learners in Schools in a Constitutional Democracy: A Comparative Analysis between South Africa and the United States," *De Jure* 46, no. 1 (2013): 114–31.

²² Solomon Makgoke and Jacob T Mofokeng, "Strategies for Policing Alcohol and Illicit Substance Abuse amongst Learners of Selected Secondary Schools within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality," *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 33, no. 1 (2020): 91–114.

²³ Makgoke and Mofokeng, "Strategies for Policing Alcohol and Illicit Substance Abuse amongst Learners of Selected Secondary Schools within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality."

²⁴ Mabeba Gladys Kekana, "The Impact of Substance Abuse among Youth on the Risk Profile of Bekkersdal Community" (Northwest University, 2015).

²⁵ Kekana, "The Impact of Substance Abuse among Youth on the Risk Profile of Bekkersdal Community."

²⁶ Chukwudi Cosmos Maha, Tolulope Olagoke Kolawole, and Samira Abdul, "Innovative Community-Based Strategies to Combat Adolescent Substance Use in Urban Areas of the US and Africa," *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences* 6, no. 6 (June 6, 2024): 1048–67, <https://doi.org/10.51594/ijarss.v6i6.1173>.

²⁷ Medical Research Council of South Africa, *The 2nd South African National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey*, 2008.

themselves as institutions focused on learning and academic achievement.²⁸ This requires a concerted effort to foster a culture of learning, discipline, and safety. As part of this effort, educators and administrators have had to intervene by searching students and confiscating items that pose a risk to themselves or others.

The society from which the school population comes influences the culture of teaching and learning that takes place in a school. In a school where there is easy access to its school premises, abuse of alcohol, drugs and weapons (where fellow learners even know who carries a knife, smokes, sells dagga, or is drunk at school) results in chaos. For example, schools in Mqanduli, the local government (King Sabatha Dalindyebo (KSD) municipality does not clean up neighborhoods around schools. The lack of municipal by-law enforcement appears not to protect schools from illegal liquor outlets and drug merchants around schools. The community believes that many drug dealers are located directly on school grounds or premises because such schools are not adequately fenced. There are limited random searches inside and around schools. The care and safety of learners is a shared responsibility that requires collective effort and commitment from the entire school community.²⁹

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Disorganization Theory

This paper values social disorganization theory, which focuses on the relationship between neighbourhood structure, social control, and crime.³⁰ This theory directly links crime rates to ecological characteristics of the neighbourhood.³¹ For example, it states that young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods participate in a subculture that approves of delinquency.³²

There are ecological factors that lead to high rates of crime in communities.³³ Environmental factors that contribute to juvenile crime and violence include violent and permissive families, unstable neighbourhoods, and delinquent peer groups.³⁴ These factors are constantly elevated levels of high school dropouts, unemployment, deteriorating infrastructures, and single-parent homes.³⁵ Historically, institutions such as family, school, church, and friendships have fostered cooperative relationships and social bonds within local communities. These relationships create a sense of belonging, encouraging individuals to adopt community values and reducing the likelihood of engaging in criminal or delinquent behaviour.³⁶ The level of organization within these institutions influences the strength of an individual's attachment to their community. When this attachment is weak, the social deterrents to crime and delinquency decrease. Such a feeling decreases the likelihood of their involvement in criminal or delinquent behaviours. According to social disorganization theory, an individual's place of residence significantly influences their likelihood of engaging in illegal activities. This theory suggests that community structure and organization are critical in shaping individual behaviour.³⁷

METHODOLOGY

This research used a descriptive correlational design to investigate the link between bullying behaviour and learners' environmental context. Through a quantitative approach, respondents' perspectives on

²⁸ Chukwudi Cosmos Maha, Tolulope Olagoke Kolawole, and Samira Abdul, "Innovative Community-Based Strategies to Combat Adolescent Substance Use in Urban Areas of the US and Africa."

²⁹ Cox and Sisk, "Peacebuilding: A Social Cohesion Approach."

³⁰ Charis E. Kubrin and Ronald Weitzer, "New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 40, no. 4 (November 1, 2003): 374–402, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427803256238>.

³¹ Raheleh Rostami et al., "Successful Public Places: A Case Study of Historical Persian Gardens," *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 15 (2016): 211–24.

³² Elsa C Anderson and Emily S Minor, "Vacant Lots: An Underexplored Resource for Ecological and Social Benefits in Cities," *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 21 (2017): 146–52.

³³ Kubrin and Weitzer, "New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory."

³⁴ Rebecca Wickes, "Social Disorganization Theory: Its History and Relevance to Crime Prevention," *Preventing Crime and Violence*, 2016, 57–66.

³⁵ Wickes, "Social Disorganization Theory: Its History and Relevance to Crime Prevention."

³⁶ Theo Lorenc et al., "Crime, Fear of Crime, Environment, and Mental Health and Wellbeing: Mapping Review of Theories and Causal Pathways," *Health & Place* 18, no. 4 (2012): 757–65.

³⁷ Magdalena Van den Berg et al., "Health Benefits of Green Spaces in the Living Environment: A Systematic Review of Epidemiological Studies," *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 14, no. 4 (2015): 806–16.

bullying reduction strategies were gathered to inform policy discussions and future research that supports safe and secure learning environments.

For this study, six secondary schools in the OR Tambo In-Land District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, were selected. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, we intentionally selected 6 school principals, 240 parents, 320 learners, and 30 educators from six secondary schools.

The Likert scale questionnaire allowed respondents to express their feelings on a scale of agree or disagree on a given probe. Then, by aggregating the scores, the researchers collected information, personal opinions, or attitudes from respondents.

Quantitative analysis provides a detailed understanding of bullying in schools, shedding light on the underlying social dynamics.³⁸ Adopting this approach, the researchers systematically examined the factors that influence individuals within the school community, generating valuable insights to inform future interventions. Quantitative research focuses on measuring quantities or amounts, expressing processes and phenomena in terms of numerical values. It is suitable for this study as it enables mathematical analysis of data on bullying escalation and prevention. This approach, commonly used in scientific research, involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to draw conclusions about a larger population.³⁹

The research report follows a standardized structure, including introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Respondents (Learners, educators, principals and parents) are asked to respond to the probe: *Educators use corporal punishment or send learners home or out of the classroom during tuition time to punish them.*

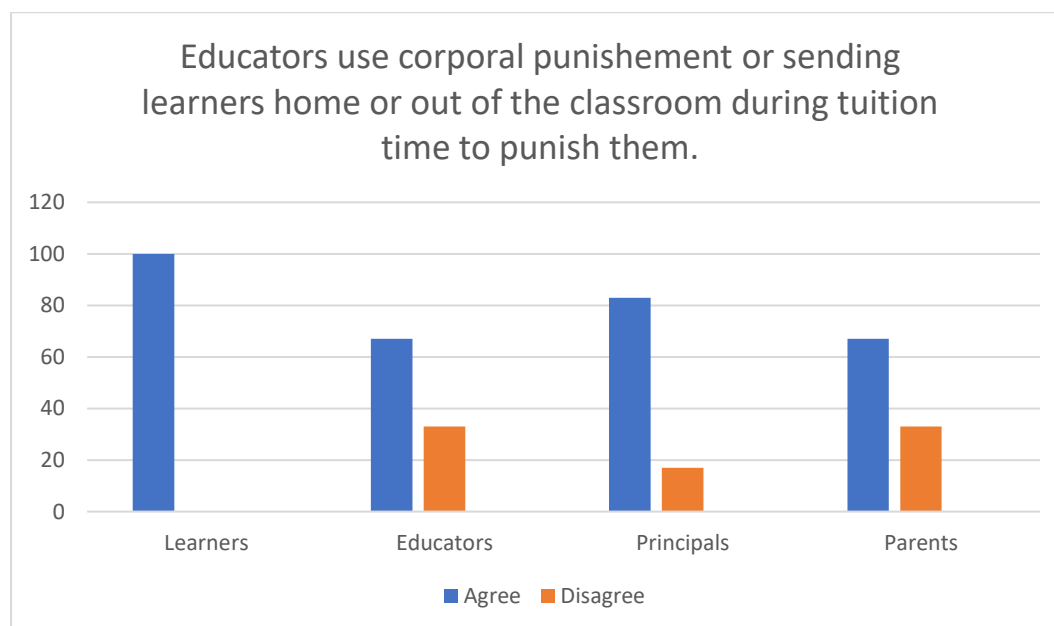


Figure 1: *Educators' use of corporal punishment or sending learners home or out of the classroom during tuition time to punish them.* Source: Poswa, 2025

The findings reveal that all learners (100%) perceive educators as unfriendly. 67% of educators admit to using prohibited methods such as corporal punishment or sending learners out of classrooms, despite knowing that the SASA No.84 of 1996 outlaws them. Educators create a toxic environment for learners. 67% of parents acknowledge educators' mismanagement of learner discipline, resulting in loss of learning opportunities. Parents also acknowledge the loss of learning time and do not address the deprivation of their children of the basic right to education. 83% of principals are also aware that

³⁸ KSSN Dehalwar and Shashikant Nishant Sharma, "Exploring the Distinctions between Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods," *Think India Journal* 27, no. 1 (2024): 7–15.

³⁹ Sharique Ahmad et al., "Qualitative v/s. Quantitative Research-a Summarized Review," *Population* 1, no.2(2019):2828–32.

learners are denied their right to education due to punitive measures. Therefore, educators' actions suggest disregard for the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005), depriving learners of learning opportunities. The relationship between educators and learners is compromised.

The same respondents responded to the following statement. The social background of learners, characterized by social ills (lawlessness), *contributes to bullying*.

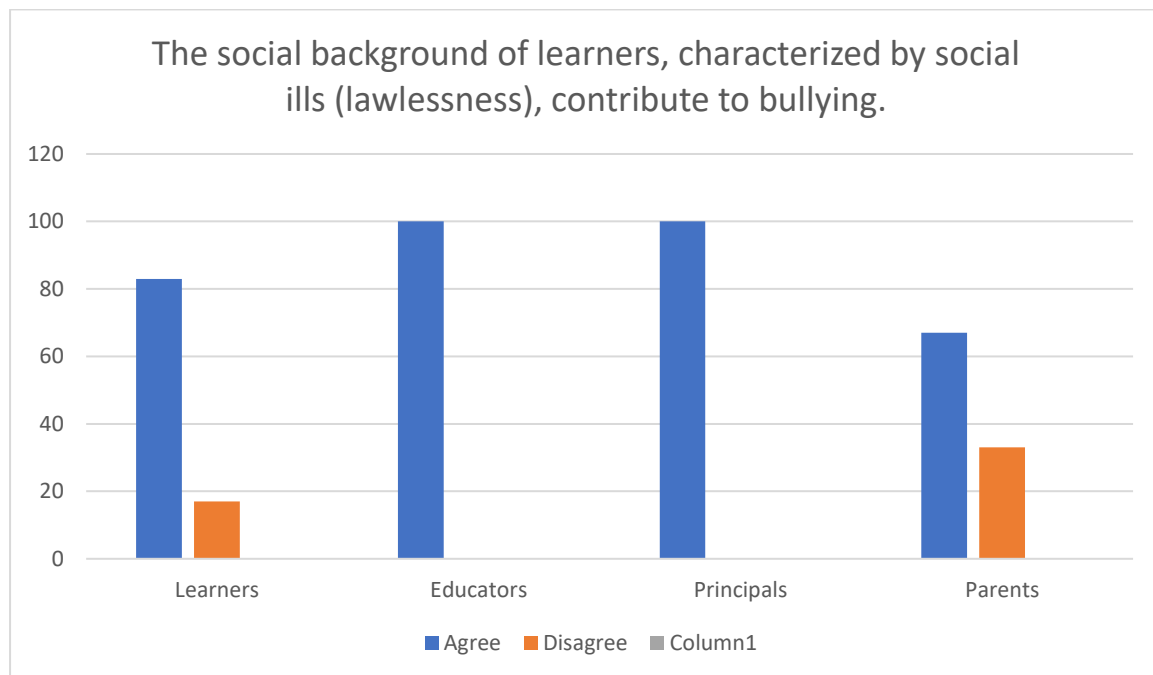


Figure 2: Social background of learners, characterized by social ills (lawlessness) which contributes to bullying. Source: Poswa, 2025

The findings highlight a strong connection between learners' environments and their behaviour where 83% of learners believe their residential area influences their behaviour. All teachers (100%) and 67% of parents agree that a learner's environment and family background influence learners' behaviour. Even principals confirm that learners' social backgrounds directly shape their behaviour.

These findings suggest that bullying behaviour is linked to social learning, with learners heavily influenced by their surroundings and peer interactions. Considering learners' backgrounds is crucial to addressing bullying, as social learning plays a significant role in shaping learners' behaviour.

These data reveal a clear link between learners' environments and bullying behaviour. Learners, teachers, and parents all recognize the impact of environment and family background on learner behaviour. This suggests that bullying is a product of social learning, influenced by the environment of the learners and peer interactions. Understanding learners' backgrounds is key to addressing bullying and promoting positive behaviour.

DISCUSSION

Lack of positive teacher–learner relationship

Evidence indicates a lack of positive teacher–learner relationships in SA schools. Teachers do not treat children with dignity and respect. They do not create a respectful school environment that promotes human rights. They still believe that power, authority, and being in charge in the classroom are the bases for control and discipline. Most of the participants in this study indicate that teachers are often unclear on how to effectively connect with their students. Instead of adopting a nurturing approach, many teachers rely on authoritarian methods and punitive measures to maintain classroom discipline.

The dynamics of teacher authority and teacher-student relationships play a crucial role in shaping discipline management strategies in public high schools.

Following the ban on corporal punishment in 1994, teachers are expected to foster positive relationships with students, creating a respectful and trusting school environment. However, some teachers appear to be reluctant to form personal connections with their students, possibly for fear that it may erode their authority and control in the classroom. As a result, some teachers are reportedly resorting to corporal punishment and other illicit measures to discipline misbehaving students.

Toxic environmental factors that contribute to bullying in schools

The findings of this study confirm that students' behaviour, learning outcomes, and overall wellbeing are significantly influenced by various factors, including family dynamics, peer relationships, school environment, and broader community contexts.

The family plays a vital role in shaping individuals' values and social norms, influencing their understanding of right and wrong and adherence to societal expectations.⁴⁰ Family values, which consist of beliefs, attitudes, and values learned within the family, significantly impact personality development. In contrast, social norms refer to the unwritten rules and behaviours accepted and expected by society.⁴¹ Positive family values, such as ethical behaviour, responsibility, and empathy, can deter individuals from engaging in criminal behaviour. Additionally, personal characteristics like age, sex, personality traits, mental and physical health, and temperament all contribute to shaping an individual's behaviour, particularly in learners.⁴²

The social background of learners with patriarchy, toxic masculinity, lawlessness and at times vigilantism, vandalism, poverty and theft may contribute to bullying and violence in schools.⁴³ Other factors that cause learners to bully one another include complexion, stature, love triangle and academic performance. These tend to increase negative peer pressure (including jealousy) among learners and result in bullying when learners develop low self-esteem regarding those issues.

Social disorder often arises from the breakdown of social norms and values, coupled with inadequate social control. Factors such as economic instability, unemployment, limited education, and restricted access to services can contribute to social disorder in disadvantaged communities. Without strong collective mechanisms to address community needs, these areas can foster an environment that allows crime and bullying to thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that acknowledges and incorporates the diverse histories, values, beliefs, and perspectives of individuals from various cultural backgrounds.⁴⁴ To implement this approach, teachers must adapt their lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of their students. This involves using culturally relevant texts, materials, references, and historical examples that resonate with learners of various backgrounds, allowing them to see themselves and their experiences reflected in the curriculum.⁴⁵

The following ways in multicultural education play a vital role in promoting social cohesion in schools.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Rameshwor Baral, "Exploring the Prominent Role of Social Institutions in Society," *International Research Journal of MMC (IRJMMC)* 4, no. 2 (2023): 68–74.

⁴¹ R Zia, "The Role of Gender in Shaping Social Norms: Insights from Social Science Research," *Physical Education, Health and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2023): 1–7.

⁴² Walaa Elsayed, "Building a Better Society: The Vital Role of Family's Social Values in Creating a Culture of Giving in Young Children's Minds," *Heliyon* 10, no. 7 (April 2024): e29208, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29208>.

⁴³ Muh Afrilsah, "Investigating the Role of Religion in Shaping Moral Values and Social Norms," *Mahogany Journal De Social* 1, no. 1 (2024): 41–49.

⁴⁴ Carl James, "Multiculturalism, Diversity, and Education in the Canadian Context: The Search for an Inclusive Pedagogy," *Global Constructions of Multicultural Education: Theories and Realities*, January 1, 2001, 175–204.

⁴⁵ Yasemin Acar-Ciftci, "Multicultural Education and Approaches to Teacher Training,," *Journal of Education and Learning* 8, no. 4 (2019): 136–52.

⁴⁶ Ogo Okoye-Johnson, "Does Multicultural Education Improve Students' Racial Attitudes? Implications for Closing the Achievement Gap," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 8 (2011): 1252–74.

- **Learning content:** The Education District must design learning materials that incorporate diverse cultural and religious viewpoints, providing a more inclusive and nuanced understanding.⁴⁷ For instance, a lesson on South African history could explore the varied cultural and religious experiences of African communities, offering a richer and more comprehensive perspective. This may reduce cultural-based bullying. Each culture may be recognized and respected at school.
- **Student cultures or religions:** To create a culturally inclusive learning environment, educators can gain insight into students' cultural and religious backgrounds. They can develop learning experiences and content that resonate with students' diverse perspectives and heritages. By doing so, educators can empower learners to identify, discover and appreciate the cultural and religious diversity of their peers. They can also share and exchange their own cultural and religious experiences. This can foster a deeper sense of understanding and respect for community diversity so that bullying does not prevail.
- **Critical analysis:** To foster a fair and inclusive learning environment, educators must thoroughly review educational materials to detect and eliminate biases. They must acknowledge and question their own cultural and religious biases. Through collaborative efforts with learners, educators should examine how educational resources, teaching methods, and school policies might perpetuate cultural or religious biases. Educators must facilitate open and honest discussions to recognize and address biases. They must cultivate a culture of equity and inclusivity.⁴⁸

Positive behaviour modification strategy, which focuses on personal development, should be organised for learners. Effective strategies for reducing bullying in schools can include neighbourhood safety initiatives that create a secure environment at home, access to social services and support systems within schools. They also include community-based programs that foster a culture of support and inclusivity.

These multifaceted approaches can help mitigate bullying behaviours and promote a safer, supportive learning environment. Bullying behaviour manifests itself in many ways, including rudeness towards others and through anti-social behaviour such as violence towards others.

CONCLUSION

Building a culture of peace and progress requires social cohesion, tolerance, and acceptance. Schools, communities, and families must work together to address bullying, promoting mutual respect and inclusivity. Comprehensive training and a collective approach can empower individuals to create safe environments. Fostering social cohesion, we can promote social justice, equity, and the well-being of all community members, ultimately combating bullying and creating a more just society. Every school community member has a critical role to play in preventing bullying. Stakeholders, including educators, staff, parents, and learners, must work together to prevent bullying and address its negative impact on learners' well-being.

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⁴⁷ John Eligon, "Poor Scores Leave an Afrocentric School in Chicago Vulnerable," *The New York Times*, 2016.

⁴⁸ Thomas S. Dee and Emily K. Penner, "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance," *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 1 (February 24, 2017): 127–66, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216677002>.

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