



# Deconstructing Traditional Bullying, Cyberbullying and Psychological Distress among LGBT and Heterosexual Adolescents in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Bullying and psychological distress among adolescents are considered serious social and public health concerns. Several research works concerning psychological distress among adolescents as a result of bullying experiences have been conducted but not many studies explore the differences in the bullying experiences of LGBT adolescents and their heterosexual counterparts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the comparative analyses of traditional bullying, cyberbullying, and psychological distress among heterosexual and LGBT adolescents in South Africa. The study adopted an ex-post-facto research design. A total of 140 respondents (73.6% self-identified as heterosexual and 26.4% as LGBT adolescents) who are students, were engaged using purposive random sampling. Participants completed the bullying victimisation components (B1 for the traditional bullying scale and B2 for cyberbullying scale) and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-10), which measures psychological distress among the study participants. Findings revealed that sexual orientations and gender identities do not significantly influence traditional-bullying victimisation among adolescents ( $t = 0.065$ ,  $df = 138$ ,  $p > .05$ ). However, further analysis revealed that LGBT adolescents ( $\bar{x}=53.44$ ;  $SD=05.03$ ) reported higher experiences of cyberbullying, compared to their heterosexual counterparts ( $\bar{x}=45.84$ ;  $SD=06.57$ ). Consequently, LGBT adolescents ( $\bar{x}=30.28$ ;  $SD=0.75$ ) reported higher experiences of psychological distress because of cyberbullying victimisation, compared to their heterosexual counterparts ( $\bar{x}=24.87$ ;  $SD=03.15$ ). It is recommended that psychological assessments and insightful counselling should be encouraged among LGBT adolescents. The purposeful intervention might enable early identification of psychological problems, and in turn, enables early psychosocial interventions that will address the prevailing psychological distress experienced among LGBT adolescents because of bullying victimisation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bullying and psychological distress among adolescents are considered serious social and public health concerns. This is because of the rampaging increase in the prevalence of bullying and psychological distress among adolescents.<sup>1</sup> Zhong et al. define bullying as the intentional and reoccurring aggressive actions toward another person in which there is a perceived or obvious imbalance, and the target of bullying often feels vulnerable to the stimulus.<sup>2</sup> According to Thomas et al., the most common modes of exerting bullying are verbal, name-calling and physical abuse.<sup>3</sup> Given the recent lockdown due to the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic, there was a significant increase in the use of gadgets for communication, even for educational purposes.<sup>4</sup> The study by Patchin and Hinduja reported that as the use of ICT significantly increases, adolescents in South Africa who are prone to bullying behaviour are more likely to engage in cyberbullying.<sup>5</sup> This is because of the anonymity advantage that allows perpetrators to hide their identity while engaging in cyberbullying.<sup>6</sup>

South African school adolescents have reported the prevalence of bullying in schools.<sup>7</sup> The Youth Research Unit at the University of South Africa reported that in 2012, 34.4% of in-school adolescents sampled in Gauteng confirmed that they had been victims of bullying and 67.7% of participants reported that bullying had increased in the past two years preceding the report.<sup>8</sup> One explanation for the increasing rate of bullying among adolescents in South Africa could be that adolescents in South Africa emulate the many violent acts in South African communities with which the in-school adolescents are conversant and that are mimicked in school contexts.<sup>9</sup>

Even though there exists the worrisome prevalence of psychological distress because of bullying victimisation, not many studies have examined the differences in the experience of traditional bullying, cyberbullying and psychological distress among LGBT and Heterosexual Adolescents in South Africa. Most of the researchers interested in the subject matter examined bullying (traditional or cyberbullying) and psychological distress among heterosexual school adolescents.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, many scholars have equally examined the variables (i.e. bullying and psychological distress) among LBGT school adolescents.

However, there is a paucity of studies that has attempted to explore comparative analyses of bullying experiences and psychological distress among heterosexual and LGBT school adolescents in the South African context. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the comparative analyses of traditional bullying victimisation, cyberbullying victimisation, and psychological distress

<sup>1</sup> Donnay Manuel et al., "Prevalence of Bullying Victimisation among Primary School Children in South Africa: A Population-Based Study," *BMC Research Notes* 14 (2021): 1–6; World Health Organization, "Youth Violence," 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence>.

<sup>2</sup> Mengting Zhong et al., "Association between Bullying Victimization and Depressive Symptoms in Children: The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 294 (2021): 322–28.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah J Thomas et al., "Association of Different Forms of Bullying Victimisation with Adolescents' Psychological Distress and Reduced Emotional Wellbeing," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 50, no. 4 (2016): 371–79.

<sup>4</sup> Vivian M. Olaseni and Abayomi O. Olaseni, "Covid-19 Pandemic: Impact of Socio-Demographic Factors and Parent's Life Orientation on Enforced Learning in Pupils during Lock-down in Nigeria," *Cape Comorin* 2, no. 4 (2020): 34–39.

<sup>5</sup> Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja, *Bullying Today: Bullet Points and Best Practices* (Corwin Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Esperanza Debby Ng, Joelle Yan Xin Chua, and Shefaly Shorey, "The Effectiveness of Educational Interventions on Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying among Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23, no. 1 (2022): 132–51.

<sup>7</sup> Segun A Emmanuel Adewoye and Annelize du Plessis, "Factors That Influence Emotional Disturbance among School Bullying Bystanders," *International Journal of Emotional Education* 13, no. 1 (2021): 35–50, [www.um.edu.mt/ijee](http://www.um.edu.mt/ijee); Deon Tustin et al., "Bullying among Secondary School Learners in South Africa with Specific Emphasis on Cyber Bullying," January 1, 2014, 13–25.

<sup>8</sup> Annelie Laas and Trynie Boezaart, "The Legislative Framework Regarding Bullying in South African Schools," *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 17, no. 6 (2014): 2666–2702.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria Margaret Timm and Linda Marie Eskell-Blokland, "A Construction of Bullying in a Primary School in an Underprivileged Community: An Ecological Case Study," *South African Journal of Psychology* 41, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 339–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/008124631104100308>.

<sup>10</sup> Manuel et al., "Prevalence of Bullying Victimisation among Primary School Children in South Africa: A Population-Based Study."

among heterosexual and LGBT adolescents in South Africa. In line with this, the following are the specific objectives of this study:

- To examine the comparative experiences of traditional bullying victimisation among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa
- To evaluate the comparative experiences of cyberbullying victimisation among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa
- To juxtapose the experiences of psychological distress among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa

The specific objectives of this study informed the following research hypotheses.

H1: *There will be a significant difference in the experiences of traditional bullying victimisation among heterosexual and LGBT school adolescents in South Africa.*

H2: *There will be a significant difference in the experiences of cyberbullying victimisation among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa*

H3: *There will be a significant difference in the experiences of psychological distress because of bullying victimisation among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Bullying Victimisation and Psychological Distress

Bullying victimisation is one of the significant risk factors for psychological distress among adolescents.<sup>11</sup> Psychological distress can be described as an unpleasant emotional state that an individual experiences in reaction to a specific stressor or demand that causes harm either permanently or temporarily to the person.<sup>12</sup> Psychological distress is often used by numerous scholars to cover a wider spectrum of emotional and behavioural problems not limited to feelings of depression, anxiety, negative thoughts (suicide ideation), withdrawal from social activities, etc.<sup>13</sup> Sansone and Sansone as well as Bifulco et al. reported that victims of bullying may experience signs of psychological distress such as worry, sadness, anxiety, nightmares, restlessness or loneliness.<sup>14</sup>

Previous studies showed a significant association between bullying victimisation and psychological distress.<sup>15</sup> Selkie et al. found a significant association between bullying victimisation and depression among female adolescents college students.<sup>16</sup> In addition, a result of a meta-analysis by Kowalski et al. which synthesised one hundred and thirty-one (131) studies indicated a strong association between bullying victimisation and psychological distress.<sup>17</sup>

The prevalence of psychological distress because of bullying victimisation among adolescents in South Africa is not a concern peculiar to South Africa; it is, rather, considered a worldwide

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<sup>11</sup> Segun Emmanuel Adewoye, "Adolescent Experience of Cyberbullying in the Era of Covid-19 in South Africa," *International Journal of Emotional Education* 14, no. 2 (2022): 36–52, <https://doi.org/10.56300/LDHK3526>.

<sup>12</sup> Sheila H Ridner, "Psychological Distress: Concept Analysis," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 45, no. 5 (2004): 536–45.

<sup>13</sup> Abayomi O. Olaseni et al., "Psychological Distress Experiences of Nigerians Amid COVID-19 Pandemic," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3596106>.

<sup>14</sup> Randy A Sansone and Lori A Sansone, "Workplace Bullying: A Tale of Adverse Consequences," *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience* 12, no. 1–2 (2015): 32; Antonia Bifulco et al., "Risk Factors and Psychological Outcomes of Bullying Victimization: A Community-Based Study," *Child Indicators Research* 7 (2014): 633–48.

<sup>15</sup> D American Psychiatric Association and American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, vol. 5 (American psychiatric association Washington, DC, 2013); A. Vieno et al., "Cybervictimization and Somatic and Psychological Symptoms among Italian Middle School Students," *The European Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 3 (June 1, 2015): 433–37, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cku191>.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen M Selkie et al., "Cyberbullying, Depression, and Problem Alcohol Use in Female College Students: A Multisite Study," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 18, no. 2 (2015): 79–86.

<sup>17</sup> Robin M Kowalski et al., "Bullying in the Digital Age: A Critical Review and Meta-Analysis of Cyberbullying Research among Youth," *Psychological Bulletin* 140, no. 4 (2014): 1073.

phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> That is to say, globally, the prevalence of psychological distress because of bullying victimisation among adolescents is also overwhelming. For instance, in a transnational study conducted in forty (40) developing countries to examine the prevalence of psychological distress resulting from bullying victimisation, the result revealed that an average of 37% of adolescents girls had psychological distress after they experienced bullying victimisation, while a prevalence rate of 42% rate was found among their male counterparts.<sup>19</sup> In addition, a recent meta-analysis of eighty (80) international studies revealed that the prevalence rate of psychological distress among adolescents victims of bullying is 34.5%.<sup>20</sup> In addition, a study conducted in India reported a 33.8% prevalence rate of psychological distress among school adolescents due to bullying victimisation experiences.<sup>21</sup>

In Africa, a high prevalence of psychological distress was also reported among school adolescents who experienced bullying victimisation. For instance, the study by Siziya and Mazaba conducted in Zambia reported a prevalence of 15.7% psychological distress among school adolescents who experienced bullying victimisation.<sup>22</sup> In South Africa, a study by Burger reported a 56.9% prevalence of psychological distress among adolescents who were victims of bullying.<sup>23</sup>

Adolescents across different lines of sexual orientations and gender identities (heterosexual or LGBT) experienced bullying victimisation in both traditional ways and remote wise. Traditional bullying is exerted through face-to-face dealings between the perpetrators and victims. On the other hand, cyberbullying (remote) entails the use of electronics and digital means such as phones, text messages, social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, TikTok,), and instant messages through the internet to harass, assault or intimidate victims.<sup>24</sup>

The study of Garaigordobil et al. explored the differences in heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexual orientations in the experience of bullying and cyberbullying.<sup>25</sup> The findings of the study revealed that the experience of cyberbullying was higher among non-heterosexual adolescents than heterosexual adolescents. Similarly, the study by Robinson and Espelage reported that college students who identify as LGBTQ had a more significant experience of bullying victimisation than their heterosexual counterparts.<sup>26</sup> The study further revealed that students who self-identified as LGBTQ were 3.3 times more likely to experience suicidal ideation and its attempts than heterosexuals. Similarly, LGBT students reported more cases of peer victimisation compared to their counterparts who are heterosexual. Furthermore, Garaigordobil et al. explored the differences between heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexual orientations in the experience of mental health problems.<sup>27</sup> The study supportably stated that non-heterosexual adolescents are significantly more depressed and expressed high social anxiety and psychopathological symptoms than their heterosexual counterparts.

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<sup>18</sup> Sara Valdebenito et al., "School-based Interventions for Reducing Disciplinary School Exclusion: A Systematic Review," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 14, no. 1 (January 9, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.1>.

<sup>19</sup> World Health Organization, "Youth Violence."

<sup>20</sup> Izabela Zych et al., "School Bullying in Different Countries: Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Short-Term Outcomes," in *Protecting Children Against Bullying and Its Consequences*, ed. Izabela Zych et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 5–22, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53028-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53028-4_2).

<sup>21</sup> T S Jaisooriya et al., "Prevalence and Correlates of Psychological Distress in Adolescent Students from India," *East Asian Archives of Psychiatry* 27, no. 2 (2017): 56–62.

<sup>22</sup> Seter Siziya and Mazyanga Lucy Mazaba, "Prevalence and Correlates for Psychosocial Distress among In-School Adolescents in Zambia," *Frontiers in Public Health* 3 (2015): 180.

<sup>23</sup> James W Burger et al., "Associations between Psychological Distress and Facets of Mindfulness: Implications for Campus-Based University Wellness Services," *Journal of American College Health*, 2021, 1–10.

<sup>24</sup> Kowalski et al., "Bullying in the Digital Age: A Critical Review and Meta-Analysis of Cyberbullying Research among Youth."

<sup>25</sup> Maite Garaigordobil and Enara Larrain, "Bullying and Cyberbullying in LGBT Adolescents: Prevalence and Effects on Mental Health Acoso y Ciberacoso En Adolescentes LGTB: Prevalencia y Efectos En La Salud Mental," 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph P Robinson and Dorothy L Espelage, "Bullying Explains Only Part of LGBTQ–Heterosexual Risk Disparities: Implications for Policy and Practice," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 8 (2012): 309–19.

<sup>27</sup> Garaigordobil and Larrain, "Bullying and Cyberbullying in LGBT Adolescents: Prevalence and Effects on Mental Health Acoso y Ciberacoso En Adolescentes LGTB: Prevalencia y Efectos En La Salud Mental."

## METHODOLOGY

This section embodies the research design, setting of the study, sampling technique, research instruments and administration, as well as ethical considerations.

### Research Design

This study adopted an ex-post facto research design. The design allows the establishment of links between an already existing outcome in bullying victimisation experiences and psychological distress among the sampled population.

### Sampling and Research Participants

The study's population was in-school adolescents in South Africa. The participants were purposively selected from the population of concern within the geographical mapping of South Africa. The data was accordingly collected from participants who met the inclusion criteria for participating in the study. The inclusion-exclusion criteria for selecting participants were:

- Adolescents between the age ranges of 11 years to 20 years
- Must reside and attend school in South Africa
- Must self-identified as heterosexual or LGBT adolescents
- Ability to read, understand and write in the English language

A total of one hundred and forty (140) respondents (27 males, 113 females) students participated in the study. In terms of their age ranges, participants in their early adolescents (11 to 14 years) were 02 (1.4%), mid-adolescents (15 to 17 years) were 64 (45.7%) while those in their late adolescents (age 18 to 20 years) were 74 (52.9%). Regarding participants' sexual orientation, 103 (73.6%) self-identified as heterosexuals, while 37 (26.4%) self-identified as members of the LGBT community.

### Instruments and Measures

A structured standardised questionnaire was used to collect data in this study. The questionnaire contained three (3) sections, and each section sought information on variables of interest. Section A retrieves information on the demographic characteristics (age, sexual orientation, gender, marital status) of the research participants. Section B measures the bullying victimisation experiences of participants, and section C measures the psychological distress of the study participants.

Section B quantifies the bullying components (B1 for the traditional bullying scale and B2 for cyberbullying scale). The B1 component was measured using the Olweus Bully Questionnaire (1996) which asked how frequently participants did experience traditional bullying victimisation from colleagues or people around in the last 2 months.<sup>28</sup> Each item was evaluated on a 5-point scale. This scale reported the reliability of Cronbach's alpha value of 0.76. Accordingly, the B2 component was informed by cyberbullying scale.<sup>29</sup> The scale is also a 5-point Likert scale which explored the experience of cyberbullying in the past 2 months among the study participants. The subscale also reported a strong Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.73.

Section C of the instruments measures the psychological distress among the study participants using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K-10). Items of the K-10 scale are scored from 1 'none of the time' to 5 'all of the time'. The higher the scores of the participants on the K-10 scale, the higher the level of psychological distress experienced and the lower the scores, the lower the level of psychological distress.

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<sup>28</sup> D. Olweus, *Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire* (Bergen, Norway: University of Bergen, 2006), <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Ft09634-000>.

<sup>29</sup> Hannah J. Thomas et al., "Development and Validation of the Bullying and Cyberbullying Scale for Adolescents: A Multi-dimensional Measurement Model," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 89, no. 1 (2019): 75–94; Olweus, *Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire*.

### Data Collection and Procedures

As the study was an ex-post-facto survey study, data were retrieved through a set of structured and validated questionnaires which enabled an objective assessment of the constructs of interest in the study. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were engaged in the study. A detailed informed assent/consent form (stating all the ethical requirements) was made available to prospective participants who willingly consented to participate in the study.

### Ethical Approval

A complete research proposal was submitted to the Chair of the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) and ethical approval was subsequently issued by the author’s institution. The ethics approval and a letter of permission were submitted to the management of the selected schools in South Africa, requesting their collaboration in providing crucial information during the data collection. This letter of permission gave the researchers easy access to the participants.

### Data Analyses

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the relationship between the study's variables. In addition, inferential statistics, (t-test) of the independent sample, through the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS v 28), was used to test for the significance of the research hypotheses.

### FINDINGS

This section deals with data analyses and interpretation of the results. The data analyses were reported in two phases; the first phase is the correlational matrix of the study’s variables, and the second phase revealed the results of the tested three research hypotheses in the present study. The results are presented in tables 1 and 2.

#### Zero-order correlation among the study’s variables

Zero-order correlations of all study variables were tested to check for the inter-correlation among the study variables. The following variables were examined, and the results were presented below (see table 1): socio-demographic factors (age, and sexual orientation), traditional bullying, cyberbullying, and psychological distress.

**Table 1: Showing inter-variable correlations among the study’s variables using Pearson Product Moment Correlations**

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. D
1. Age	-					15.00	02.76
2. Sexual Orientation	.359**	-				01.41	0.78
3. Traditional Bullying victimisation	.172	.179	-			46.39	03.68
4. Cyberbullying victimisation	.160	.076	.597* *	-		46.81	06.87
5. Psychological Distress	.150*	.067	.243* *	.367* *	-	25.56	03.47
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

Outcomes revealed a significant positive correlation between participants' age and experience of psychological distress due to bullying victimisation ( $r = -.150, p < .05$ ) which implies that the older the age of school adolescents, the higher the experiences of psychological distress. Insignificant relationships were found between sexual orientation ( $r = -.067, p > .05$ ), and psychological distress. Furthermore, analysis reveals that traditional bullying ( $r = -.243, p < .01$ ) and cyberbullying ( $r = -.367, p < .01$ ) have a positive and significant relationship with psychological distress, such that, the more the experience of either traditional or cyberbullying victimisation the more the experience of psychological distress among in-school adolescents.

### Test of Research Hypotheses

The results of the comparative analyses used for testing the stated hypotheses are presented below. The outcomes were reported as per the specified objectives of the study (see table 2).

**Table 2 - t-test of independent samples showing the significant differences in bullying victimisation experiences and psychological distress among same-sex and heterosexual adolescents**

DV	Community	N	Mean	Std. D	Df	T	P
Traditional-bullying victimisation experiences	Heterosexual	122	46.39	03.82	138	0.065	> .05
	LGBT	018	46.33	02.59			
Cyberbullying victimisation experiences	Heterosexual	122	45.84	06.57		04.71	< .01
	LGBT	018	53.44	05.03			
Psychological distress	Heterosexual	122	24.87	03.15		07.22	< .01
	LGBT	018	30.28	00.75			

### Study Outcome 1

Study outcome 1 was set to examine the comparative experiences of traditional bullying among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa (see table 2). The findings revealed that sexual orientations and gender identities do not have a significant influence on the experience of traditional bullying victimisation among in-school adolescents ( $t = 0.065, df = 138, p > .05$ ). In other words, outcomes revealed that there was no significant difference in the experience of traditional bullying among heterosexual and LGBT school adolescents in South Africa. This outcome did not conform to the hypothesis one of this study. Therefore, study hypothesis one is rejected.

### Study Outcome 2

Study outcome 2 was set to examine the comparative experiences of cyberbullying among heterosexual and LGBT school adolescents in South Africa (see table 2). The findings revealed that sexual orientations and gender identity have a significant influence on the experience of cyberbullying victimisation among adolescents ( $t = 04.71, df = 138, p < .01$ ). Further interpretations revealed that LGBT school adolescents ( $\bar{x} = 53.44; SD = 05.03$ ) reported higher experiences of cyberbullying victimisation, compared to their heterosexual counterparts ( $\bar{x} = 45.84; SD = 06.57$ ). This outcome confirmed hypothesis two of this study, which states that there is a significant difference in the experience of cyberbullying victimisation between heterosexual and LGBT adolescents. The second hypothesis of this study is therefore accepted.

### Study Outcome 3

Study outcome 3 was set to examine the comparative experiences of psychological distress among heterosexual and LGBT school adolescents in South Africa (see table 2). The findings revealed that sexual orientations have a significant influence on the experience of psychological distress among adolescents ( $t = 07.22$ ,  $df = 138$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Further interpretations revealed that LGBT school adolescents ( $\bar{x}=30.28$ ;  $SD=0.75$ ) reported higher experience of psychological distress, compared to their heterosexual counterparts ( $\bar{x}=24.87$ ;  $SD=03.15$ ). This outcome confirmed the study's hypothesis three, which hypothesised a significant difference in the experience of psychological distress between LGBT and heterosexual adolescents. Therefore, study hypothesis three is accepted.

### DISCUSSION

The result of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the experience of traditional bullying victimisation among heterosexual and LGBT in-school adolescents in South Africa. However, this result does not go in the direction of the result of the study by Garaigordobil et al. who reported that the experience of traditional bullying is higher among non-heterosexual adolescents than heterosexual adolescents.<sup>30</sup> The difference in the findings could be due to socio-cultural knowledge and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and the strong legal framework that protects the rights of LGBT persons and communities in South Africa.

Furthermore, the result of this study also revealed that sexual orientations and gender identity have a significant influence on the experience of cyberbullying victimisation among adolescents such that LGBT adolescents reported higher experiences of cyberbullying victimisation, compared to their heterosexual counterparts. This result is similar to the findings of Robinson and Espelage, which reported that college students who identify as LGBTQ had more significant experiences of cyberbullying victimisation than their heterosexual counterparts.<sup>31</sup> The findings of a study by Robinson and Espelage further revealed that adolescents who self-identified as LGBTQ experienced suicidal ideation and attempts suicide 3.3 times more than heterosexual adolescents.

Lastly, the result of this study also indicated that sexual orientations have a significant influence on the adolescent experience of psychological distress because of bullying victimisation. Further interpretations revealed that LGBT adolescents reported higher experiences of psychological distress, compared to their heterosexual counterparts. This finding resonates with the report of a study by Garaigordobil et al., which supportably stated that non-heterosexual adolescents are significantly more depressed and expressed high social anxiety and psychopathological symptoms than their heterosexual counterparts.<sup>32</sup>

### CONCLUSION

This research study that examined the comparative analyses of traditional bullying, cyberbullying and psychological distress among heterosexual and LGBT adolescents in South Africa is particularly significant because not many studies explore the differences in the bullying experiences of LGBT adolescents and their heterosexual counterparts. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to examine the comparative analyses of traditional bullying, cyberbullying and psychological distress among heterosexual and LGBT adolescents in South Africa. This study concludes that there was no significant difference in the experience of traditional bullying victimisation among LGBT adolescents and their heterosexual counterparts. However, significant differences were observed in the experience of cyberbullying victimisation and psychological distress among LGBT adolescents and their

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<sup>30</sup> Garaigordobil and Larrain, "Bullying and Cyberbullying in LGBT Adolescents: Prevalence and Effects on Mental Health Acoso y Ciberacoso En Adolescentes LGTB: Prevalencia y Efectos En La Salud Mental."

<sup>31</sup> Robinson and Espelage, "Bullying Explains Only Part of LGBTQ-Heterosexual Risk Disparities: Implications for Policy and Practice."

<sup>32</sup> Garaigordobil and Larrain, "Bullying and Cyberbullying in LGBT Adolescents: Prevalence and Effects on Mental Health Acoso y Ciberacoso En Adolescentes LGTB: Prevalencia y Efectos En La Salud Mental."



heterosexual counterparts. Participants who self-identified as LGBT adolescents reported experience of cyberbullying victimisation and psychological distress more than heterosexual adolescents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are suggested to reduce the experience of cyberbullying victimisation that leads to psychological distress among vulnerable LGBT in-school adolescents.

Concerned authorities and policymakers should take cognisance thereof that LGBT in-school adolescents are susceptible to cyberbullying victimisation. The management and school counsellor should underline the factors in designing school-based intervention in handling presenting problems among the vulnerable population. Internet users and society at large equally need to be informed about the dangers associated with cyberbullying behaviour and simplify to them what constitutes bullying and the need to avoid it for humanity's purpose. Tolerance messages could be passed to the general masses through various media means, such as the internet/social networks, television, and radio programmes.

Psychological assessments and insightful counselling should be encouraged among the vulnerable group i.e. LGBT adolescents. The purposeful intervention might enable early identification of psychological problems, and in turn, enable early psychosocial interventions that will address the prevailing psychological distress experienced by adolescents as a result of bullying victimisation.

## LIMITATIONS

The current study utilised a relatively small number of participants, and a gap difference in the numbers of LGBT and heterosexual adolescents, which could confound the outcome of the study. Also, response bias in a study like this may be difficult to control. Future studies should consider factoring in these aspects. Considering the limitations observed in this study, the present findings should be interpreted and/or generalised with caution, as there is a likelihood that if more respondents were to be involved the outcomes might have changed.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the conceptualisation, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript were conducted without any hidden affiliation, commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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