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Educators' Perceptions of Bullying and Children with Special Needs

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts (Educational Psychology).

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work, and that acknowledgement has been given to all sources used throughout this report. This report is submitted for the Degree of Master of Educational Psychology to the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

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Bianca Cassingena

Date: 2018/07/16

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the relationship of bullying behaviour and children with special needs. Research highlights that discrimination based on difference and vulnerability takes place on a regular basis in schools today. Children with special needs are considered a vulnerable population within schools and are therefore prone to being bullied. This study reinforces previous literature and takes a look at the topic from a South African perspective. South Africa is a democratic society with laws that protect previously disadvantaged people. Children with special needs were not disadvantaged previously in the same way that people of colour were, they were disadvantaged in subtle exclusionary ways. This exclusion appears to be prevalent today and was therefore focused on in this study. Eight educators were interviewed who worked at private primary schools in South Africa. Both schools followed mainstream curriculums and included special needs learners. The objective of this research was to investigate educators' perceptions of bullying in relation to children with special needs. As bullying is a rife topic of research globally, a South African perspective was seen to add to literature. The research design was qualitative and of an exploratory, descriptive and contextual nature. Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological theory and the Social Dominance Theory were used as theoretical frameworks in order to create an in-depth multi-layered analysis of the topic. Information was gathered through questioning eight participants from two private primary schools in Gauteng, via semi-structured interviews. The researcher analysed the data using thematic content analysis. Seven sections (and multiple themes within these sections) were identified, discussed and supported with literature. These sections were: types of special needs, stigma, perceived causes, prevalence and definitions, intervention success, gender roles and social hierarchies. Some of the themes identified included*: ignorance is bliss, bullying stagnation or the rise of bullying, is bullying universally defined, and is physical bullying decreasing or is it less acceptable?* The research concluded that girls who play the role of the bully tend to maintain indirect forms of bullying and boys make use of both direct and indirect bullying. Social hierarchies are present in some schools, however, not all bullying stems from this. It was found that the primary causes of bullying are social and behavioural difficulties. The themes found from the collected data highlighted that bullying behaviour in the two schools sampled is not as prevalent as research suggests and that children with special needs are not necessarily vulnerable to bullying behaviour. However varying perceptions of bullying were indicated. Due to this varied perception and the fact that only two

schools were sampled, conclusions regarding the prevalence of bullying within schools cannot be made.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

Bullying is currently a worldwide concern that is highlighted by the present ongoing school violence within schools. It challenges the concept that schools are a safe place for children to grow and learn at both the emotional and physical levels (Almeida Zequinão, de Medeiros, Pereira, & Luiz Cardoso, 2016). Bullying has become a common feature in schools and, despite much research, evaluation and various interventions, it is still a matter of great concern on a global and national level (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2016). In general, bullying can be defined as a 'subset of aggression with three components: (a) an intent to harm, (b) repetition, and (c) a power imbalance between the bully and the target victim' (Bauman, 2008, p.2).

Over the past decade the United States has placed greater attention on school bullying. An increase in school shootings has led to an extensive media exposure of bullying behaviour within schools. School bullying statistics(Cross et al., 2011) in the United States show that about one in four children are bullied consistently. Bullying types ranging from emotional and physical to cyberbullying, illustrate the extent of the problem of bullying within schools (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013). In a 2008 SAFE survey, it was highlighted that teenagers attending grades six through to ten are the most likely to experience bullying within the United States. Statistics show that 30% of American students are involved in bullying on a regular basis either as a victim, a bully or a bystander. Furthermore, there has been an increase in cyberbullying on school property (Beran & Li, 2007). In Europe, Austrian statistics report that one in five boys are reported to have been involved in bullying in elementary school (Beran & Li, 2007).

Bullying in South Africa is no different. 'Bullying is prevalent throughout South African society, in the family, tertiary education, the workplace, as well as schools'(Timm, 2011, p340). The preceding quotation was an excerpt from a study conducted in Mamelodi township in South Africa. The study focused on the construct of bullying in a primary school in the Mamelodi area. Timm and Eskell-Blokland (2011) found that bullying is a multi-faceted and multi-layered problem that needs to be approached from an ecological framework in order to tackle bullying from all considerable angles. Townsend, Fisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, and King (2008) report that the percentages of children involved in bullying are as follows: Cape Town and Durban high schools (36.3%), rural schools in Mpumalanga (11.8%) and high schools in Tshwane (61%). However, apart from the above-mentioned statistics South African bullying statistics are difficult to find. No statistics were found for South African primary schools. The

lack of current statistics relays the importance of conducting research on this topic in South Africa.

Bullying behaviour in schools leads to many emotional consequences. Children are reported to miss school in fear of being bullied which subsequently leads to less school attendance. Parents report that children who are bullied tend to drop in their academic performance. Furthermore, learners who are involved in bullying develop specific emotional needs that must be worked on during counselling if those services are available to them (Farmer, Wike, Alexander, Rodkin, & Mehtaji, 2015). It becomes clear when addressing these consequences, that bullying is of grave concern and that this problem needs to be explored in depth academically.

Bullying has been a topic of research for many years. In recent years, however, there has been an interest in understanding the connection between bullying behaviour and special needs. Children with special needs have a higher risk of victimisation. Due to their poor social, emotional, behavioural and scholastic performance they are less likely to gain social support from their peers. They are therefore perceived as different in nature and are easy targets for victimisation (Boulton, Smith, & Cowie, 2010).

1.1. Research aims

Bullying behaviour remains a prevalent topic of conversation and research. Given the extensive previous research around bullying and the recent upsurge in interest in research surrounding bullying and its connection to special needs globally, it is necessary to explore this topic within a South African context. Moreover, as most research focuses on the perceptions of parents and learners, exploring the perceptions of educators will provide academic research with a unique perspective of this topic. Bullying has evolved over the years and the way(s) in which it is expressed have changed over time. As we are living in a world where we are governed by and freely have access to technology bullying behaviour has taken a new platform in the cyber world. An in-depth discussion of these forms of bullying will provide research with an understanding of how the types of bullying have evolved and how technology plays a role in this evolvement. It is often generalised that children with special needs are automatically bullied due to their vulnerability. The primary aim of this research was to explore the reasons behind bullying and its connection to special needs children from the perspective of educators in South Africa. Further, it broadly aimed at looking at the multi-layered reasons behind school bullying as experienced by some special needs children within South Africa. The specific aims of this research involved establishing why educators believed bullying occurred in their schools

as well as investigating the different definitions of bullying from the perception of the educators. It also aimed to conceptualise specific case studies and understand how bullying has occurred in various schools from the educators' perspective. A further aim is to evaluate the current success of bullying interventions. Lastly, this research aimed at understanding what educators believed needs to be implemented within their schools in order to help prevent bullying.

Broadly, this research aimed to approach understanding bullying and its connection to special needs through the framework of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model and social dominance theory. As bullying is a multi-layered topic it felt relevant to analyse and explore the topic with a multi-layered theory. The purpose was to identify contributing factors within each layer with a particular focus on South African private primary schools. Defining special needs was also a necessary aim in order to set the parameters of the study. Another brief aim of this study was to understand the type of bullying that Educators perceive to be the most commonly experienced by special needs learners.

Finally, the researcher aimed to explore whether bullying was more common when special needs learners were involved, thus leading to an understanding as to whether or not having special needs increases the chances of being the victim of bullying.

Due to the lack of research around bullying and its connection to special needs in South Africa, this research will attempt to fill a much-needed gap in the research literature. Since research on this topic focuses on the perceptions of parents and learners, exploring Educators' perceptions further extents the available research. As South Africa is a multi-cultural country there are many factors that affect bullying, therefore using the multi-layered framework that Bronfenbrenner provides leads to a well-rounded understanding of the topic.

1.2 Chapter Structure

This section - **Chapter One** concludes the introductory chapter of this research report. This chapter served to introduce the reader to the bullying crisis both globally and from a South African context. Furthermore, it orientated the reader as to the reasoning behind gaining information from an Educators' perspective. It also served to clarify the researcher's aims for this report.

Chapter Two – comprises the literature review and the theoretical framework underpinning this research. The literature provides current research surrounding bullying and special needs.

It also draws on two theoretical backgrounds which provide insight into bullying in schools from a South African perspective.

Chapter Three – involves the description of the methods used to capture and evaluate the research data. Qualitative methods are explored, and it provides an account of the particular approach used which was thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) This chapter also highlighted the instruments that were used, and any ethical issues involved in this research.

Chapter Four –discusses the results of the research, with particular emphasis on the research questions of this study. Furthermore, this chapter comprises the current research related to the results obtained. A discussion of themes is included and elaborated on.

Chapter Five – provides the conclusions of this study together with its limitations and implications for future research. Recommendations are provided which concludes this report.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the current research surrounding bullying and its connection to special needs children. Definitions of bullying, roles of bullying and special needs children will be described as well as the conceptualisation of reasons behind bullying and its connection to special needs. Attention will also be given to the causes of and reasons for bullying behaviour. This chapter further explores current school interventions for and prevention methods against bullying. It compares the advantages and disadvantages of some current interventions. Finally, it explores two theoretical frameworks namely the Socio-ecological framework and the social dominance theory (SDT) in order to understand why bullying occurs within South African private primary schools.

2.1 Introduction to Bullying

The White Paper 6 states that teaching and learning are fully inclusive in South African schools. Not only does this mean inclusion of all races but also inclusion of students with physical, emotional and learning difficulties (Department of Education, 2001). Since the release of this paper, children can attend mainstream schooling despite their difficulties. This is a positive move towards inclusion because learners with disabilities were previously excluded from mainstream schooling. Inclusive education, highlighted in the Education White Paper 6 (2001), states that all children will be allowed access to a mainstream school enrolment, wherein their specific needs can be accommodated. This has brought about the idea of Independent Education Programmes (IEPs), wherein teachers are required to design and develop specific learner education programmes that are tailored to suit each learner. Schools were required to make their grounds accessible to learners with physical disabilities once this paper was released.

Despite the transition to democracy in South Africa and the initiative of the Education White Paper 6, South Africa continues to battle with ongoing problems with implementing inclusion in mainstream schools (Costandius & Rosochacki, 2013). Children are often excluded from receiving an inclusive education as children with disabilities, special needs or difficulties are often placed in schools separate to their neurotypically developing peers. Although inclusion has not yet manifested itself in totality in all South African schools, there are a few schools that incorporate an inclusion policy.

Looking at the research on bullying in the school context in mainstream schools, it is clear that bullying among children is a major concern (Side & Johnson, 2014). Farmer, et al. (2012)

explored the prevalence of bullying in the United States. The statistics revealed that '30% of children and youth report being involved in bullying in schools as the perpetrator, victim, or both. There has been some research - particularly in the United States and Europe - that looks at bullying of special needs children. (Participant 8), Espelage, Aragon, and Elliott (2011) show how bullying towards children with special needs is a problem within schools. They discovered higher rates of victimization of children with special needs than those without. Andreou et al. (2015) explored bullying of children with special needs in a school in Greece. Their research discovered that the participants were involved in bullying on two levels. The first level is that they were bullies themselves and the second is that they were victims of bullying. Studies by Andreou, Didaskalou and Vlachou (2015) and Coates and Vickerman (2010) are two examples of research that explore bullying behaviour toward children with special needs. Together with (Participant 8) et al. (2011) these studies highlight that perpetration and victimisation are influenced by educational practices/ethos of the school, classroom structure and the type and extent of disability the children have. This has provided insight into the prevalence, perspectives of and understanding of bullying of children with such needs. This insight includes that children with Autism experience higher rates of victimisation due to a lack of social understanding and being different. However, the (Participant 8) et al. study is limited to children with Autism and it does not investigate children with other special needs (Kolstrein & Toledo Jofre, 2013).

Bullying behaviour is problematic worldwide as well as in South Africa. To help prevent bullying within schools, various bullying intervention programmes have been implemented and researched over the years. Most previous research focuses on bullying programmes that have been created externally and implemented within schools (Olweus, 2005). The Olweus bullying programme is a programme that is used in many different schools. This programme focuses on bullying interventions and prevention. However, it is limited as it is a generic programme that is used in many schools. This programme is not specific to individual schools. This research focuses on the schools' individual bullying programmes that were created within the specific schools' systems. (Participant 8) et al. (2011) indicated that there is a need for more research into bullying of children with special needs. They quantitatively investigated the rates of bullying of students with special needs in America. The results indicated that children with special needs experience higher rates of bullying.

As South Africa has implemented the idea of inclusive education, this study adds value to literature as it investigates how bullying behaviour towards children with special needs is being addressed in mainstream schools.

2.1 Definitions and Types of Bullying

Bullying is reported to be pervasive in many countries around the world. Both bullies and victims are at risk of developing psychosocial and psychiatric problems that may continue into adulthood (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Many definitions have been used worldwide to define bullying behaviour. Bauman (2008) mentions that the generally accepted definition defines bullying as a subset of aggression with three components: '(a) intent to harm, (b) repetition, and (c) a power imbalance between the bully and the target or victim' (Olweus, 1995). This definition provides a basic overview of bullying although, it does have limitations for schools. The intent to harm can be extremely difficult to detect within the school environment as the bully or the victim could both deny the accusation or claim of such intent. The term 'it was an accident' is commonly found to be a response of bullies within schools. The second component comprises repetition and although this is an important factor, it illuminates single cases of bullying which according to Bauman (2008) cannot be ignored or overlooked Bullying behaviour highlights the power imbalance between the parties involved. This is a relevant factor when analysing bullying behaviour. However, there is a concern that with the focus on only two parties - the bully and the victim – an important element might be missed. As a result, recent research has included the role of the bystander (Taruna & Yadav, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to include all those involved in bullying interactions within the definition.

Twemlow, Fonagy, and Sacco (2004) propose another definition of bullying

> 'bullying is the repeated exposure of an individual to negative interactions directly or indirectly inflicted by one or more dominant persons. The harm may be caused through direct physical or psychological means and/or indirectly through encouragement of the process or avoidance by the bystander' (p. 221).

This definition seems to provide a broader focus for exploring bullying behaviour. It includes the various potential parties that could have an involvement in bullying. However, Twemlow et al. (2004) also fail to recognise single instances of bullying. Furthermore, this definition does

not include all forms of bullying that current research identifies. For instance, the phenomenon of cyberbullying has become a growing means of bullying within schools and amongst learners (Farmer et al., 2012) A definition that included a variety of bullying types together with the inclusion of single instances of bullying would be beneficial.

(Tsiantis et al., 2013) conclude that school bullying refers to

> 'violent and aggressive behaviours that are manifested by students in an intentional repetitive manner and aim at producing physical or psychological pain to other students inside or outside school grounds' p244

This definition, although not necessarily specific in nature, leaves room for all types of bullying to be taken into consideration. Moreover, it mentions that bullying behaviour can occur both inside or outside school grounds. This definition does not consider single instances of bullying nor does it aim to include behaviour that is covert in nature. It lends its focus to violent and aggressive behaviour but is not limited to overt behaviour.

For the current study, the following definition has been adopted:

> Bullying refers to the covert or overt behaviours that are manifested by learners in an intentional manner to place harm onto another learner. These behaviours can be a single instance or repetitive in nature. Bullying includes involvement of the bully, the victim and or bystanders. Bullying behaviour can take many forms and may be physical, emotional or cyber in nature.

This definition leaves room for multiple intentional behaviours to be included. It also allows for a multitude of bullying types to be accounted for.

2.1.1 Bullying Types

The definition of bullying makes provision for different types of bullying that are explored in the current research. Farmer et al. (2012) focus on two types of bullying, namely, overt and indirect bullying. Overt bullying is defined by any behaviour that includes both physical and verbal bullying behaviours that are external in nature. These behaviours are obvious to observers and involve observable behaviours. These behaviours include: pushing, hitting, shoving, name calling, threatening and malicious teasing.

Indirect bullying occurs when the harm is inflicted by damaging the victim's relationships and therefore includes relational aggression (Bauman, 2008). Behaviours that are defined by indirect bullying include social exclusion, spreading rumours and demanding compliance from

another without it being given freely. Furthermore Timm (2011) highlights that relational bullying is more emotional in nature and leads to numerous social and psychological problems, such as maladjustment. Research suggest that teachers are most likely to treat this form of bullying as less serious, as the impact is not instantaneous and is emotional in nature. However, Bauman (2008) concludes that learners who were bullied indirectly in school are more likely to suffer from depression in adulthood.

There is much debate as to whether indirect bullying should be considered bullying. Bauman (2008) emphasises the long-term effects of indirect relational bullying on learners. Physical bulling tends to decease with age, however, relational bullying tends to be continued throughout one's lifetime. Bauman (2008) discovered that when direct bullying decreased in schools, indirect bullying began to increase. As mentioned previously and reinforced by Bauman's study, rates of depression in adulthood have been directly linked to relational bullying. Furthermore, in Bauman's study of 116 Mexican American elementary learners, the only significant predictor of depression symptoms was relational bullying. Therefore, it appears that indirect bullying should be viewed as bullying.

A type of bullying that has gained much research attention recently is that of cyberbullying. With the increase in social media and globalisation, technology has provided learners with another platform for bullying. Cyberbullying includes the use of technology and media platforms where the use of information and communication are cause for concern in terms of bullying behaviour. Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) state that cyberbullying allows space for repeated, deliberate and hostile behaviours towards an individual or group of people that are intended to harm. Cyberbullying seems to have created a space where children are more likely to engage in bullying. Being able to hide behind a computer, laptop or phone lessens the risk of exposure and allows bullying to take place more freely (Blake et al., 2016). Research suggest that because cyberbullying takes away the physical aspect of bullying more children feel brave enough to engage in bullying behaviour. Whereas previously the physically weaker children would have no choice but to revert, they now have a space that allows them to engage in this behaviour (Hanif, Nadeem, & Tariq, 2011).

2.2 The Role of Gender

Current research around bullying explores differences in the types of bullying in relation to gender. Most research concludes that boys are more likely to engage in direct forms of bullying (Chatzitheochari, Parsons & Platt, 2016). These behaviours include physical violence, public

shaming and name calling. Although boys are also involved in indirect forms of bullying, according to Bauman (2008) the preferable mode of bullying among boys is direct bullying. Girls, on the other hand, tend to use indirect relational bullying. This includes gossiping, social exclusion and speaking behind the victim's back. Hartley, Bauman, Nixon and Davis (2015) found that girls were 2.14 times more likely to engage in indirect bullying than boys.

2.3 Bullying Roles

Certain terms have been coined that define the roles of parties involved in bullying. For this research, the following terms will be explored: the bully, the victim, the bully-victim and bystanders. These definitions serve to create a greater understanding of the dynamics that are involved in bullying behaviour within schools.

2.3.1 The Bully

The first role that will be explored is that of the bully. Farmer et al. (2012) define the bully as the learner who repeatedly perpetrates physical or social harm against other learners. This definition provides for a broad understanding that the bully is the role player who inflicts harm onto another. However, it is limited due to the fact that it does not leave room for emotional harm. Timm (2011) mentions that the learner who is perceived to be the bully has predetermining characteristics that makes them assume that role. These characteristics include an aggressive demeanour with little inhibition, a need to dominate and deriving a sense of satisfaction from seeing another learner being bullied. These characteristics are broad in nature and leave room for multiple interpretations. However, Bauman (2008) indicates that there are deeper underlying factors that contribute to bullying behaviour. Scholastic and social problems such as educational difficulties, emotional concerns and behavioural problems are indicators of bully characteristics. Bauman's study (2008) includes a deeper understanding of the characteristics of a bully but it does not contain aspects such as dominance, little inhibition and an aggressive demeanour that Timm (2011) highlighted. Bullies too are seen to have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Together with learning difficulties, bullies are often seen to have been bullied previously (Timm, 2011).

For this research, the following definition has been created. The bully is defined as the learner who intentionally inflicts harm onto another learner/learners in a manner that asserts dominance and who receives internal or external positive reinforcement that reinforces this behaviour. Bullies are seen to have emotional, social, learning and or behavioural difficulties that impact their self-worth and self-esteem.

2.3.2 The Victim

In comparison to the research that has been conducted around defining the bully, there is far less research that has explored the definition of the victim. Ofe et al. (2016) define the victim as being physically weaker than the bully. The victim is perceived to interpret violent behaviour as aggressive and tends not to engage aggressively towards the bully. Furthermore, the victim is associated with psychological traits such as being anxious, sensitive and quiet. This description provides a basis for understanding the role of a victim. However, it is limited in its content as it does not include any behavioural and social characteristics of the victim. Furthermore, this description is limited to physical bullying and fails to incorporate characteristics that would be present in victims of indirect, relational bullying or cyberbullying.

Timm and Blockland (2011) conducted a study on the construction of bullying in a primary school in South Africa. In this study victimisation was found to be a result of increasing school violence due to increasing violence and aggression in South African communities. Timm and Eskell-Blokland, (2011) include the impact of external factors related to bullying. For the current study, the victim will be referred to as follows: the learner or learners who are harmed either directly or indirectly by another learner or learners. This harm is intentional in nature. The victim is the party who is more submissive in the power play. This harm can occur in a single event, or repeated events. Victims have characteristics that include: differences in social, emotional, academic and physical behaviours to other peers.

2.3.3 The Bully-victim

Ofe et al. (2016) define the bully-victim as the learner who is initially bullied but then in turn becomes a bully. The type of bullying that is conducted by the bully-victim may not be the same bullying type that they received as the victim. As highlighted in their study, one learner who is bullied physically may then in turn go home and cyber bully another learner. It is mentioned that because the victim is perhaps unable to become aggressive in nature towards their perpetrator, their behaviour is then projected in a different place, and towards someone whom they can overpower (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). This definition of the bully-victim provides a sound sense of what this role entails. It allows room for understanding how a victim can become a bully and it includes an understanding of the displacement of aggression. However, it is limited in its understanding of other examples of bully-victim behaviour that differ from physical and cyberbullying.

Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) conducted a study in Greece on bullying of children with special needs. This study highlighted that both the victim and the bully share many characteristics as both parties may have adjustment problems, a negative self-concept, display anxiety and depression characteristics, have scholastic difficulties and struggle to regulate themselves emotionally. Therefore, these characteristics put them at higher risk for taking up either or both roles. Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) create an in-depth understanding of the reasons behind a party taking on the bully-victim role. Explanations as to how this occurs were not explored. Therefore, for the benefit of this study, the following definition will be undertaken: a bully-victim is a learner who shares the common characteristics of a victim and a bully such as: emotional, behavioural, social and educational differences. The bully-victim is the learner who either first assumed the role of a bully or a victim and in turn assumed the role of the opposite.

2.3.4 The Bystander

Bystanders have been described as those learners who witness bullying but choose not to do anything about it. By ignoring bullying behaviour, bystanders allow this victimization to continue (Ofe et al. 2016). The bystander is seen to have an involvement in bullying behaviour as they allow its continuation. Some of the reasoning behind this allowance is fear of becoming a victim.

2.4 Special Needs and Bullying Behaviour

This study lends its focus to students with special educational needs and their involvement in bullying and victimisation. These children are vulnerable to experiences of bullying behaviour as they are perceived as being different (Farmer et al., 2015). Furthermore, research suggests that children with special educational needs have fewer supportive relationships within the school environment and are more prone to cognitive, behavioural, emotional, educational and social limitations (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2013). In recent years studies have focused on peer relations and children with special needs with a particular emphasis on socialisation. Children with a broad range of special educational needs were found to have limited social skills and social information skills. They have difficulty in interpreting verbal and nonverbal social cues. As a result, these learners are less able to maintain and create positive peer relationships. There have been fewer studies that have explored bullying behaviour and its connection to special needs. Current research studies are inconclusive as to which role(s) a learner with special educational needs tends to assume. Some studies such as Chatzitheochari et al. (2016), claim that these learners are at higher risk for victimization. This highlights factors such as poor

socialisation skills, low levels of scholastic performance, behavioural difficulties and physical differences that would place them at a high risk for victimization.

However, other studies such as (Farmer et al., 2015) found that in some instances children with special educational needs tend to have the characteristics of bullies. Their findings conclude that due to limited social awareness and social interaction skills, these learners often use bullying behaviour. For instance, saying hurtful things to other learners, or becoming aggressive towards other learners. In addition, Ofe et al. (2016) explain that children with special educational needs exhibit aggressive or inappropriate behaviours due to a lack of verbal and nonverbal understanding and processing as well as a lack of self-regulation skills. Furthermore, learners with special needs are often likely to be physically weaker than their neurotypically developing peers(Cho, Hendrickson, & Mock, 2009). This makes them easy targets for direct physical bullying. It is therefore necessary to consider the previous definition of bullying where the intent to harm is included. Either direct and indirect behaviours could be interpreted as being bullying although it might lack the intent to harm. It could at times be aggressive, but not actually be bullying because there is no intent to harm. Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) explain that students with special needs may assume a bully-victim role as they misplace their aggression towards other learners who are perhaps more vulnerable than they are.

2.4.1 Special Needs and the Victim Role

The growing research around bullying and special needs lends focus to whether these learners are at a higher risk of experiencing victimisation. Research examines whether this risk for victimisation is higher in mainstream schools with an inclusive education programme (Flynt and Morton, 2007). Farmer et al. (2015) highlight that in the United States 30% of youth in secondary schools are reported to be part of bullying either as a victim, bully, bystander or bully-victim. The risk factors for victimisation include ‘a variety of interpersonal, behavioural, and social factors’ (p. 265). Children with special educational needs were found to have more of these risk factors then their neurotypically developing peers. Farmer et al. discovered that due to this, these learners were at higher risk for victimisation and experienced higher rates of bullying. The range included a 24.5% risk factor for learners without special needs and 34.1% risk factor for victimisation for learners with special needs. Furthermore, Farmer et al. (2015) concluded that having a physical special need was not a basis for higher rates of victimisation, but rather factors such as social skills, communication difficulties and self-regulation problems were contributing factors.

Farmer et al. (2015) claim that bullying reflects a power difference between two parties. As learners with special educational needs are considered different. Farmer et al. (2015) concluded that they were at higher risk of victimisation due to their difference. Observable differences such as poor social skills, behavioural problems and speech and language impairments have a bigger impact on risk than those with subtler special needs such as specific learning difficulties. Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) conducted a study in Greece that highlighted that learners with special educational needs have a higher risk of victimisation. Their study claimed that when attending mainstream inclusive classrooms, these learners were considered to be different and therefore became targets for bullying. Risk factors included poor academic performance, communication difficulties, behavioural challenges and poor social skills. Both peers and teachers reported that these learners were at higher risk of being bullied. Coping mechanisms among these learners were reported to be the suppression of emotions or projection of anger.

In South Africa, Timm & Eskell-Blokland, (2011) found that children with special educational needs were at higher risk for victimisation. As their study was conducted in an underprivileged community, standard violence and bullying rates tended to be a lot higher. Standard violence includes acts such as physical pushing and punching. This violence, however, stemmed from a larger societal influence (p. 348). The high prevalence rate and discourse of community violence within Mamelodi township was one that led to high bullying rates within schools. Regardless of the increase in general bullying rates, learners with special educational needs were seen to have higher rates of victimisation than their neurotypically developing peers. The current research focuses on two private schools which charge high school fees, and which are situated in expensive suburbs of Johannesburg. Although there is a high rate of violence throughout South African society, it is possible that the learners who attend these two schools are not exposed to the same degree of violence as learners from areas such as Mamelodi. It is possible that this difference in socio-economic states might buffer some of the spill over of violence in the broader society from entering into the private schools in the current study.

In conclusion, since children with special educational needs embody characteristics of poor social skills, behavioural difficulties, physical weakness and scholastic limitations, they are at higher risk for victimisation. Due to their differences, they have characteristics that are common risk factors for victimisation associated with school bullying.

2.4.2 Special Needs and the Bully Role

Farmer et al. (2015) study highlighted the differences between characteristics of the victim and the bully. The characteristics of a bully included more positive social and behavioural characteristics, higher social ranking than other learners, they are perceived to be popular by peers, they have physical advantages and use aggressive behaviour towards other learners. Learners with special educational needs do not usually fit this profile. Similarly, Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) highlight that characteristics of a bully include aggression, higher social standing and physical advantages. However, they also highlight that learners with special needs tend to be more hyperactive and impulsive in nature. Moreover, behaviourally they tend to lack self-regulation strategies. Therefore, these learners may behave aggressively or may say inappropriate things that can be considered bullying behaviour. Similarly, bullying behaviour was found to distract from their poor academic performance. The factor to be considered here is where this behaviour is coming from. These learners' poor social skills, difficulties in understanding verbal and non-verbal behaviour are likely to limit the intent to harm. Therefore, the difference between the bullying behaviour being exhibited by them and their neurotypically developing peers is that of the intent to harm (Kokkinos and Antoniadou, 2013).

2.4.3 Special Needs and the Role of the Bully-Victim

Timm and Blokland (2011) highlighted that although children with special educational needs may not necessarily assume the role of the bully, they are more likely to assume the role of the bully-victim. According to their study, characteristics of the bully-victim include social inclusion problems, a high risk for peer rejection and being at a low ranking within the social hierarchy. Since these learners do not exhibit many characteristics of the bully, they tend to lean towards the bully-victim role. Because of being bullied and not being able to express their frustration towards the perpetrators, they tend towards reactive aggression and behavioural and emotional dysregulation towards other peers who may be of a lower standing than themselves.

Similarly, Kokkinos and Antoniadou (2013) conclude that children with special educational needs fit the role of bully-victim quite well. Due to being on the receiving end of bullying behaviour and not having the prerequisite skills to handle the emotional consequences, these learners are more likely to project their aggression and frustration onto others within their environment. At the time of the current study, no research surrounding special needs and the bully-victim role in South Africa could be found.

In conclusion, previous research indicates that learners with special educational needs are more likely to take the role of victim within bullying due to their increased risk of victimisation which stems from poor social skills, scholastic difficulties and behavioural and emotional problems (Boyes, Bowes, Cluver, Ward, & Badcock, 2014). Furthermore, rarely are these learners seen to take on the role of bully as they most often have a poor social standing. However, a bully-victim role is assumed in reaction to poor emotional and behavioural coping with being the recipient of bullying behaviour.

2.5 Bullying Interventions in Schools

There are many bullying interventions that have been implemented and analysed within school systems (Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). Despite the ongoing research in this area and the implementation of interventions, bullying still remains an issue of concern (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). Furthermore, studies indicate that current bullying interventions and prevention strategies are not effective (Ofe et al., 2016). Often bullying advice that is given to victims includes ignoring the bully; walking away from the situation or behaviours that include bullying the bully in return. These types of interventions have proven unsuccessful within the school setting (Doğruer & Yaratan, 2014). As teachers and support staff are in contact with the children daily, they have an important role to play when it comes to bullying.

It is important to consider the three main aspects that define bullying when looking at bullying interventions (intent to harm, bullying behaviour occurring on a regular basis or as a single instance and a power imbalance). With these three aspects it becomes clear, that when looking at interventions to prevent bullying or interventions where one deals with bullying that has already occurred, the interventions cannot be the same as those that are used for other forms of violence (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). When considering what interventions to use in relation to bullying behaviour, it is important to look at intrinsic aspects of the students as well as external factors. Furthermore one needs to acknowledge that bullying is defined by the three defining characteristics mentioned above as opposed to underdeveloped social skills (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Wong, Cheng, Ngan, and Ma (2011) highlight that although previous thought around interventions for bullying in schools usually involved punishment or suspension on an individual level with blame and accountability put onto the bully as well as the isolation of both parties, interventions that run on this format have proven to be unsuccessful. This section will look at two bullying intervention strategies, namely, The

Restorative Whole School Approach and the Whitted and Dupper (2005) bullying intervention strategy.

The Restorative Whole School Approach (RWSA); (Braithwaite, Ahmed, Morrison, & Reinhart, 2003) is the first intervention that is discussed. Wong et al. (2011, p. 3) report that the RWSA model is formed around the concept of structuring a long term positive school environment. This environment promotes anti-bullying and is based on the concept of restorative justice. Restorative justice focuses on 'repairing harm done to relationships over and above the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment'(Walgrave, 2003). The RWSA encourages support and empowerment for those who have been victims of bullying, as well as support for bullies themselves. Such support could include social reintegration and then on a wider level an increase in school safety.

The RWSA model aims to create a positive school environment where anti-bullying becomes a part of the school's daily ethos and is practised throughout the school on a day to day basis. Wong et al. (2011) conducted research around the effectiveness of this intervention for bullying in a school in Japan. They explained that the RWSA has three main components that are at the core of its success. The first component includes the mind-set that bullies can reach a point where they are no longer be bullies and that victims can reach a point where they are no longer victims. Secondly, all participants need to have the opportunity to be involved in the justice process from the beginning or as soon as possible. Lastly, those who are involved in the community and government need to promote justice, order and peace (D. S. W. Wong et al., 2011).

Whitted and Dupper (2005) take a similar stance to the RWSA model as they also suggest that intervention needs to be targeted on multiple levels as opposed to only focusing on the students involved in bullying. The first level is the school-level, where strategies are put into place to change the culture and climate of the actual school. The belief is that if the school is promoting an anti-bullying environment from the top levels of management, it will be easier for this atmosphere to resonate throughout the school and to create an anti-bullying environment for the students (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Some of these strategies include teacher and staff training on anti-bullying procedures as well as putting supervision policies in place to ensure that interventions are being implemented correctly throughout the school year. The second level would be the classroom-level which looks at strategies where teachers can promote an

anti-bullying environment in the classroom. Strategies include concepts of bullying being incorporated into the curriculum. The third level is the student level. Here strategies are developed to help or support bullies, victims and bystanders. Strategies include support structures for victims, techniques for bystanders to intervene when witnessing bullying and encouraging social inclusion through reinforcement (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

In South Africa there is little -but growing- research regarding bullying interventions within schools. Flynt and Morton (2008) conducted a study on bullying prevention and students with disabilities in Pretoria, South Africa. They concluded that when implementing a school-wide anti-bullying prevention programme, accommodations and modifications must be made to include learners with special needs within South African schools. These accommodations and modifications include a variety of teaching materials and teaching tools. As these learners have unique needs, it is important to consider these needs when implementing these programmes.

Research suggests that bullying behaviour is best targeted from a systemic point of view. When looking at bullying within the school context it would be beneficial to target bullying on different levels (Cross, Moks, Hall, Shaw, Pintabona, Erceg & Hamilton., 2011). The levels of bullying would be depicted as increasing or decreasing by looking at the whole school. The focus of bullying interventions needs to include factors such as the intrapersonal characteristics that leads to becoming a bully or a victim (Ross & Nelson, 2014). Creating an anti-bullying environment within the school, and if possible in the greater community, through various strategies will result in the prevalence of bullying decreasing. Furthermore, the time of recovery from bullying for various participants, should be far quicker. The rates of reoccurrence of bullying behaviour will be less than those interventions that look at handling bullying solely from an intrapersonal model (Wong et al., 2011).

It is important to note that the success of bullying interventions, despite being systemic or whole school approaches, is questionable (Cross et al., 2011). Ttofi and Farrington (2010) highlight that there are still high rates of bullying within schools despite many different interventions. Furthermore, bullying behaviour has many negative impacts on victims and bullies (Coates & Vickerman, 2010). It is therefore pertinent to provide the bully and the victim with individual support in order to help them process their internal world (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). Bullying interventions and prevention strategies should therefore include a whole school, systemic approach which includes individual support for the bully, victim and

bystanders. In a South African context, violence is an ongoing cause of concern within communities. Therefore, when looking at bullying behaviour it is necessary to explore all causes and factors that impact on this issue. The following section highlights two theoretical frameworks that are able to conceptualise bullying and special needs within a South African context.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Ecological Framework

An ecological framework for bullying looks at the interplay between individuals' characteristics and the effect of their broader systems (Hong & Garbarino, 2012). These systems refer to the levels in which individuals are nested. The main aim of the ecological framework of bullying is to explore the dynamic relationship between the bully and the victim within their complex systems (Barboza et al., 2009). This relationship involves all parties that are involved in bullying: the bully, the victim, the bully-victim and the bystander. Barboza et al. (2009) state that the relationship between the bully and the victim is played out in their various systems, therefore emphasis is placed on exploring the bully's and the victim's characteristics in relation to their contexts.

An ecological framework that examines individuals as part of a broader multi layered system is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Systems (1999). Bronfenbrenner highlights that an individual is influenced through various levels within their environment. These include intrapersonal, interpersonal and external factors. These systems are: the individual, micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono- systems. The first system, or the first layer, of the ecological model created by Bronfenbrenner (1999) is the microsystem. The microsystem consists of the settings that directly influence the individual's development. The focus in this system is the individual's immediate influences with regards to bullying. These may include parental involvement, the school support system and the characteristics of the bully-victim relationship (Espelage, 2014). The mesosystem includes the interaction between two microsystems. The relationship between the individuals and the school is also very important in preventing bullying and in terms of intervention. This would include the parents' relationship with the school and the school's relationship with the individuals. Collaborative and supportive relationships between the school and the parents can have positive effects on bullying prevention and interventions (Barboza et al., 2009). The exosystem does not impact the bully and the victim directly, but rather influences them by impact. Various exosystemic factors in bullying include the school's procedures on managing bullying, school policies and staff

training in bullying awareness and intervention (Timm & Eskell-Blokland, 2011). The following system would be the macrosystem. The macrosystem involves those factors that contribute to the individual's wellbeing in the most indirect way. The macrosystem would include broader societal views on violence; accepted behaviour regarding bullying; cultural beliefs and values; the role of media in terms of bullying and government rules with regards to bullying preventions and interventions. The last system is the chronosystem. The chronosystem influences the individual indirectly as it refers to the impact of time on bullying behaviour (Khoury, 2014). Each of these levels is discussed in detail below.

2.6.1.1 The Individual

An understanding of the individual and the characteristics of being involved in bullying behaviour is of importance as it provides a foundation for a socio-ecological explanation. To summarize previous chapters, risk factors for involvement in bullying include: poor social and emotional coping, a lack of self-regulation, scholastic difficulties, physical disabilities and poor interpretation of verbal and nonverbal behaviour (Kokkinos and Antoniadou, 2013). Having special educational needs leads to a greater risk for victimization and bully-victim involvement. A child with special needs difference and social-emotional and behavioural difficulties finds it most difficult to adjust to the social aspect of school (Farmer et al., 2015).

2.6.1.2 The Micro – System

When looking at the individual, one needs to consider the immediate role players that impact on them. Three significant micro-systems affect learners in a primary school: the school environment, family and peer relations. The school has a major involvement in a learner's adjustment. This is where children are exposed to socialisation, are encouraged to achieve academically and where bullying prevention and intervention can be targeted (Khoury, 2014). Therefore, a school's involvement with bullying serves as a major influence. The success of the school's prevention and intervention programmes would largely affect the individual's involvement in bullying. Furthermore, the way the school approaches socialisation and academic achievement will set a foundation for adjustment skills. For example, if a school has a strong focus on high academic achievement this may create a need for certain scholastic performance. Those who fail to achieve this expectation may fall into a category of difference which leads to a risk for victimization or becoming a bully.

Family factors are key influences on the development of bullying in schools (Espelage, 2014). In homes where bullying behaviour occurs, children are more likely to adopt that behaviour at

school. For example, if children experience bullying from their older siblings or from a parent, they may project this behaviour onto their peers whom they are able to dominate. Furthermore, parental involvement in bullying interventions is of utmost importance. Espelage (2014) highlights that in instances where parents played an active role in bullying interventions, it provided more emotional support for the learners involved.

A learner's peer group and peer relationships are significant factors. Commonly learners aim to seek the approval of their peers in the school environment If this seeking of approval leads to learners engaging in bullying behaviour in order to be accepted , this can be problematic (Timm & Eskell-Blokland, 2011).

2.6.1.3 The Meso – System

This system refers to the connections between the micro-systems. Here a major factor that influences this level is that a risk factor in one system affects another (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Therefore, if one's home is extremely violent in nature and bullying behaviour is displayed, it puts the learner at greater risk for applying this in the school environment. It is important to note that as much as risk factors will affect the learner in this system, so will protective factors. Therefore, if the school environment has a successful no bullying policy, it is likely that the learner could not engage in bullying behaviour despite their home environment (Khoury, 2014).

2.6.1.4 The Exo – System

The Exo-system comprises external environments such as communities and the media. Where communities are involved in a lot of bullying behaviour, it is more likely that a learner will display this behaviour at school (Hong & Garbarino, 2012). This level does not provide the learner with support but rather the learner is exposed to violent behaviour that they are most likely to project elsewhere. Similarly, the media is a constant influence in an individual's life. If the media is displaying ongoing bullying behaviour, or if certain shows exhibit this behaviour, a learner may adopt these beliefs and behaviours. Alternatively, if a learner's community has a strong anti-bullying campaign, this can engage support and the learner is therefore at a lower risk of engaging in bullying behaviour. In terms of the media, if programmes are being aired that promote anti-bullying or if the news reports on anti-bullying interventions and prevention strategies, the learner is exposed to more appropriate behaviours and is therefore less likely to engage in bullying. Furthermore, for victims the media can promote support and skills on how to stop the bullying cycle.

2.6.1.5 The Macro-System

The macro-system is where government policies come into play. With regards to bullying in schools, one would look at the various educational bullying interventions given to schools from the Department of Education. Furthermore, in South Africa in 1993 formal desegregation occurred, where schools became racially mixed. This led to various learners being bullied due to differences (Engelbrecht, 2006). Even today various social and racial differences tend to be a risk factor for victimization and bullying (Timm & Eskell-Blokland, 2011). Furthermore, special needs policies would impact how a school makes space for a child with a learning need. If mainstream schools with an inclusion policy have created a space where there is not much attention to difference, there will be lower risk for victimisation.

2.6.1.6 The Chrono-System

This system involves the dimension of time. Time influences an individual in their environment. In terms of bullying, special needs and the South African context, this level plays a significant role. The apartheid regime was abolished in 1990 and as mentioned above, in 1993 learners of all different races began to attend school together. Under apartheid rule, children with special needs were excluded from mainstream schooling (Cluver, Bowes & Gardner, 2010). Currently mainstream schools include children of all races and where there is an inclusive education programme, children with various learning needs attend mainstream schools. However, time plays an important role as previously disadvantaged learners may still find themselves at a higher risk for victimisation due to their perceived previous difference.

2.6.1.7 The South African Context

In the South African context it is important to note that various cultural and historical events impact an individual's development (Cluver, Bowes, & Gardner, 2010). In terms of the microsystem, due to the high level of domestic violence in rural areas of South Africa, a bully maybe exposed to violence in his or her home environment, thus this would affect the individual's characteristics (Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, & Shai, 2010). On a mesosystemic level, due to the level of poverty in South Africa, many parents work late shifts. This factor could lead to a poor school-parent relationship due to the lack of communication between parent and school (Karen, 2011). Furthermore, some South African schools are under- resourced and many teachers feel disempowered, and this could lead to a breakdown in the teacher-learner relationship (Kaminer, du Plessis, Hardy, & Benjamin,2013). Looking at the exosystem, in a South African context some schools do not have the resources - such as psychologists - to

implement successful anti-bullying procedures. Therefore, the support within these schools regarding bullying may be limited. In terms of the macrosystem, South Africa is a diverse multicultural country. Within this diversity there are many different cultural views on violence and weapons (Kaminer et al., 2013). These differing views will affect the individual's development. From a chronosystemic view, the apartheid regime would still have an impact on individuals because racial segregation has rippled through time and still plays a role in schools today. Although Apartheid was abolished 22 years ago, in terms of time, previously disadvantaged individuals are still bearing the effects of this regime's policies, these effects include lack of financial support and enduring discrimination. Since the fall of apartheid, South African schools are required to implement inclusive education (South Africa & Department of Education, 2001). However, some schools have implemented an inclusion policy whilst others have not.

Bronfenbrenner's theory explains how different environmental factors impact a learner's risk for bullying within a South African context. It also highlights some of the gaps within research and adds value to this current study as a need for better understanding of bullying and special needs from an educator's perspective within the South African context is of importance. The second theory focuses on dominance and social hierarchies, as discussed below.

2.6.2 The Social Dominance Theory

The social dominance theory (SDT) first formulated by psychology professors Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (Romm, 2013), follows the belief system that human systems and societies are structured according to social-group-based hierarchies. These hierarchies include a dominant and submissive group (Goodboy, Martin, & Rittenour, 2016). The difference between these two groups is related to the accomplishment of positive social status, which is measured according to the accumulation of desirable social and financial resources. SDT explores the notion that individual social power is gained through membership of a socially constructed group (Goodboy et al., 2016). Although there are intrapersonal characteristics that contribute towards children being at risk for bullying, the SDT interest lies within the social hierarchical construct. The concept of social hierarchies provides a conceptual framework which contributes to an explanation as to why bullying occurs (Romm, 2013).

According to the SDT, bullying is used as a tool to maintain social dominance within these social hierarchies (Romm, 2013). Dominance is not an end in itself but a means to get

prioritised access to resources that are valued for the group. Individuals use bullying behaviours such as aggressive physical, emotional and social bullying in order to gain and maintain dominant status within the hierarchy (Goodboy et al., 2016). The SDT does not suggest that this behaviour is prevalent because children are innately evil, but rather that they engage in this behaviour to survive or increase their social or status ranking within school classes and peer groups. For learners to be successful they need to be skilled socially and not display behaviours that seem to indicate that they lack social competence, thus bullying behaviour assists learners with developing these skills.

Aggressive children who lack social skills tend to be identified as bullies or victims or provocative-aggressive victims at the lower end of the dominance hierarchy (Romm, 2013). Provocative-aggression victims refers to those who provoke and antagonise bullies to bully. Based on SDT, the main intention of bullying is not to inflict harm but to use it in an instrumental and calculated way to improve social status. Aggression is often used as a means to an end, the end being reaching a certain social status that is desirable to the learner. Individuals use aggression to support their own position in the hierarchy within new groups or to increase their level within the hierarchy. Therefore, according to the SDT, bullying is used as a recourse to increase social dominance status, and then once this is gained and there is social dominance, the bullying decreases (Goodboy et al., 2016).

In support of this assumption, research has demonstrated how bullying increases during the transition from primary school to middle school when children's social groups are disrupted, and after a while it decreases again as social dominance is established in the school classes (Shafer & Silverman, 2013). However, various other resources state that bullying behaviour is seen throughout school despite the grade children are in (Bauman, 2008). Bullying is seen as a means to an end, i.e. a method employed to reach a certain goal. This means that a bully may be displaying bullying behaviour to gain social dominance and social status. It is used as a tool to gain access to something. Reputation is the reward or accessible benefit of bullying to both the individual and the group hierarchy (Romm, 2013).

As mentioned previously, children with special needs are at a higher risk for victimisation within schools (Kokkinos & Antandiou, 2013). Due to their behavioural, scholastic, cognitive and emotional difficulties, they are perceived as being different. This places them at the lower end of the social hierarchy. These learners become easy targets for bullies and they may easily be used as a means for other learners to gain higher social status. Since many learners with

special educational needs have poor social skills and poor social relationships, they may not have the social support that their neurotypically developing peers have (Romm, 2013).

2.7 Brief Outline of Aims

This research aimed at understanding bullying behaviour and children with special needs and the views of educators on these matters. This study discussed what causes are behind bullying and its connection to children with special needs, together with evaluating school interventions.

2.8 Research Questions

The object of this study was to investigate educator's perceptions of bullying and its connection to special needs. This study aimed to understand what stigma special needs learners carried within schools. It also aimed to assess educator's perceived causes of bullying. as well as how prevalent bullying is within schools and how successful bullying interventions are.

2.8.1 Primary Research Question

What do educators perceive to be the reasons behind and dynamics involved in bullying in relation to children with special needs?

2.8.2 Secondary Research Questions

1. How do educators define bullying?
2. What do educators perceive as the causes of bullying?
3. Do educators perceive children with special needs to be involved in bullying, and if so, how?
4. How do educators evaluate their current school's bullying intervention and prevention programme or approach?
5. Based on experience, how best do educators handle bullying?

3. Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter describes the methods used in the current study including the design of the study, the sample and sampling issues. Furthermore, the analytical technique employed and the ethical concerns regarding this study will be focused upon.

3.1 Research Design

This study used an exploratory and descriptive design. It focused on eliciting the perceptions, ideas and experiences of educators with regards to bullying and its connection to special needs. While quantitative research provides statistical information for research, this study did not aim to understand the relationships between variables. As mentioned in previous chapters, due to limited research on this specific topic, a rich account of experiences helped give this study real-life context (Maree, 2007).

3.2 Sample and Sampling

The sample was chosen based on a discussion with the school principal. In the discussion it was noted that participants needed to have had exposure to bullying. The principals gave names and contact information of educators who had dealt with bullying cases in the past. Eight participants volunteered for this study. The volunteers were educators at co-educational schools who had exposure to bullying. This was determined by the principal of each school. The exposure included incidents in the classroom and not particular roles dealing with bullying in the school. The researcher aimed for saturation of data, but due to time constraints this was not achieved.

The participants were employed by two private schools in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Th schools were mainstream schools with an inclusion policy, attended by children with special needs (as defined in previous chapters). Primary schools were preferred as most current South African research about bullying is focused on high schools. Co-educational schools were desirable as this would allow for a comparison of bullying behaviour across genders. As previously mentioned, boys tend to lean towards more overt bullying tactics whereas girls are more likely to engage in covert bullying including social exclusion. Ideally both government and private schools would have been included as this would have provided a comparison between the two. Unfortunately, due to the inability to reach government schools within the time given to conduct the research, the researcher decided to conduct the research only at the private schools she had received consent from.

The participants included one African male; six white females and one Indian female. The biographical details of the sample are described in Table 1. These demographics were of benefit to the study due to the varied ages of the sample. Furthermore, the sample included three different race groups. However, these demographics do contain limitations. Due to time constraints, receiving permission from a varied sample was difficult. Therefore, the demographics are not an accurate representation of teaching staff in South Africa. The demographics did not include all races within South Africa and there was only one male included.

Table 1. Participants' socio-demographic information

Participant	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Age	64	50	62	27	62	55	24	22
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Race/ethnicity	White	White	White	White	White	White	Indian	Black
Home language	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	Sotho

3.3 Research Procedure

The first step was, was selecting appropriate schools to conduct the educators' interviews. Firstly, the researcher contacted the principals of six different schools within the Gauteng region. School A and School B were the first to make contact and give permission for the research to be conducted (Appendix E and F). The email sent to the principals included a detailed description of the research topic and aims of the research. It also included the approximate length of the interview and the requirements relating to the participants. Once written permission was given, the researcher sent a school consent form to the various principals. Once the school consent form was signed by the principal, the educators were given a participant information sheet by the researcher (Appendix G and H). Once verbal consent was given, the researcher contacted each participant via email to set up a time and day most convenient to them for the interviews to take place. All interviews were conducted at School A and School B.

Each participant received a consent form for conducting and recording of the interview. Furthermore, they were provided with an information sheet with a detailed description of what the research required from them and what the research would entail. Each interview took place

separately and lasted approximately one hour and was conducted with an interview guide. Furthermore, the participants had to fill out a demographic questionnaire (Appendix J). Interview questions were read out and the participants responded accordingly. The participants were encouraged to expand on their answers and to provide more information. Each interview was recorded, and transcribed, additional information was noted on paper during the interview if necessary. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were thoroughly analysed to find common themes.

3.4 Instruments

This study was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that was used to create direction for the interview (Appendix D). It also allowed space and flexibility for the flow of conversation. The interview questions were used as a guide to capture data relevant to the research topic and research questions. The questions explored educators' perceptions on bullying and its connection to special needs based on their experience. Interventions causes, and particular instances of bullying were discussed. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix D. The interviews were conducted separately with each participant.

The interviews were audio recorded for transcription purposes. Rough notes were taken during the interviews to capture extra information and to highlight important notes. Probing techniques were used to allow for more in-depth information to be provided following the research question and the research topic. When necessary, clarifying questions were used to ensure that quality data was being provided (Maree, 2007). The questions that guided the interview were formulated carefully to guarantee that the data being captured would highlight the perspectives of educators. Lastly, a demographic questionnaire was conducted.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Themes capture important aspects of the data which relate to the research question, and represent patterned responses or meanings contained in the data set (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). Thematic content analysis is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms and provides a solid foundational method for inexperienced researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While there is no clear agreement regarding what thematic content analysis actually is and how it is accepted (Braun & Clarke, 2006), its aim is to describe data and interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998, as cited in Braun & Clarke (2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this involves the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns within data, otherwise known as themes. Once the interviews were transcribed, each one was analysed to look for themes that emerged in each interview. This study made use of thematic content analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). During analysis, common themes were highlighted in each interview. Themes were then linked throughout the analysis of each interview. Themes were linked through commonality as well as difference. Braun and Clark (2006) highlight the generally accepted six step process in thematic analysis, starting with the immersion of the data and concluding with the writing of the report.

1. Immersion in the data

Braun and Clark (2006) explain that during this step it is important for the researcher to become acquainted with the data. The researcher acquainted herself with the data by first analysing the transcripts.

2. Creating Codes

Once the researcher had familiarised herself with the data, codes were derived to help identify patterns. Codes were not generated according to an existing coding framework, but rather the information was coded in relation to the educators' responses. Braun and Clark (2006) explain this form of coding as an 'inductive approach' to thematic analysis.

3. Identifying Themes

Themes were then gathered from the data and put into various categories. All relevant codes were collated under these thematic categories. This stage concluded with the identification of a range of potential themes.

4. Revising Themes

Revising of the emerging themes took place. Some themes were collapsed into existing themes and others were kept separate for an in-depth analysis and coherence.

5. Finalising Themes

Once the themes were finalised, they were given relevant names that related to the previous literature and research questions of this report.

6. Writing up of the Research

This is the final step which involved highlighting various excerpts from the interviews that illustrated certain themes, thus matching the results to the literature. A discussion regarding previous literature took place and the conclusion of this led to the end of this chapter.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The first step in obtaining the research data was applying for ethical clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand and permission for the study to be conducted by Gauteng Department of Education. Once permission was obtained from the various institutions, information and consent forms were sent to the various schools. Then intention was to conduct research in both government and private schools which is why permission from the Department of Education was obtained, however due to time constraints mentioned previously only private schools were used.

To protect the participants and create a research study that was ethically considerate, the following steps were taken. The volunteers were informed of the nature of the study and what it entailed before the interviews took place. Firstly, the researcher contacted the principals of six different schools within the Gauteng region. School A and School B were the first to make contact and give permission for the research to be conducted. The email sent to the principals included a detailed description of the research topic and aims of the research. It also included the approximate length of the interview and the requirements relating to the participants. Once written permission was given, the researcher sent a school consent form to the various principals. Once the school consent form was signed by the principals, the educators were given a participant information sheet by the researcher (see appendix D). Once verbal consent was given, the researcher contacted each participant via email to set up a time and day most convenient to them for the interviews to take place. All interviews were conducted at School A and School B. Each participant received a consent form for conducting and recording of the interview (Appendix H). Furthermore, they were provided with an information sheet with a detailed description of what the research required from them and what the research would entail.

Participants were given pseudonyms after the interview to ensure anonymity and all information obtained from the interviews will be kept confidential. Furthermore, case studies were discussed, and learners and the schools were given pseudonyms. The interviews were transcribed, and the interviews will be destroyed once the research has been completed. The

participants were informed before the interview took place that if at any time they wished to withdraw from the study they could. Other considerations included making the participants aware of the fact that during the interview some questions asked may possibly evoke emotional reactions in the participants. If the participant had any personal associations with bullying and or special needs children, it may have provoked emotions that may not have been provoked if the interview had not happened. A page with the South African Anxiety and Depression Group was included as a resource for the participants in case they needed psychological intervention after the interview (Appendix I).

3.7 Reflexivity

This study is of personal interest due to the researcher's involvement with children with special needs. During her facilitations with these children in mainstream schools she became aware of the bullying that took place. Within these interactions she observed educators dealing with bullying incidences and realised their importance in everyday bullying incidents. The researcher realised from her experience that there is currently a large amount of bullying that is present in schools, particularly involving children with special needs. Therefore, it must be considered that the researcher did have a personal interest in this study. The researcher had to take careful note of not including her own thoughts or observations within this study. During the interview she had to remain objective to the participants thoughts and comments. This is a risk in qualitative research whereby trustworthiness can be questioned. However, in this study, the researcher made use of an interview guide that was objective and she, with awareness tried to remain as objective as possible throughout the research process.

4. Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

The results of the thematic content analysis taken from the data are discussed in this chapter. Many themes emerged through the analysis; there were a few noted differences within the data that will be discussed. Furthermore, the emerging themes and sub-themes will be described and discussed in relation to the context of the recent and relevant literature. Themes will be identified in *italics*. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The themes will be highlighted and constructed using quotations that have been taken from the transcribed interviews. This chapter also includes an in-depth discussion around the data collected and the previous literature.

This chapter will begin with an outline of sections as shown in Figure 1 below. Then there will be a discussion of the perceived types of special needs from the participants. It will then delve into educator's experiences of bullying by highlighting case studies and discussing prevalence, stigma, social hierarchy and parental involvement. An exploration of various causes of bullying will be presented, followed by what role special needs plays in the bullying situation. Current school interventions will be analysed together with what role educators play in the bullying process. Lastly the role of media with regards to bullying in schools will be elaborated upon.

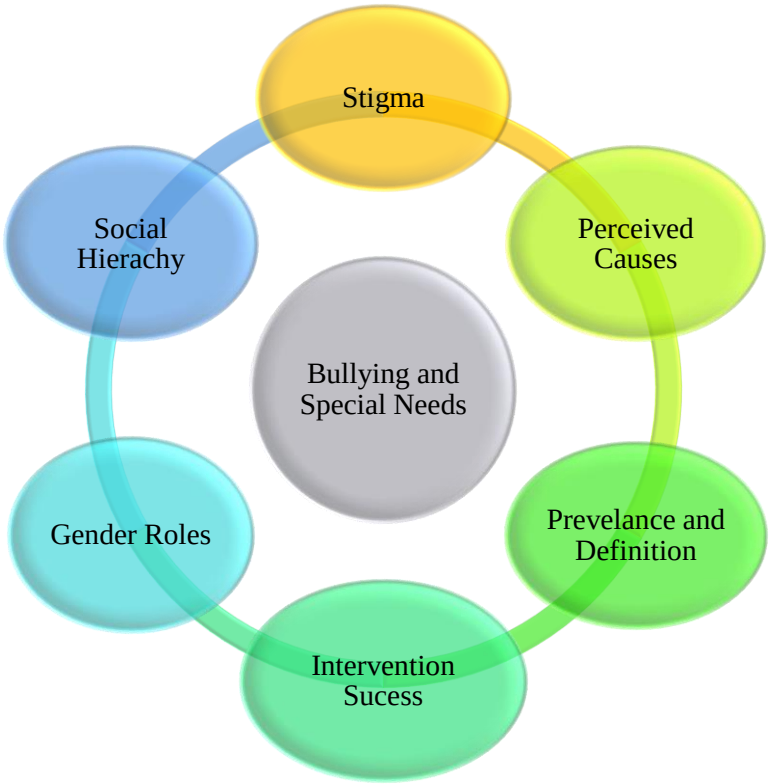

Figure 1. The major sections within which themes emerged

4.1 Prevalence of Bullying

A discussion around bullying prevalence in the interview brought up the sub-theme *of bullying stagnation or the rise of bullying*? One would assume that based on social media and recent research that bullying is a major concern in schools today, particularly towards children with special needs. In a 2008 SAFE survey, it was highlighted that teenagers attending grades six through to ten are the most likely to experience bullying within the United States. Statistics show that 30% of American students are involved in bullying on a regular basis either as a victim, a bully or a bystander. Furthermore, there has been an increase in cyberbullying on school property (Beran & Li, 2007). In Europe, Austrian statistics report that one in five boys are reported to have been involved in bullying in elementary school (Beran & Li, 2007).

However, the data provided mixed results. Although some participants interviewed believe that bullying is on the rise and is a major concern, others believe it hardly exists. The literature previously discussed highlighted that bullying in schools is rife and the statistics showed that 30% of American students are involved in bullying on a regular basis either as a victim, a bully or a bystander. In Europe, Austrian statistics report that one in five boys are reported to have been involved in bullying in elementary school (Beran & Li, 2007). This leaves a contradiction between existing literature and the collected data.

The discussion around prevalence drew discrepancies in the definition of bullying. What some educators considered to be bullying behaviour, others did not. Thus, perceptions of the prevalence of bullying are related to what one considers bullying to be, or how one defines it. This lead to the emerging sub-theme of: *where does nastiness end and bullying begin?* During the interviews the definition of bullying was challenged. Most educators mentioned that they wouldn't define all acts that they witnessed as bullying. Most defined these acts as meanness as opposed to bullying. This goes against Bauman (2008) who emphasises the long-term effects of indirect relational bullying on learners. Physical bullying tends to decrease with age, however relational bullying tends to be carried throughout one's lifetime. Bauman (2008) discovered that when direct bullying decreased in schools, indirect bullying began to increase. Although all educators believe that bullying does occur in their schools, the prevalence is reported to be low.

> 'Quite honestly; I haven't seen anything' (Participant 1)

> ‘There was bullying, not in the normal way but I was doing playground duty and the one day trying to get him to behave…they came along, and they would say eat your food like a dinosaur, put it on the floor’ (Participant 2)

> ‘There has been normal bullying amongst children you know, generally’ (Participant 3)

These comments suggest that there is a certain amount of acceptance of bullying, or at least of ‘nasty’ or hurtful behaviour amongst educators. It also indicates that ‘minor’ incidences of bullying (or hurtful behaviour) are not seen as being important and are therefore not likely to be included in (Participant 3)’s evaluations of the prevalence of bullying. On the other hand, for other educators the slightest incident would be considered bullying

> ‘Even if someone says something and they laugh because to them they find it silly’ (Participant 2)

> ‘I don’t know if it is because they are frustrated with the work and not coping, or whatever, maybe not bullying just meanness actually, there is a lot of meanness’ (Participant 4)

The idea of meanness was explored with (Participant 4). It referred to incidents involving girls who are ‘catty’. Meanness refers to comments that are made between girls mainly by learners who are more outspoken. It is not considered bullying by educators because this meanness is seen as being normal childhood behaviour.

> ‘They just tease or make a comment that the other child perceives as bullying…particularly moms of children with special needs tend to be very sensitive’ (Participant 5)

At times the parents’ opinions are devalued. It should be considered that no one other than the parent would represent the victims if the teacher herself did not see the incident as being serious or worthy of attention or intervention Also, one might ask how ‘balance’ can be achieved when deciding what bullying is and what it is not, especially when the behaviours are subtle and are probably not easily observed by teachers.

> ‘I don’t – I think it is almost; I wouldn’t say non-existent but if you take an average, it’s probably out of say ten, a score of one or two, it’s probably a two… it is hardly worth mentioning…there is a spirit amongst the kids… there is a good comradery with everyone’ (Participant 1)

(Participant 1) believes that bullying seldom occurs and that when it does occur it is not serious. There is a certain behaviour that is seen as being normal amongst learners that is not seen as bullying. This creates various implications. If certain behaviour is not considered bullying or

is not taken seriously, these incidents may continuously occur. If no intervention is given for these negative childhood interactions, the seriousness of this behaviour may be downplayed. Furthermore, it can be asked where the dividing line between 'nastiness' and bullying are and who sets this dividing line According to the data each participant has a different concept of what bullying is. Therefore, it suggests that the dividing line depends on each individual educator If parents' perceptions of what bullying behaviour is, are not taken seriously it is of concern that these cases may be ignored.

Two of the educators mentioned that minimal bullying occurs, but that it is subtler in nature. It is questionable here that perhaps educators began to take a deeper look at bullying as the interview progressed. At first, they seemed to think bullying was of a subtle nature but as the interview progressed they began to see the extent of bullying. If by definition 'subtle' forms of bullying are nonetheless still forms of bullying behaviour, then it could seem that teachers may not consider these cases to be serious forms of bullying. This has major implications for learners and for bullying within schools. If certain behaviours are tolerated, that will create an environment that allows those forms of bullying. In the data, participants mentioned that educators are the ones who primarily deal with bullying behaviour. Perhaps due to a lack of support, some scenarios are ignored by educators. If educators are not supported enough in bullying prevention and intervention, they may feel that normalising certain behaviour means that they don't have to intervene as often. As discussed in chapter two, bullying can take many forms (Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013). It appears that from the data collected, bullying takes place indirectly more often than overtly. Therefore, as discussed previously, indirect bullying seems to be increasing (Bauman 2008). As (Participant 2) highlights:

> 'We like to think we're on top of it, but I think there is always underlying bullying. Even if someone says something and they laugh because to them, it's a silly comment or something, that's bullying, to a child with learning disability' (Participant 2).

This statement by (Participant 2) highlights that the decisions over which incidents are bullying, and what the different power relationships are amongst the learners, are subjective in nature. The participants had differing views of what was considered bullying. This impacts on interventions and prevention strategies. Some teachers may use prevention strategies that target even the subtle, indirect forms of bullying whilst others may only use these strategies for those that they consider to be bullying. Furthermore, interventions may target all forms of bullying for those teachers who include indirect forms of bullying such as 'nastiness' or interventions

may only target more direct forms of bullying. In terms of different role players, each educator maybe subjective as to who they define as the bully, victim and bully-victim.

> 'It is a gut feel. You just know which children are the bully or the victim…the smallest act of meanness' (Participant 3)

This statement highlighted the sub-theme: *Subtle bullying being swept under the carpet?* (Participant 2) believes that even the smallest act of meanness should be considered bullying. To a child with a learning disability such acts will affect them in the same way as overt bullying. This is a differing point of view compared to those participants who believe small mean acts are simply normal negative childhood behaviour. It shows that subtler forms of bullying do occur and indicates that the definition of bullying is not universal amongst educators. (Participant 2) believes that small acts of meanness are bullying and that they should be handled in this way too. Furthermore, her statement highlights that bullying can be indirect and that perhaps there is a lack of intervention on bullying.

The idea that the perception and definition of bullying are different for each person raises questions about the definitions of bullying discussed in Chapter Two. 'Bullying refers to the covert or overt behaviours that are manifested by learners in an intentional manner to place harm onto another learner. These behaviours can be a single instance or repetitive in nature. Bullying includes involvement of the bully, the victim and or bystanders. Bullying behaviour can take place in many forms and maybe physical, emotional or cyber in nature.'

Meanness and teasing are considered indirect forms of bullying according to three of the educators. (Participant 2), (Participant 8) and (Participant 8) agree that smaller accounts of bullying such as meanness and teasing are bullying. This relates to the literature that states indirect bullying forms do include forms of teasing. However, the literature did not mention meanness as a form of bullying. Therefore, there could be a continuum of bullying behaviours in terms of severity and this is a topic that could be explored further. Bullying that is perhaps difficult to identify and that is not physical in nature could also be included in such a spectrum. There is an intent to harm and these events can be single or multiple in nature. Therefore when meanness and teasing are considered to be forms of bullying it would indicate that bullying does in fact occur within these schools (Bradshaw et al., 2013). However, when they are not considered to be forms of bullying the prevalence of bullying is significantly lower, even almost non-existent. It brings into question the idea that bullying, or the concept of bullying

has perhaps changed over time. The educators mentioned that when they themselves were at school, bullying was more physical in nature.

(Participant 5) believes that currently boys are being taught that it is normal to talk about feelings and due to this, the nature of bullying has changed over time. There are major repercussions for physical bullying as mentioned by (Participant 5), where a more punitive approach is followed. This includes punishment where the learner does not go out for break or must miss a sports match and has to write a letter of apology to the headmistress. This could also have a significant effect on the decrease of physical bullying.

This leads to the sub-theme *Is physical bullying decreasing or less acceptable?* Is physical bullying decreasing due to awareness or rather is it decreasing because it is more obvious, more punitively punished or more noticed as bullying? Perhaps if all forms of bullying had the same consequences as that of physical bullying, there would be a decrease in that area too. This also brings up the idea that perhaps bullying is not decreasing but that learners are finding more discreet ways of engaging in bullying.

> 'boys are now allowed to talk about their feelings, they are more sensitive… there is more of a psychological approach' (Participant 5)

Previous literature suggested that children with special needs embody characteristics of poor social skills, behavioural difficulties, physical weakness and scholastic limitations and therefore they are at higher risk for victimisation. In their differences, they have characteristics that are common risk factors for victimisation within school bullying (Blake et al., 2016). However, the data collected challenges this conclusion. The participants all agreed that children with special needs seem more likely to be bullied due to their vulnerabilities but prevalence rates within these schools are not high. (Participant 5) refers to some children who - whether they have special needs or not - have 'a vibe that almost calls on the bullying'. She mentions that many children with special needs are well liked by their peers. Participant supports this as she mentions that the only instance of bullying and children with special needs she has personally encountered is when children notice learning differences. She believes that it is more observation spoken aloud by learners than bullying. (Participant 4) maintains that bullying does occur, yet it is personality type and social interaction rather than having a special need, that are key factors.

When the educators were asked if children with special needs are more vulnerable to bullying and being victims they all answered that they were. They gave reasons such as that they are

weaker, have a vulnerability and are different. Yet when it came to providing case studies to support this, they were not all able to. The sub-theme of *stereotyping special needs children or lack of awareness?* came into play. Perhaps the educators who were unable to support this view with case studies, were using what is the most obvious stereotype of special needs children or perhaps this highlights the lack of awareness of bullying. (Participant 6) gave a case study where a child with special needs was bullied due to his social behaviour and interactions. (Participant 4)'s case study referred to a girl with possible Autism who was bullied by other children with special needs due to her social skills.

> 'we have the one child who is on the spectrum and then, but the other child is also coming across to be on the spectrum, but nothing has been diagnosed' (Participant 4)
>
> 'and it manifests through their play, through their interaction with each other…you can see that. Some are more forceful, some are very soft' (Participant 6)

This lead to the sub-theme of: *the rise of indirect bullying or the decrease of direct bullying.* All educators reported that overt and direct bullying have not increased in their experience. It seems that there is a decrease in physical violence and direct forms of bullying. As educators have been made more aware of bullying, they do tend to notice more indirect forms of bullying. It appears that with more awareness of what bullying behaviour is, the more indirect forms of bullying are noted. However, the data presented still indicates a mixed review of the prevalence of direct and indirect forms of bullying.

Educators unanimously stated that cyberbullying has become a cause of great concern. It is on the rise and difficult to control or intervene as this act can be done outside of school grounds. It appears that because children can hide behind a form of social media it becomes easier for them to bully with this form than it is at school. (Participant 5) mentioned that the most severe cases of bullying are cyberbullying. Educators believe that some children who are bullied at school, tend to bully at home on social media platforms. 'It is almost safer' (Participant 8). Perhaps these learners are projecting their frustration or feelings of being a victim onto other targets, in a space where they feel confident enough to do so. Teachers would have difficulty in observing cyber-bullying and this would have numerous effects on their perceptions of the prevalence of bullying. If they are unable to observe the behaviour they may believe it is not has prevalent as it is.

Based on what the participants said, it appears that the prevalence of bullying in these schools is low. However, different participants had different understandings of bullying and some

excluded behaviours that they categorised as being 'mean' as opposed to 'bullying.' Also, indirect bullying can be difficult to observe. Therefore, while it is possible that the prevalence of bullying was not high in these schools, it might not be as low as the participants perceived it to be.

4.2 Stigma related to special needs children

All educators had experienced cases of learners with special educational needs. There were a few differing points of view in terms of the presence of stigma. Six educators mentioned that stigma was very minimally present within their schools. They mentioned that children don't tend to stigmatise those with special educational needs and rather make observations as opposed to stigmatising them.

> 'It is more of an observation that the child is not pronouncing a word correctly or that they are not performing tasks as they are being taught' Participant

Stigma or observation was a key sub-theme that was presented. However, these educators did mention that children with social and behavioural problems are most likely to be stigmatised. Therefore, indicating a discord in understanding of prevalence of bullying amongst these educators. At first, they mention bullying is minimal but when they were asked furthermore in-depth questions the educators began to notice the actual occurrence of bullying in their schools. (Participant 5) states that in their two bridging classes (which are classes that aim to bridge learners' educational difficulties and reintegrate them into mainstream classrooms) the children are seen to reintegrate well at break time with their other peers. The idea that *social skills lead to bullying* was indicated. However, there are small incidents that occur that lead to stigmatisation. (Participant 5) explains:

> 'We have got, we have our two bridging classes now that we introduced three or four years ago and children going into that, and it seems they seem to reintegrate with the other children at playtime and they do their art together and things like that. But every now and again, if we are going to put it, consider putting a child into that class, a parent will come and say, well what about, I hear that other children tease them and so on. Well it's not something that we really are aware of happening I think it is probably more the odd comment than that it is an issue' (Participant 5)

Parental involvement: cure or curse? A key sub-theme that emerged was whether parental involvement was beneficial in the bullying situation or detrimental. (Participant 5) mentions that the majority of stigma comes from parents, and that by contrast children are generally

extremely accepting. She further comments that not many students are aware that others have special needs apart from two aspects, viz. behavioural and social difficulties. The majority of the participants commented that children are more often excluded or picked on if they become disruptive during social time. Furthermore, when children stick out due to a lack of social skills, different socialisation or impulsivity, educators find that these children often tend to be excluded from social activities. They also become the child who commonly disrupts the classroom. Children are less likely to want to engage with them and they tend to be picked on at times.

This was supported by the five other educators. Stigma seems to be present amongst the parents. This is because of their perceptions of special needs and what it is like to have special needs in a school.

> 'Funny you ask because a lot of parents actually have that stigma…they said they are going to be bullied and all that, whereas I don't know if it's the school we are at, but I find a lot of the children actually almost treat them a lot better' (Participant 4)

(Participant 8) adds to this argument as he stated that children in the primary schools he has taught in tend not to notice that other children have special needs. Or they notice they have special needs but then extend more kindness or understanding towards them as opposed to stigmatising them. However, where the educators all unanimously experience stigma is from the parents. The educators who teach at a school with a bridging class state that parents tend to be very involved with bullying through their statements about the class and the children in it. This is a class where children with special needs are placed with the aim of reintegrating at a later stage. (Participant 8) mentioned that parents often mention 'but the bridging class is for children who are different'. She also stated that parents with children in the 'normal classes' often look at children who attend the bridging class with pity. 'They often seem to pity the children in bridging class, also they tend to use bridging class as a threat. One of the children told me that their parents told them if they don't perform well they will end up in bridging class. Which doesn't help matters'.

Participant added that in general mainstream classrooms, stigma is more around that of antisocial behaviour.

> 'more how children, the child exhibits. If they exhibit antisocial behaviour, then yes, they will pick it up and they will comment on it. But for a lot of the children with special needs, they are

> still very sociable, so they actually play very well, and they are interesting, and they are quite lateral thinking'

She further adds, however, that towards the end of the year if children have a more severe special need such as a speech impediment then children will begin to create stigma around this.

> 'occasionally you know you find that as the year goes on because we are doing a lot of phonological stuff, so if children have a speech impediment or they are battling to make sounds, the children start commenting on it so if they have a profound lisp, that doesn't improve with therapy they will say when it is wrong. It is not prejudice per say it is observation'.

Participant mentions that it is not prejudice but instead observation *stigma or observation*. This comment reveals an interesting take on stigma surrounding bullying and special needs. In Chapter Two, Kokkinos and Antoniadou, (2013) together with the study by (Chatzitheochari, Parsons, & Platt, 2016) mention that children with special educational needs are more susceptible to bullying as they tend to have a lack of social awareness and difficulties with social skills. They highlight that these learners have less chance of forming supportive peer relationships. However, this data suggests that perhaps stigma or prejudice is merely the making of observations. Children may be pointing out clear differences as opposed to mentioning this with the intention to harm. It must be noted that these educators work in primary schools and perhaps the age of these learners is a factor.

(Participant 7) has worked in the bridging class for a few years and she has noticed that when the bridging class was first introduced there was some stigma around it. This indicates that there was a preconceived idea of special needs. (Participant 7) mentions that perhaps it was a lack of understanding or education regarding special educational needs.

> 'children wondered why their friends were going into this class and they didn't know what it meant. Then the parents got very anxious. But I would say 2,3 years down the line, they don't call it the bridging class anymore, so it is just like other classes… the stigma's become less and less' (Participant 7)

Outside the bridging class, (Participant 7) says there is a bit of stigma involved but not from the children, it is from the parents. 'But I would say, I would say the stigma comes more into play with the parents. Because they are worried that someone is going to label their child or bully their child, so I've noticed it more with parents than with children'. Educators who experienced stigma from the parents tend to agree that there is a preconceived notion that children with special needs will be bullied.

One participant mentioned that in her experience there has been a lot of stigma attached to special needs. (Participant 2) works in a mainstream inclusive education school. She mentioned that stigma is rife in her opinion and that children can pick up when other children have weaknesses.

> 'I asked my class today and I said, "do you think we pick on people who are different or who have weaknesses?", and immediately they all said "yes". I said the moment there is any weakness they pick on it absolutely' (Participant 2).

(Participant 2) was the only educator to state that children with special needs have a stigma attached to them. Her idea that children pick up on any form of weakness supports the literature in Chapter two. The literature mentioned that children with special educational needs have differences and, in these differences, they are seen to be vulnerable. In this vulnerability they are often isolated or picked on (Insoo Oh & Moss, 2012).

The data collected concludes that most of the educators' experience stigma regarding children with special needs from parents rather than from the children. This stigma also seems to be based on pre-conceived ideas or perhaps a lack of understanding regarding special needs. The educators find parents become anxious if their children have special needs and this anxiety perpetuates stigmatisation. One educator states that stigma is rife in the classroom amongst learners. Her assertion supports the literature stating that children with special educational needs are vulnerable and, in their vulnerability, they are susceptible to being bullied.

4.3 Perceived Causes of bullying

The data collected indicates that children who are involved in bullying have social and emotional problems, behavioural difficulties, learning or educational issues and perhaps physical difficulties that leave them vulnerable. One of the emerging sub- themes in this section was *neediness versus resilience*. The data indicates that a number of educators perceive that some children who become victims to bullying seem to be needy. They feel that these learners come to class with a neediness that evokes victimhood. As emotional issues tend to be a cause of bullying, this neediness could be considered a cause of bullying. Personal characteristics such as resilience were perceived by educators to be a strength that would prevent some children with severe special needs from being bullied. (Participant 5) mentioned that

> 'children are becoming incredibly needy these days…it often depends on how the child presents themselves. Some almost come with a kind of, almost like a victim mentality and they almost invite other children to tease them and so on. And other children have got some…resilience,

> grit…they seem to be able to cope with it. Yet there are some kids who will have a more overt difficulty like the little boy, the one who has got the hearing device, very difficult to listen to his speech. He is very compromised. Kids absolutely love him. He has never been teased'

(Participant 1) supported this view:

> 'I think it's got a lot to do with possibly latchkey kids. You know children who go home, and mommy and daddy aren't always around to be there to give them support and emotional support. I think it could be insecurities or maybe they have stress'

The rise of bullying became a common sub-theme from the data. All educators mentioned that children have become more sensitive to bullying behaviour. They unanimously agreed that as most children come from homes where both parents work, or are very busy, learners tend to have more emotional and behavioural needs. Eight educators mentioned that they have noticed that many learners who are involved with bullying as a victim or a bully Shave parents who work full time. They indicated that in their perception there may be a link between the amount of quality time children get with their parents and bullying behaviour. *Behaviour difficulties and its effect on bullying* emerged as a sub-theme as all eight educators stated that children seem to have behavioural problems due to a lack of parental involvement and that behavioural problems lead to bullying behaviour. The collected data highlights that a cause of these emotional and behavioural difficulties is the lack of general and emotional support in the home environment. The research discussed in chapter two indicated that a main cause of bullying behaviour is emotional and behavioural difficulties (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2013). However, there was no research found to back the data indicating that parental involvement leads to bullying.

Other educators mention that children arrive at school having learnt bullying behaviour.

> 'You can see which children experience bullying behaviour at home… they tend to be quite defensive and aggressive. They exhibit this behaviour in the classroom but as a teacher you just know that it has been learnt elsewhere. Then when you meet the parents it all fits into place' (Participant 8).

The data highlighted that children who are most vulnerable to being bullied are those who have social and behavioural difficulties as well as learning difficulties.

> 'In my experience when there are children who struggle to engage with their peers socially they are often prone to bullying. Whether they are socially awkward, or impulsive and aggressive these are the children that are bullied or the children who bully. I have children with

> learning difficulties, a lot of them. Some are bullied, and some aren't. What I have noticed is that if they tend to be a child who is socially a bit odd they will get teased for their learning difficulties but there are others who are socially adequate with learning difficulties who do not'. (Participant 8)

The above statement by (Participant 8) indicates that the way a child engages socially and behaviourally are major factors in bullying. She was not alone in this claim. As mentioned earlier, (Participant 5) said that there are some children who 'exhibit some sort of pheromone, or a message that indicates victim'. (Participant 4) who works in the bridging class states that bullying amongst learners with special needs is very much social in nature. As all learners have learning difficulties in her class, she has noticed that the children who are socially impaired or have major behavioural difficulties are usually the ones excluded. It could be argued that exclusion may not be the same as bullying. However as indirect bullying includes social exclusion as a form of bullying, this exclusion can be considered bullying behaviour.

Unanimously the educators claim that bullying behaviour is largely influenced by family relationships. Most educators believe that if a child is bullied at home there is large risk for bullying behaviour in the classroom. Participant provided a case study of a child who was bullied by his older brother at home 'he was very aggressive in the classroom and at the end of the day after he went to the psychologist we understood that he was taking out his frustration on learners that were vulnerable because he could not defend himself at home.' The idea that bullies have often been bullied themselves could explain these statements. If children are being bullied at home and are unable to defend themselves, perhaps they are more likely to bully at school or in an environment where they have access to a more vulnerable target.

Chapter two discussed Bronfenbrenner's (1999)ecological theory as applied to bullying. Espelage, Rao, and De La Rue (2013) argue that bullying is a phenomenon that is caused by multi-faceted layers that affect a learner. These layers include intra-personal characteristics such as: social behaviour, learning difficulties and temperaments well as interpersonal relationships with peers and family members. Furthermore, the community, media and the government all play a role in bullying within the school environment. This argument supports the collected data, as the home environment is one of those layers that have an influence over a learner.

The literature discussed in Chapter two indicated that the perceived causes of bullying special needs children were these specific factors. Firstly, the victim is considered to have either

behavioural and social difficulties, learning and educational issues, physical disabilities or social and emotional problems that cause them to become vulnerable (Almeida Zequinão et al., 2016). The bully in turn is also considered to have similar factors associated with them. The Ecological theory that was covered in detail in Chapter Two, mentions that there are layers that affect bullying within a school. These layers include the learner's intrinsic characteristics such as social skills, resilience, learning or educational difficulties, inter-personal skills and behavioural problems. Other layers such as home life, relationships with parents and siblings, as well as learnt social behaviour impact the chances of bullying involvement (Hong, Lee, Lee, Lee, & Garbarino, 2014). Furthermore, the broader community, extended family, media influence and government policy all have a part to play in bullying behaviour within schools. Minimal parental involvement emerged from the data as a cause of bullying. Children who are less tended to at home are seen to be more prone to bullying. They have emotional needs that are not fulfilled, and it manifests within their social and school interactions. 'Parents these days are too busy. They are very, very busy. You can see the difference in a child's behaviour if their parents are involved or not' (Participant 1)

(Participant 5) perceives that the media has become a major cause of bullying. Children are seen to be influenced by the media they are exposed to.

> 'It is about who you let into your home… I would never let half of the characters that are on the television into my home. But children are now exposed to this behaviour and to these kinds of people. Language has become so bad…children can watch shows that have bullying in them all the time, it is now socially acceptable' (Participant 5)

Most educators did not state that there was a social hierarchy in their school. As they are in primary school this may be a reason why this behaviour is not relevant. However, two educators did mention that amongst female learners there is a development of a social hierarchy.

> 'There tends to be an almost queen bee mentality with some of the girls. I don't know if it is necessarily a hierarchy at the moment, but they do use social exclusion, they gossip, steal each other's friends… there is a meanness, and, in this meanness, there is social exclusion'. (Participant 8)

A social hierarchy may distinguish between learners who are on the top of the social ladder and those who are at the bottom. The educators perceive their students to have different groups within their classes. Although not everyone may socialise together, they are not necessarily considered more dominant groups and weaker groups. The age of students is an important

consideration, as the educators teach learners in primary school. It could be that only when children are older a social hierarchy develops. The assumption that children with special needs are automatically placed at the lower end of the social hierarchy may not be valid. Mary mentioned a boy with hearing devices who had many friends and socialised well with his peers.

4.4 Intervention Success

The data collected indicates that both schools do not have a standard bullying intervention or prevention policy. This is linked to the sub-theme of *Prevention or Cure?* Four of the educators stated that their schools have a zero tolerance for bullying. However, when you investigate the procedures of bullying interventions it becomes clear that there is no set procedure. All educators mentioned that they play a vital role in preventing bullying within the school but that at times there is no procedure when it comes to handling bullying.

> 'We almost have a no tolerance thing…there is no programme' (Participant 4)
>
> 'So, we as teachers are teaching the strategies now' Participant
>
> 'As far as I know there was never any follow up…It was only what I saw and was able to handle, but I don't think anyone else, possibly a class teacher this year… I think it is so easy to let it slip by and not to deal with it. It's easier not to sometimes' (Participant 2).

(Participant 2) had a different view to most educators throughout the interview process. She took bullying seriously and she seemed to have been personally involved in many bullying incidences at her school. Her role was of mediator and working with the children after bullying had occurred. Her view here is a strong contrast to the views of the other educators. She mentions that the school has little involvement in the bullying process. Due to her active role in dealing with bullying, she may be more aware of how much needs to be done and perhaps how little is being done currently.

All participants mentioned that the key to bullying intervention and prevention is awareness. As the perception of bullying is changing, it has become evident that what was once considered normal childhood playing or teasing is now considered to be forms of indirect bullying. The participants all agreed that the more awareness there is about bullying within their schools, the more they can intervene successfully. This is an implication for the ecological model as parents and teachers need more awareness according to the data. As discussed previously in chapter two, a school's involvement with bullying serves as a major influence. The success of their prevention and intervention programmes will largely affect the individual's involvement in

bullying. Furthermore, the way the school approaches socialisation and academic achievement will set a foundation for adjustment skills (Cross et al., 2011).

> 'Initially you would think it was a little, a hissy fit or a little spat, you know? And you wouldn't take much notice but nowadays it's become a lot more spoken about, everyone is a lot more aware of it' (Participant 1)

The use of wording here suggests that (Participant 1) did not really think that these incidents were bullying but instead interpersonal interactions. The dividing line between bullying and other negative interpersonal interactions is blurry since educators have differing opinions as to what bullying behaviour is. Furthermore, the educators were not able to clearly differentiate between negative interpersonal interactions and bullying behaviour. The educators who believed there is a general meanness or teasing that are not considered bullying, defined bullying incidents as those that were overt in nature.

However, according to previous literature, social exclusion, gossiping and verbal teasing are considered to be indirect forms of bullying (Olweus, 1995). These acts that are negative interpersonal interactions should be considered bullying. A focus on awareness being a key factor in understanding bullying evolved throughout this research.

> 'The key is awareness' (Participant 5)

In terms of the eco-systemic model discussed in Chapter two, awareness would be multi-layered. Thus, an impactful result would entail providing awareness at all levels. *The Individual*, at this level there were many factors that were identified within the data. These were mainly those indicating that learner involvement in bullying would include: learning, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Furthermore, some educators believed that some children, regardless of whether or not they had special needs, had intrapersonal characteristics that set them up to be victims. At this level, it would be beneficial to bring awareness to the individuals and the learners. Perhaps creating awareness of behaviour and social interactions that are acceptable so that learners become more aware of their own behaviour in relation to their peers.

The *micro-system* refers to the immediate relations to the individual such as school and home. As children form part of peer groups within schools this would be an area to target in terms of awareness. Examples would be teaching acceptance and tolerance of difference or creating structures where different groups must intermingle. Furthermore, stereotyping by parents and

educators is a common factor that was revealed in the data. Perhaps targeting these levels through bullying talks will help create awareness at this level.

At a *meso-system* level creating programmes for parents and families where bullying awareness is focused on helps to bridge awareness from school to the home environment. In terms of the *exo-system* educators have described that community involvement does impact bullying behaviour at schools. Therefore, extending talks to the local community may create a broader awareness. At the *macro-system* level educators perceive social media to have an impact on bullying behaviour. Creating a form of awareness regarding bullying in social media will help target bullying on this level.

Although discussed in chapter two that a whole-school systemic approach to bullying is effective when combined with working with the individual needs of the bullies and victims, the data collected reveals that both schools do not target bullying in this way. Each school did not have a specific bullying intervention. They both claimed to have a zero tolerance for bullying, but prevention and intervention strategies varied. All eight participants mentioned that the educators are the first point of call for bullying, not because this is procedure but because they are with the learners most of the time. Prevention strategies included: bringing in guest speakers to talk about bullying to raise awareness, school assemblies with a focus on bullying, adding bullying programmes into the curriculum and the practice of love and care within the school. All participants stated that in their opinion the prevention strategies do work as they raise awareness and create an idea of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour. However, it is questionable whether that awareness is enough to create successful prevention and intervention strategies.

In terms of bullying interventions, both schools did not have any intervention strategy. The one school seemed to follow an unwritten procedure where the teacher would deal with it on site. This involved a teacher observing the bullying behaviour, intervening and talking to both learners. If a child complains about a bullying incident, then the teacher follows up with all parties involved. Then the teacher relayed a consequence which included apologising to one another. She then informed the parents and head mistress of the event. If further intervention was needed the principal would be made aware, then the parents and the school psychologist. The other school deals with bullying solely with the educators as these cases are not forwarded to the principal, psychologist or parents and there is no on-site psychologist at the school. Four educators commented that the system they use is effective but, contrary to these assertions, the

system, does not lower the cases of bullying. The claim that there is a perceived low prevalence of bullying at the schools and the fact that the difference between 'nastiness' and bullying is blurry, the statement that these interventions are successful is questionable. In terms of consequences, both schools use a mixture of approaches. (Participant 5) mentions that although they do not want to use punitive methods they do resort to these when necessary. Consequences included: group discussions, individual discussions, discussions between the bully and the victim, punishment in the form of no break or no sport and then written letters of apology.

> 'I think the teachers and the staff, and everyone are very homed in on things, and they don't, things don't slip under the radar, because we always find out about it' (Participant 3)

The accuracy of this statement is questionable. (Participant 3) was an ex-pupil of the school she is now teaching at and she has a very positive outlook on this school. This outlook may have led to some bias when discussing the effectiveness of her school's bullying intervention policies.

> 'I think children need to know that if they bully they will get into trouble' (Participant 4)

In previous literature it was discussed that if bullying is targeted in a multi systemic way its prevalence will decrease (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). However, from the data collected there seems to be a hands-on one-on-one approach. Teachers and schools seem to be dealing with the after effects of bullying as opposed to preventative measures. The preventative measures that are in place are not effective in bullying prevention but rather in creating bullying awareness. To enhance the effectiveness of the strategies they could perhaps integrate a consistent consequence procedure.

4.5 The Role of Gender

The collected data indicates that all educators found girls to engage in more indirect forms of bullying, using forms such as social exclusion, gossiping and teasing. *The rise of indirect bullying or the decrease of direct* bullying emerged as a sub-theme throughout this section. They mentioned that boys were more involved with overt forms of bullying such as active name calling, physical bullying or obvious mockery. However, (Participant 5) said that boys have now become accustomed to indirect forms of bullying. As it has become more acceptable for boys to speak about their feelings and engage in their emotions, they tend towards indirect bullying too. However, this statement is very ambiguous and does not indicate solid reasons as to why boys are moving towards more indirect forms of bullying.

> ‘In general, the girls use more words because I think they tend to talk to each other more, they are more talkative, that is their mode of communication. Boys you watch the boys playing and its very physical.’ Participant
>
> ‘Girls are more socially exclusive, they tend to gossip and manipulate whereas boys are more in your face and aggressive’ (Participant 8)
>
> ‘There are some boys that are quite verbal…they won’t really bad mouth you but make you feel insecure…talk down to you’ (Participant 1)
>
> ‘With girls there is almost a Queen Bee mentality’ (Participant 5)
>
> ‘Boys are more brutal. I suppose boys use both. Girls are more sensitive and don’t tend to say as much as quickly. Probably bitchier… Leaving them out, excluding them, not including them in the group’ (Participant 2)

The data presented shows that boys do still tend towards more aggressive, overt forms of bullying behaviour whereas girls are more prone towards indirect forms of bullying. However, all educators believe that because boys are being taught how to speak about their emotions and how to express themselves that they are moving away from physical bullying. Girls continue to use indirect forms.

As highlighted in chapter two, current research around bullying explores the differences in the types of bullying as it relates to gender. The research by Chatzitheochari et al. (2016) concludes that boys are more likely to engage in direct forms of bullying. These behaviours include: physical violence, public shaming and name calling. However, boys are also involved in indirect forms of bullying. Bauman (2008) indicated that the preferable mode of bullying among boys is direct bullying. Girls on the other hand use indirect relational bullying. This includes: gossiping, social exclusion and speaking behind the victims back. Hartley, Bauman, Nixon and Davis (2015) found that girls were 2.14 more times likely to engage in indirect bullying than boys. It is unlikely that educators can be aware of this all the time, or act on it in every instance. This would suggest that (Participant 1)’s statement in the previous section, which stated that educators were aware of all bullying, was unrealistic or does not consider gossiping etc. to be bullying. Again, this relates to the sub-theme of *is bullying universally defined?* Educators have differing views and definitions of bullying and what is considered bullying behaviour. This filters into this section on gender, as their definition of what bullying is will affect the way they view bullying behaviour by boys and girls.

4.6 Social Hierarchies

The data collected questions the social dominance theory to a certain degree. Four out of the eight participants said that there is not a social hierarchy in their schools. It may be since they are both primary schools as (Participant 5) stated in her interview, but the educators do not have experience of social hierarchical systems. However, there is no research to support that primary schools do not have social hierarchies. The SDT is much more about power dynamics as opposed to social hierarchies. So, although there are no stable hierarchies within both schools, there are still power dynamics. However, they do mention that among girls there seems to be a type form of popularity. As (Participant 5) mentions 'a Queen Bee mentality' where one girl will be the popular girl. She would thus have influence over those that follow her. Yet these educators have not found bullying to play a role in terms of social hierarchies.

> 'I don't get a sense of hierarchy, but I get a sense of those are the ones to be watched and those are the ones that need constant monitoring…I don't think they use it for social status at this stage in school…I think there is some queen bee attitude…I will call the shots as to who is, you know the girls tend to sit in a big circle at break time' (Participant 5)

This statement from (Participant 5) highlights that the view of a social hierarchy and normal social behaviour within schools is different. The idea that a 'queen bee attitude' is present and different from a social hierarchy is pertinent. The sub-theme *defying the norm* emerged throughout the data. Many educators made claims that there is normal behaviour and then there is bullying behaviour. A social hierarchy furthermore, is seen as something that develops at a later stage in school. Social status seems to develop later too. The idea that some children need to have constant monitoring indicates that educators may have preconceived perceptions of what bullies and victims' characteristics are. This may also lead to suspicion that perhaps those that are not monitored may fall under the radar and go unnoticed.

> 'In terms of social power definitely not, it is more individual disputes' (Participant 8)

The social dominance theory (SDT) discussed in the literature review concerns the belief system that human systems and societies are structured according to social group-based hierarchies. These hierarchies include dominant and submissive groups (Goodboy et al., 2016). The difference between these two groups is related to the accomplishment of positive social status, this social status is measured according to the accumulation of desirable social and financial resources. SDT explores the notion that individual social power is gained through membership of a socially constructed group (Goodboy et al., 2016). Although there are

intrapersonal characteristics that contribute towards children being at risk for bullying, the SDT interest lies within the social hierarchical construct.

The other four educators believe that bullying is a result of a social hierarchy where children are trying to either maintain their social status or move up in their social status. Bullying is used in order to maintain this social hierarchy. The educators believe that it stems from inner insecurities. Bullies needing power to prove their own self-worth. This bullying leads to insecurities and disempowerment on the part of the victim. There is a perception that the learners at the top of the pecking order have more power, are strong willed and usually loud and the ones at the lower end are more submissive and vulnerable. Therefore, as children with special needs are considered to have vulnerabilities they are often found to be at the bottom of the hierarchy.

> 'Oh yes especially with the girls…and if she is against someone, she's able to victimise them and get all the others to agree with her and join in' (Participant 2)

> 'I think there is a pecking order…it goes across the board. It goes from the staff all the way down to the children. I mean even to the littlest one in my class; there is a pecking order in my group…but I think it is human nature…I think a typical bully may not like where he is at and may want to be either higher up, or he would be prefer to be lower down. So, he has got to find ways and means to actually get what he wants…whether it is bullying or underhand means' (Participant 1)

This quote from (Participant 1) creates the sub-theme of *Acceptance and Denial*. There is a degree of acceptance that emerges throughout, that this is how society is structured and that it's human nature to behave in this way, so there is little that can be done about it – there is a clear attitude towards social hierarchy and bullying that is shown here. However, there may be an acceptance of this behaviour and social hierarchy or, in contrast, a denial that these behaviours do exist or that they are harmful and may be considered bullying.

> 'I think there is you know and sometimes bullies can be in the top of that hierarchy, and sometimes it's not all that, uhm, it is subtler than you think. Children do learn that when there as a group that you could be bullied with, if they are strong you can cope with those people… but it is a power thing…you need power to prove to yourself you are worth something…why would you need to be unkind to anybody if you are feeling good about yourself?' Participant

> 'Definitely, there are power plays too and the involvement is definitely bullying in social hierarchies' (Participant 8)

4.7 Conclusions

Although existing literature states that bullying and its connection to special needs children is a pervasive and common topic, the data revealed that bullying and its connection to special needs children in two primary school institutions has a low prevalence. The data suggests that children with special needs are not necessarily involved in bullying (whether as victims or bullies) more than other children. The interviews revealed no information around bystanders and the focus was on the role of the bully and the victim. However, through the discussion it became clear that bullying behaviour is not collectively defined. This resulted in varying perceptions amongst educators. Some seemed to take bullying very seriously whilst others were more casual in their approach. Some educators did not believe 'meanness' to be bullying but instead saw it as normal negative social interaction, whilst others believed it to be a serious matter. A topic of awareness emerged. Awareness is seen as a tool which can help with intervention success and perhaps this may allow for a universal definition of bullying behaviour.

Interventions are currently based mainly on dealing with bullying once it has happened. Both schools have their own bullying intervention which entails educator intervention. Both schools tend to deal with bullying once it has occurred, despite a few prevention strategies such as bullying talks for the educators and assembly discussions for the children. The idea that children with special needs are more vulnerable to bullying is questionable according to the data. It was revealed that some children have intrapersonal characteristics that make them prone to victimhood.

The data also revealed that there are more accounts of indirect bullying than direct bullying between both genders. Some educators believe this is due to boys being encouraged to explore their emotions. However, it seems that schools take a more punitive approach to direct bullying and thus indirect bullying may be on the rise for this reason.

Educators state that the home environment as well as the media are critical influences on bullying behaviour. One factor that became clear throughout the data collection is that bullying has an impact on many different levels that affect a learner. There are many factors that influence bullying and its connection to special needs within the school environment.

> 'It is so layered that it becomes a difficult thing' (Participant 3)

5. Chapter Five: Limitations, Implications and Conclusions

Bullying is a topic of concern within current research. There are numerous studies worldwide that aim to explore bullying within a school context. The school is an important facility for social interactions, peer relations, acquisition of knowledge and academic performance (Kolstrein & Toledo Jofre, 2013). Within these interrelations children are often exposed to bullying behaviour. Bullying has numerous effects on children as it often leads to poor academic performance, emotional problems and behaviour difficulties. Within mainstream schools with an inclusion policy, children who have special needs are seen to have lower social standing among their peers. Due to factors such as poor socialisation skills, academic difficulties and behaviour problems these children are at high risk for victimisation (Coates & Vickerman, 2010). This research highlighted the perceptions of educators with regards to bullying and its connection to children with special needs. Although the role of special needs in bullying is a growing topic of research, it is limited in the South African context. Furthermore, there is a need for more understanding of educators' experiences with regards to this topic. This research highlighted an in-depth exploration of bullying and its connection to special needs within a South African context from the perceptions of educators.

Additionally, this research provided an analysis of bullying from social ecological and social dominance theory frameworks. These theories promote understanding of how bullying impacts an individual from multi levels within their environments as well as the significance of social hierarchies and dominance within schools which ultimately create space for bullying behaviour. The research concluded that school hierarchies are questionable within primary private schools as the results were mixed in this regard. Furthermore, it became clear that children with special needs are not necessarily more vulnerable to bullying behaviour. Some educators believe the stereotype that children with special needs are automatically vulnerable to bullying, but when it came to back these perceptions up with case studies they were unable to provide any.

The results indicated that multifaceted factors such as: home life, schools, communities and intrapersonal characteristics impact bullying behaviour within schools. It was concluded that the current bullying interventions within schools are limited. This study forces one to consider whether there should be a shift in how bullying is being dealt with within schools. Furthermore, there is a difference amongst educators as to what bullying is and what it is not. This is

significant as there needs to be a common understanding amongst the various stakeholders within the school. It does not need to be a universal understanding, but people within the school community need common understanding, or at least more awareness of the difficulties in creating a common understanding of defining bullying. School policies seem to be diverse and inconsistent. Both schools had different approaches to bullying. Within each school each participant had a different method or procedure of how to intervene with bullying incidences.

Although this study provided numerous advantages listed above, it does have limitations. The sample of participants was limited in their race, ethnicity and gender as the majority of participants were white females. Moreover, due to lack of response from schools these participants were taken from private primary schools within Gauteng North. The study is limited in its exploration of bullying towards children with special needs across multiple contexts. Contexts such as remedial schools, government schools, secondary and tertiary education systems and less well-resourced schools. This study would have benefited from a more in-depth exploration of educators' perceptions around the roles of bullying behaviour and a deeper delve into the difference between 'meanness' and 'bullying could have been explored.

Future research would benefit from a study that includes a diversity of race, ethnicity and gender as well as a broader spectrum of participants from various public and private schools within Gauteng. A larger study could be conducted; however, this qualitative study provided a rich in-depth analysis of bullying and its connection to special needs. It allowed for a detailed analysis of definitions, causation, interventions and case studies. Future research would benefit from exploring results of interviews with educators who work at remedial schools, government schools and secondary and tertiary education systems. Lastly saturation of data is a limitation within this study. Future literature can be done with a focus on bystanders. Schools would benefit from creating more awareness of bullying to parents, students and educators. Hosting information evenings for parents, teacher training and adding bullying education into the school syllabus are practical ways of creating awareness. Furthermore, creating a standard definition of bullying within schools where indirect bullying is included would be helpful. Lastly, schools would benefit from having a protocol to follow for bullying intervention strategies.

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Appendix A – University of the Witwatersrand Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MEDP/15/007 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	Educators' Perceptions of Bullying and Children with Special Needs.
INVESTIGATORS **DEPARTMENT**	Bianca Cassingena Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	10/06/15
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 10 June 2015

CHAIRPERSON Sumaya Laher
(Prof. Sumaya Laher)

cc Supervisor: Prof. Joseph Seabi
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2019

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B – Department of Education Ethical Clearance

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	10 August 2017
Validity of Research Approval:	06 February 2017 – 29 September 2017 2017/209
Name of Researcher:	Cassingena B.
Address of Researcher:	4 Cabernet Crescent
	Hurlingham ext 5
	2195
Telephone Number:	011 781 2518 082 771 3578
Email address:	Bianca.cassingena@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Educators' perception of bullying and children with special needs
Number and type of schools:	Two Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

14/08/2017

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Interview Guide – Questions

Introduction: Thank you for taking part in this research on bullying and special needs children in schools. I really appreciate the time you are giving to this, and your willingness to chat to me. It would be very useful to hear about your observations and views, and examples of particular instances of bullying that you are aware of. In my report I will not use your name, the name of the school, or of any children or other parties you refer to, and in this sense whatever you tell me will be anonymised. Before we start, do you have any time constraints I need to be aware of?

1. Participants' views of the prejudice and stigma associated with being a special needs child (In relations to their perceptions of the parent body, other learners, and special needs children themselves). 1. If not already known: Perhaps you could kick off by giving me a brief background on the sorts of special needs children you have at this school? (Types of special needs, severity etc). 2. In the past there has often been prejudice and stigma associated with being a special needs child. To what extent do you think this exists at this school? (Probe: How do the other children perceive the special needs children?)
2. Case studies of bullying towards children with special needs. Please could you tell me about one or two situations where a child with a special need was bullied? If you could include aspects such as what happened, how the bullying unfolded, how the victim, bully and other children reacted, that would be very useful.
    a. What happened?
    b. How did the bullying unfold?
    c. How did the victim react?
    d. How did the bully react?
    e. How did the bystander/s react?
    f. What was the follow up procedure?
    g. What were the consequences?
    h. What was the school's involvement?
    i. What was the parents' involvement? How typical was this incident of the sort of thing that tends to happen with bullying?
3. Case studies of bullying from children with special needs. It is possible that a child with special needs can be the bully? Please could you tell me about one or two situations

where this occurred?

   a. What happened?
   b. How did the bullying unfold?
   c. How did the victim react?
   d. How did the bully react?
   e. How did the bystander/s react?
   f. What was the follow up procedure?
   g. What were the consequences?
   h. What was the school's involvement?
   i. What was the parents' involvement?

4. Case studies where bullying is difficult to observe. I assume that there are situations where it is difficult to observe the bullying taking place. Please could you tell me about one or two of situations where this happened? What are the challenges in dealing with situations like this?

   a. What happened?
   b. How did the bullying unfold?
   c. How did the victim react?
   d. How did the bully react?
   e. How did the bystander/s react?
   f. What was the follow up procedure?
   g. What were the consequences?
   h. What was the school's involvement?
   i. What was the parent's involvement?

5. How do you go about deciding who is really the bully and the victim?
6. Does bullying occur differently between boys and girls? In what ways?
7. Have patterns regarding bullying changed over time?
8. How serious is bullying within your school? And of special needs children?
9. What do you think are the underlying causes of bullying? And the underlying reasons for special needs children? (As victims and bullies).

   a. Home environment?
   b. Children's relationships with their parents?
   c. Children's relationships with their family members?
   d. A child's community involvement?
   e. Relationships with peers?

f. Schools involvement?
g. Government involvement and procedure around bullying? What factors in the environment do you see as contributing to bullying?

10. Some researchers have related bullying to children's status in a social hierarchy, a bit like a 'pecking order,' I am interested in your views on this.
11. If yes, does this hierarchy have an effect on bullying? What sort of children are considered to be at the top of the hierarchy? What sort of children are usually lower on the hierarchy? How does a child gain status within the hierarchy?
12. What do bullies get out of bullying? How does bullying influence the social hierarchy?
13. How do you see your role in terms of dealing with bullying? How prepared do you feel you are within this role?
14. How does this school deal with bullying?
15. Has this school implemented any bullying interventions (over and above what you have already mentioned)?
16. At this school, who (else) deals with bullying?
17. How successful do you think the school is at dealing with bullying? (Why?)
18. How does the school evaluate the success of the intervention?
19. What advantages does the intervention have?
20. What disadvantages does the intervention have?

Appendix D – Principal Information Page

Principal Information Page

Good day,

My name is Bianca Cassingena and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining an Educational Psychology Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand and I would like to invite educators at your school to take part in my study. My area of focus is that of educators' perceptions of bullying behaviour towards special needs students.

Participation in this research will entail educators being interviewed by myself and possibly on occasion my supervisor, at a time and place that is convenient for them. The interview will last for approximately one hour. With their permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify the school or educators 'will be included in the research report. Pseudonyms will be used from the point of transcription. The interview material (recordings and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation other than my supervisor Prof. Fiona Donald at any time, and will only be processed by myself with her guidance and that of a transcriber. Participants may refuse to answer any questions they would prefer not to, and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Educators can be approached or asked to participate in the study at the principal's discretion and where possible maybe approach and asked by myself.

> If you choose to participate in the study, please can you send me contact details of any educators who may be willing to participate in this study. You can email these to me at Bianca.cassingena@gmail.com. If you have any questions you'd like to ask before agreeing feel free to contact me.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on perceptions of bullying behaviour towards special needs children.

Kind Regards,

Bianca Cassingena

Researcher

084 887 5556

Bianca.cassingena@gmail.com

Prof. Fiona Donald

Supervisor

011 717 4507

Fiona.donald@wits.ac.za

Appendix E – School Consent Form

School Consent Form

I, _____ consent to the study by Bianca Cassingena on educators' perceptions of bulling towards children with special needs.

I understand that:

- No information that may identify the school or its staff or clients will be included in the research report, and their responses will remain confidential.
- The research report may use the quotes of the staff or clients as long as they are not identifiable as their own.
- The findings of this study, as informed by the staff or clients of (school) contributions, may be subject to publication at some stage.

Signed _____

Date_____

Appendix F – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Page

Good day,

My name is Bianca Cassingena and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining an Educational Psychology Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand and I would like to invite you to take part in my study. My area of focus is that of educators' perceptions of bullying behaviour towards special needs students.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself and possibly on occasion my supervisor, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately one hour. With your permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you will be included in the research report. Pseudonyms will be used from the point of transcription. The interview material (recordings and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation other than my supervisor Prof. Fiona Donald at any time, and will only be processed by myself with her guidance and that of a transcriber. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

If you choose to participate in the study please fill in your details on the form below and email it to me at Bianca.cassingena@gmail.com . If you have any questions you'd like to ask before agreeing feel free to contact me.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on perceptions of bullying behaviour towards special needs children.

Kind Regards,

Bianca Cassingena

Researcher

084 887 5556

Bianca.cassingena@gmail.com

Prof. Fiona Donald

Supervisor

011 717 4507

Fiona.donald@wits.ac.za

Appendix G – Participant Consent Form

Consent form – Interview participation and Audio recording

I, _____ consent to being interviewed by Bianca Cassingena for her study on educator's perceptions of bulling towards children with special needs. I also consent to my interview being audio recorded.

I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.
- The research report may use my quotes as long as they are not identifiable as mine.
- The findings of this study, as informed by my contributions, may be subject to publication at some stage.
- The recordings and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher and supervisor.
- All audio recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed _____

Date_____

Appendix H – Participant Support Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for taking part in this research project. Your participation and enthusiasm to aid mental health research in South Africa is greatly appreciated. Should you wish to view the final research report, it will be available from me in late November.

If you feel that you would like to speak to a trained mental health professional, please contact the following organisations. They are available on campus so as to ensure your convenience.

Emthonjeni Centre:

011 717 4513/4559

Located on East Campus (please see first map attached)

Career and Counselling Development Unit:

011 717 9140/32

Located in the CCDU building, West Campus, Gate 9, Enoch Sontonga Avenue, Braamfontein (please see second map attached).

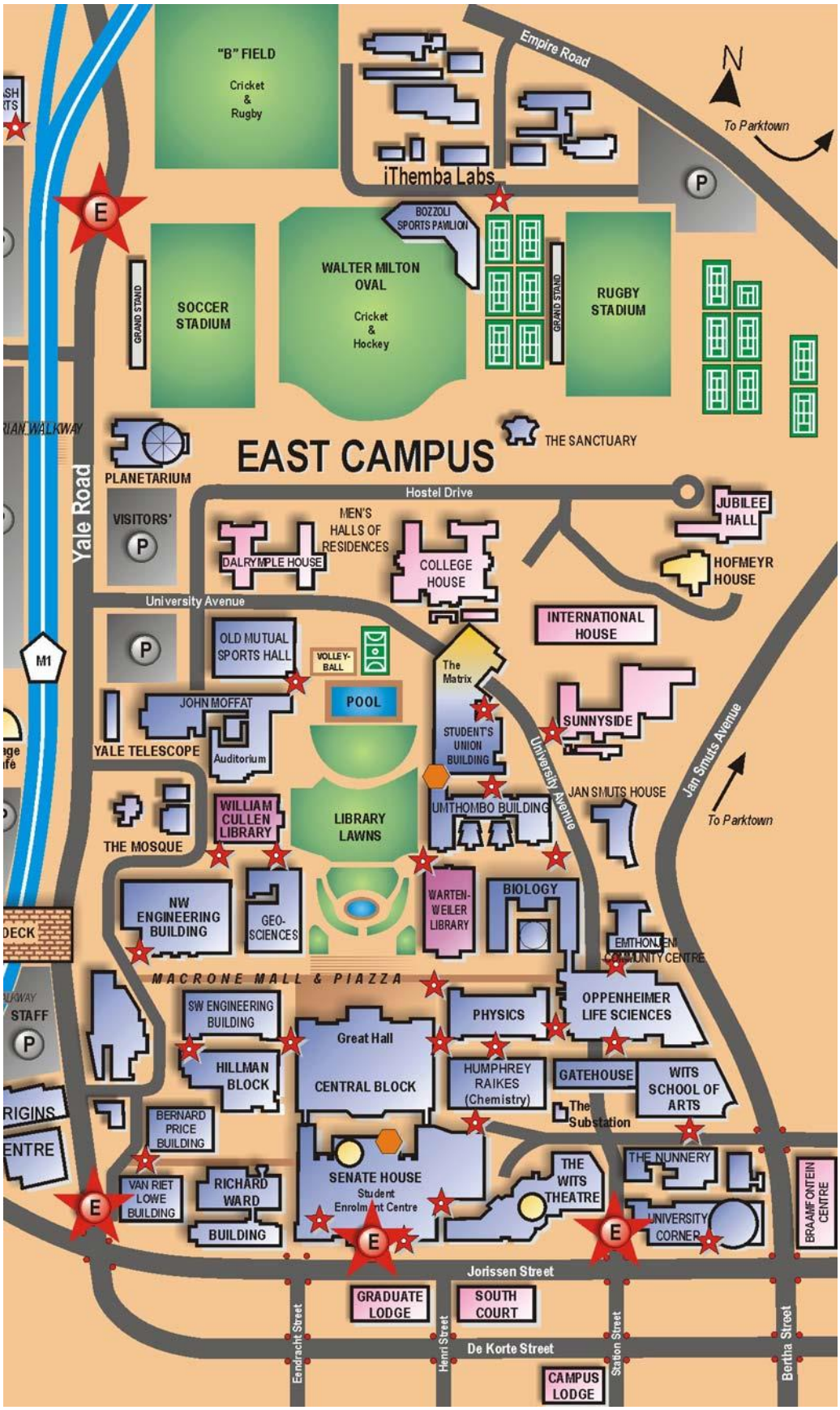
They charge R30 per session for students.

Furthermore, if you do not feel comfortable with these services or would like to recommend that a non-student family member or friend speak to a professional, they can contact the **South African Depression and Anxiety Group** on their toll free number 0800 567 567. They offer telephonic counselling and can also refer you to free mental health services in your area as well as provide you with literature on mental health.

Thank you again.

Kind regards,

Bianca Cassingena


"B" FIELD
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iThemba Labs
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BOZZOLI SPORTS PAVILION
WALTER MILTON OVAL
Cricket
&
Hockey
GRAND STAND
SOCCER STADIUM
GRAND STAND
RUGBY STADIUM
EAST CAMPUS
THE SANCTUARY
PLANETARIUM
Yale Road
VISITORS'
P
Hostel Drive
MEN'S HALLS OF RESIDENCES
DALRYMPLE HOUSE
COLLEGE HOUSE
JUBILEE HALL
HOFMEYR HOUSE
University Avenue
INTERNATIONAL HOUSE
M1
OLD MUTUAL SPORTS HALL
VOLLEY-BALL
POOL
The Matrix
STUDENT'S UNION BUILDING
SUNNYSIDE
JOHN MOFFAT
Auditorium
YALE TELESCOPE
University Avenue
JAN SMUTS HOUSE
Jan Smuts Avenue
To Parktown
THE MOSQUE
WILLIAM CULLEN LIBRARY
LIBRARY LAWNS
UMTHOMBO BUILDING
NW ENGINEERING BUILDING
GEO-SCIENCES
WARTEN-WEILER LIBRARY
BIOLOGY
EMTHONJENI COMMUNITY CENTRE
MACRONE MALL & PIAZZA
STAFF
P
SW ENGINEERING BUILDING
PHYSICS
OPPENHEIMER LIFE SCIENCES
Great Hall
HILLMAN BLOCK
CENTRAL BLOCK
HUMPHREY RAIKES (Chemistry)
GATEHOUSE
WITS SCHOOL OF ARTS
The Substation
BERNARD PRICE BUILDING
THE NUNNERY
VAN RIET LOWE BUILDING
RICHARD WARD BUILDING
SENATE HOUSE
Student Enrolment Centre
THE WITS THEATRE
UNIVERSITY CORNER
BRAAMFONTEIN CENTRE
Jorissen Street
GRADUATE LODGE
SOUTH COURT
Eendracht Street
Henri Street
De Korte Street
Station Street
Bertha Street
CAMPUS LODGE

Appendix I – Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Please provide the following demographic information:

1. Name:……

2. Age: ……..

3. Gender:

Male ☐ Female ☐

4. Race/Ethnicity:

4.1 African ☐ 4.3 Coloured ☐

4.2 Indian ☐ 4.4 Asian ☐

5. Home Language:

5.1 Afrikaans ☐ 5.7 English ☐

5.2 IsiZulu ☐ 5.8 Ndebele ☐

5.3 Sepedi ☐ 5.9 Sotho ☐

5.4 Swati ☐ 5.10 Tsonga ☐

5.5 Tswana ☐ 5.11 Venda ☐

5.6 Xhosa ☐ 5.12 Other_____

6. School Type (Matriculation)

6.1 Government school ☐

6.2 Independent school ☐

6.3 Former Model C ☐

6.4 Other_____ ☐