

Effects Of Emotional Bullying on the Academic and Social Life of Students in the Luyengo Campus

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Abstract

Psychological well-being is enhanced by positive self-esteem, positive interpersonal functioning, sense of meaning and constructive activity. However, emotional bullying has adverse effects on students and their learning processes and social lives in education systems. This research aims at establishing the incidence, root cause and consequences of emotional bullying at Luyengo Campus of the University of Eswatini and the available student support networks for such adversity. Semi-structured open-ended questions were posed to 10 students through interviews and convenience samples. Emotional bullying is a serious issue on Luyengo Campus, as students acknowledged its harmful, though often subtle, effect. It negatively impacts academic achievement, mental health, and interpersonal relationships, causing lifelong emotional scars. Unrecognized emotional bullying is the most damaging. Peers, family, and teachers are usually bullies, with peer cliques being the primary source. Bullying is caused by ignorance, personality, and environment, as well as many bullies having been victims. Academically, it impedes focus and class attendance, with lecturers being perpetrators creating a toxic learning environment. Socially, victims are isolated and struggle to form relationships, with fear of reprisal deterring reporting. Campus culture is pervasive with fear. To combat this, it needs to be implemented on campus the campus needs to implement comprehensive anti-bullying student and staff training, including emotional bullying sensitivity and clear, supportive reporting procedures.

Keywords: Emotional bullying, academic impact, social isolation, perpetrators, victims, prevalence

Introduction

Psychological well-being extends beyond merely the absence of mental distress or disorders. A psychologically healthy individual demonstrates attributes such as positive self-regard, a sense of autonomy, mastery over one's environment, nurturing

relationships, a quest for meaning, and ongoing personal growth. Decisions made by psychologically well individuals often reflect a consideration for the happiness of themselves and their loved ones (Gilbert, 2006). This conscious process suggests a level of emotional intelligence and empathy that plays a crucial role in interpersonal relationships. Human development is influenced by various interconnected systems, encompassing home, school, community, and broader societal contexts. Within these systems, individuals interact and grow, acquiring diverse life experiences and behaviors. Notably, bullying emerges not simply from individual traits but is shaped significantly by relationships with peers, family members, educators, and societal factors, including media implications. Bullying has been a persistent aspect of human interactions throughout history, affecting people in numerous roles—be it bystanders, victims, or perpetrators.

Hymel (2015) highlights an intriguing dynamic, where a student facing bullying at school may express their frustrations by bullying siblings at home, reflecting a coping mechanism. This behavior underscores a cycle of aggression, where individuals redirect their hurt and anger onto others who may be vulnerable, distracting attention from the underlying issues that necessitate resolution. Parents, focusing on this disruptive behavior at home, may remain unaware of the bullying their child is experiencing at school. This discussion focuses particularly on emotional bullying, which encompasses actions and behaviours that can be incredibly damaging. Emotional maltreatment involves the persistent negation of a child's essential needs—safety, acceptance, autonomy—crucial for healthy development. As outlined by Castelo (2012), psychological safety entails a stable, non-hostile family environment; acceptance and self-esteem require positive regard and realistic evaluations from caregivers; and age-appropriate autonomy allows children to explore their surroundings without undue constraints. Unlike physical abuse, emotional abuse is often cloaked in misinterpretations of affection or humor, leading to its frequent underrecognition. The intricacies of emotional bullying can be challenging to detect

due to its subtle manifestations. Emotional violation can emerge in various forms, from the blatant to the nuanced. This complexity contributes to a lack of consensus within the scientific community regarding assessment and definition of emotional maltreatment (Estefn, Coulter & Vandeweerd, 2016).

Statement of Problem

Most especially within the Luyengo Campus, emotional bullying has become an area of concern within schools and educational facilities. While less visible than physical bullying however there are many underlying psychological effects that take root, and end up influencing the students' academic performance and interactions with others. Despite the growing concern for the enhanced research on emotional bullying, limited research has been carried out in the field to analyse emotional bullying's additions to both classroom and social life of students in Luyengo Campus. Primary effects of emotional bullying may include reduced self-esteem and coping levels, increased levels of anxiety, and isolation, all of which may cause absenteeism, disengagement and alteration of classroom climate. In addition, the social impact of emotional bullying works to weaken relationships, limit the formation of friendships, and decrease interaction with peers, all of which weaken the community feel that is regenerated in university life. This research seeks to establish how – and, more particularly, to what extent – emotional bullying affects the academic achievement and social relations of students in Luyengo Campus. Understanding the experiences of students receiving emotional bullying is the purpose of this study in order to define how it negatively influences the psychological states, academic achievements, and interpersonal activities of students in the context of the campus. The conclusions will offer potentially useful data for action-oriented prevention and assistance initiatives that will enhance the learning environment's health and equity.

The Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the contributions of emotional bullying to the academic and social life of students at Luyengo Campus. The objectives are; to investigate the prevalence of emotional bullying at Luyengo Campus; to investigate the causes of emotional bullying in university environment and to determine the influence of emotional bullying to the academic and social life of the students at Luyengo Campus.

Literature Review

Psychological abuse, or emotional bullying, is a form of abuse aimed at the mind and heart through tactics ranging from gossip and social isolation to the silent treatment (Juliana, Georgina, Okorn & Akeke 2016). Physical aggression is overt, yet more covert forms, including indirect aggression, are harder to spot. This is prevalent in schools, from second-level schools where older children physically bully younger peers to institutions of higher learning where intimidation and coercion yield a hostile campus environment. Nailing emotional bullying is challenging because it is viewed as normal coming-of-age experience. Although historically associated with women, men also engage in social bullying at epidemic rates (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Its effects are long-reaching, encompassing depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and even suicide or self-inflicted harm (Copeland et al., 2015; Allem 2016; Fanti, 2013). Emotional bullying is precipitated by various causes including family history, parent-child relationship, exposure to domestic violence (Copeland et al., 2015), and peer pressure (Juliana, Georgina, Okorn, & Akeke 2016). Targets are characterized by perceived differences in physical appearance, competency, or sexuality (Juliana, Georgina et al, 2016). Even though bullying is prominently recorded in schools, information related to emotional bullying remains elusive (Mbah, 2020). Fighting this vicious cruelty requires increased awareness, empathy, and efficient interventions to develop safe and inclusive learning environments.

Methodology

Research Design and population

One reason for conducting the study at Luyengo Campus was to investigate the impact of emotional bullying on students' academic and social lives. To resolve this concern, qualitative descriptive design was therefore preferred. Qualitative research is concerned with the experience of human life and depends on the meanings that individuals attribute to events (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). This was a convenience sample of 10 students selected from the campus population for data collection. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that uses accessible participants.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were the main instrument for data collection. Such interviews enable researchers to probe deeper into participants' experiences and garner rich and in-depth information (Creswell 2013). To ensure trustworthiness in the qualitative inquiry, the researcher employed some rigorous principles of qualitative research. Credibility was ensured by careful collection and analysis of data while taking into consideration the perceptions of the participants. Transferability has been established through provision of in-depth descriptions about the context of the research, along with the assumption of the study. Dependability was guaranteed through rigorous documentation of the entire research process in sufficient detail so that other researchers could repeat the study (Cypress, 2017). Confirmability establishes that research findings are based on the data itself, minimizing the influence of the researcher's personal biases or opinions during data collection and analysis. This was ensured by using participants' direct words.

Data Analysis

Permission was sought from the Senior Assistant Registrar Luyengo Campus for the study to examine university students. Interviews were conducted at lunchtime when

students were away from class. Framework analysis, jointly involving both inductive and deductive approaches (Khoza, 2019), was used. This technique allowed the researcher to recognize important themes and categories and provide a logical linking of the processes of data analysis.

Findings and Discussions

The study presents findings from ten participants whose demographics are contained in Table 1. They are aged from 20 to 23 years. All but one are females. Notably, all participants do Food Science Nutrition and Technology, Consumer Science Education and Textiles Apperal and Design Manangement.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Major	Victim of Bullying
Participant 1	22	Female	Food Science, Nutrition and Tech	Yes
Participant 2	21	Female	Food Science, Nutrition and Tech	Yes
Participant 3	20	Female	Food Science, Nutrition and Tech	Yes
Participant 4	23	Female	Consumer Science Education	Yes
Participant 5	20	Female	Consumer Science Education	Yes
Participant 6	23	Female	Consumer Science Education	Yes
Participant 7	20	Male	Consumer Science Education	Yes
Participant 8	20	Female	Textile Apparel and Design Management	Yes
Participant 9	22	Female	Textile Apparel and Design Management	No
Participant 10	22	Female	Textile Apparel and Design Management	Yes

The Prevalence of Emotional Bullying at Luyengo Campus.

The researcher looked into the prevalence of emotional bullying in the campus and grouped the results into; students' awareness of the dangers of bullying, the common type of bullying behaviors, the common perpetrators and lastly the knowledge of emotional bullying.

4.1.1 Students' awareness of the dangers of bullying

Teacher trainees recognize the insidious impact of negative learning environments, referring to the hidden nature of bullying. They argue emphatically for strong action to be taken against bullying, citing how it is a disruptive and unnecessary phenomenon. Bystanders feel upset and guilty, with the risk of becoming victims themselves due to the emotional impact of witnessing bullying. Victims suffer from academic and personal issues, as bullies exploit power to create aggressive environments, annihilating self-esteem and motivation. The literature intimates long-term consequences, as bullying scars affect mental health and well-being for a lifetime. Bullying predicts poor school adjustment and peer relations (Bonell et al., 2014; Allem, 2016). Complex effects involve mental health issues, academic performance decline, and social skill deficiency. Bullying wears away anger-control in victims, leading to displaced aggression, as supported by research emphasizing its adverse effect on physical and mental health (Mbah, 2020).

The common types of bullying in the campus.

Bullying through physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional abuse occurs within schools. *"I have seen quite all the types of bullying occur in the campus"* (Participant 4). Physical bullying through aggression creates an unfavorable environment, such as that in instances of forced violent play. Emotional bullying, though not always obvious, is just as damaging, where victims can't articulate what happens to them. A teacher taunting a student illustrates the subtle nature of this abuse, *"when I asked my friend as to why she did not say it earlier, she said she was afraid to talk about it*

because she is afraid of the teacher” (Participant 8). Bullying's impact extends beyond individual victims, establishing an environment of fear on campus and deterring academic and social involvement. This aligns with research indicating that behaviors of oppression, including intimidation and harassment, are common in higher education (Juliana, Okorn, & Akeke, 2016). They demonstrate bullying's contribution to hostile environments. Lester (2013) also corroborates the occurrence of physical bullying in higher education. The remedy to this lies in developing empathy, raising awareness, and erecting preventative structures to foster safe and inclusive learning environments.

The common perpetrators of bullying.

Bullying, as a multifaceted phenomenon, involves a power imbalance between bullies and victims in social environments. Emotional bullying typically occurs in social groups, and friends and siblings are most commonly cited as instigators, using manipulation and exclusion (Smith, 2016; Dantchev & Zemp, 2021). Peer and familial relationships have an important role to play in the development of bullying inclinations. Teachers and authority figures also practice bullying, which foregrounds an unequal power relationship between schools. It is a gap of generations to understand emotional bullying, with earlier generations perhaps not emphasizing its impact. Offenders will mask themselves in humor or ridicule, disregarding victim discomfort for control, perpetuating the cycle of bullying. Bullying behavior can extend into adulthood. Bullying can be done by individuals or groups, indicating the group aspect of some attacks (Ishrat & Hameed, 2024).). This indicates the complex social dynamics propelling and perpetuating bullying.

Knowledge of Emotional Bullying.

Emotional bullying, a psychological torment, goes undetected since it is of an insidious nature, yet its emotional impact is definite. Respondents described being

"emotionally subdued" by violent siblings. Although victims were not always able to articulate the abuse, they generally were clear about who was perpetrating it. *"I am a very observant person, so it was always easy for me to understand that this was all emotional bullying,"* (Participant 4). This knowledge prompts some to take action, as one volunteer stated, *"I really know that emotional bullying is real and I would gladly help anyone who has to deal with it,"* (Participant 5). Emotional bullying is described by Arnout, Alshehri, Assiri and Al-Qadimi (2020) as abuse that harms mental and emotional well-being, including spreading rumors, exclusion, ridicule, and verbal abuse (Juliana et al., 2016). Research confirms that it happens in schools; an Australian study concluded that a third of university students had experienced bullying, and name-calling was common. Ostracism is also a common approach (Orpinas, 2015). Results were mirrored in participant responses, with one describing, *"Well, I will stand up for myself to intervene and walk away every time I find them bullying me,"* (Participant 4).

Causes of Emotional Bullying

The results of the investigation on the causes of emotional bullying were grouped into perils that give away to emotional bullying as well as the nature of the perpetrators of the emotional bullying.

Perils that give away to emotional bullying

Some bullying may stem not only from perceived differences but also from temperament. In acceptance of the norms, behaviours would include: the nature of the person such as: some uniqueness in physical appearance like a shape of the unusual head, *"I was bullied by my mathematics teacher at high school because of my big head,"* (Participant 3). Moreover, others who behaved in an unconventional manner tended to be bullied e.g. such may include heavy make-ups or expressing homosexual interests and even attracted to members of the same sex. The very trait of someone's temperament can also greatly matter. Generally, gentle and submissive people might

be easily victimized, given bullies' attitudes that they are less likely to stand their ground, *"I am a soft-spoken person, while my friend is loud, so it was easy for her to bully me and the fact that she knew that I couldn't even talk back at her or retaliate gave her the room to always do whatever she liked towards me"* (Participant 8). Power and social status often increase vulnerability to emotional bullying. Those who apply to the concept of feeling less worthy, due to their physical size having different academic performance or social standing, are often more prone to being victimized (Mbah, 2020). Likewise, students with disabilities or those with social skill deficits face attacks in school settings (Mbah, 2020). The work explains that social connection does help discourage bullying. Students who were isolated or unhappily interacted would be more susceptible to victimizations. Schools can cultivate a sense of community and positive peer attraction to help eliminate emotional bullying.

The nature of the perpetrator of emotional bullying

Emotional bullying stems from varied origins, including ignorance, personality, and environment. Some bullies act unknowingly, with one participant stating, *"I knew I did not want to bully anyone, so I felt awful when I learned what I actually did."* Others exhibit deliberate malice, justifying their actions, as exemplified by Participant 6: *"I ceased being her friend because of her bitterness and harshness."* Environmental factors are crucial. Mbah (2020) notes that aggression evolves into verbal and social exclusion, influenced by peers and family. Many bullies are also victims, perpetuating a cycle. Children may adopt aggressive behaviors to avoid victimization. Lack of consequences reinforces bullying. Mbah (2020) emphasizes that consistent interventions are vital. Understanding these underlying factors—ignorance, personality, and environment—is essential for effective prevention and intervention, fostering a more empathetic society.

Influence of Emotional Bullying on Academic Life

The outcome of the influence of emotional bullying on the academic life of students was focused on the academic capabilities, the learning process and when the lecturer is the perpetrator of the emotional bullying.

Academic capabilities

Emotional bullying is of complex causes, including ignorance, personality, and environment. Some of the bullies were unintentional, as highlighted by one of the participants, *"I knew I did not want to bully anyone, so I felt awful when I learned what I actually did"* (Participant 7). Others show heartless intentions, rationalizing their actions, with one person citing, *"I stopped being her friend because of her bitterness and harshness"* (Participant 6). Social and environmental factors are important. Mbah (2020) reports that children redirect aggression into verbal aggression and social rejection due to family and peer effects. Notably, most of the bullies are victims themselves. This sets a cycle of bullying because the victims learn to adopt aggressive acts as a form of self-defense. Lack of consequences perpetuates bullying. Mbah (2020) focuses that sustained intervention is necessary. Identifying the root causes—ignorance, personality, and environment—is crucial for prevention and intervention and building an empathetic society.

The learning process

Emotional bullying severely disables students' learning, disrupting their psychological well-being. Positive self-esteem, healthy relationships, and a sense of purpose are key to learning, but bullying undermines these (Mbah, 2020). As one of the participants commented, *"I frequently zoned out and missed the entire lesson as a result of the bully's persistent snide remarks"* (Participant 10). This leads to lower concentration, missing classes, and poor grades. Students can skip classes, become isolated, or lag behind, impacting academic and social growth. A poor college environment affects learning. Victimization contributes to lower participation in class and truancy,

derailing concentration and even leading to academic failure (Lian, Yu, Tu, Deng, Wang, Su & Zuo, 2021). Bullying encourages insecurity, withdrawal, and non-membership, also hindering performance (Mbah, 2020). Colleges must put emphasis on physical and emotional needs, promoting trust and security to prevent bullying and enhance learning.

Emotional bullying when the perpetrator is the lecturer

Student victimization by teachers or lecturers is a disturbing fact. Some of the participants of this study shared stories which carried various experiences of emotional bullying that may be categorized as harmless humor or normalized by their peers. Such behavior, coming from authority figures, can leave profound scars. The normalization and legitimization of such behaviors by educators come up with severe consequences. Such mistreatments may be consciously or unconsciously internalized by those victimized, thus lowering self-esteem and mental health. Bullying can interfere with a healthy learning environment and challenge academic performance. The provision of a safe and secure learning environment is crucial for effective learning (Savolainen, 2023). Building upon Savolainen's study, which explored the link between educator misbehavior and student victimization, this connection was also evident in the current research. The correlation between emotional abuse perpetrated by a teacher and bullying behavior on the part of the pupil was very striking. This implies a need for addressing the issue of educator behavior in relation to student victimization so as to be able to put a halt to the perpetuation cycle of victimization. To this end, perhaps institutions can normalize respect and compassion. There should be guidelines in place for the prevention of bullying behavior, even when committed by educators. Lastly, training and support provided to teachers to educate them can be very effective in minimizing perpetration and building a conducive learning environment to the benefit of all students.

Influence on Social Lives

The influence of emotional bullying on the social lives of students was looked into, and the results were grouped into social interactions difficulties as well as the urge the victims may have to revenge on the perpetrators.

Social interactions difficulties

This will affect social life in various other ways. The victims must learn to cope with engaging further in social situations because they might face rejection or be bullied again, *“I avoided my friend whenever she was with her other friend because I was angry towards her and I knew that she was going to repeat what she did to me of which I did not like,”* (Participant 7). Others may further withdraw into isolation to preserve themselves from ever forging a friendship lest they become a target for bullying. Such a severe effect is felt on one self-esteem, as the victims are careful and reserved, thus disabling their ability to relate to others on a genuine basis, *“Emotional bullying has damaged me to a point where my self-esteem has been reduced, I cannot be myself fully without being cautious what the next person is thinking or what the next person is going to say”* (Participant 10). Unless one has been bullied, it is difficult to build trust and establish relationships. However, the emotional repercussions of such are out of this world. Studies cited possible major consequences of depression and anxiety in many other attributes like insecurity and hindrances to social adjustments. In similar vein, Nikolaou (2022) has revealed that emotional bullying relates closely to social exclusions, academic failures, and the misery of poor mental health.

The urge to revenge

Though this situation encourages an urge for revenge, the whole setting will remain in flux and confuse matters further. Some victims may opt to turn a blind eye or intervene, others may simply retaliate either verbally or physically. The dynamics regarding the bully's source of power may impede the retaliation of the victim. The psychological consequences of bullying, such as decreased self-esteem, depression,

and anxiety, may additionally exacerbate the urge for revenge. In some situations, desperate victims may resort to aggression and violence (Mbah, 2020). Unfortunately, threats often force victims to refrain from reporting the matter for fear of the shame in doing so or that there is no one willing to support them (Almahasni, 2019). Such negative outcomes can be avoided or reduced by developing effective reporting mechanisms where victims know they will be protected and can freely report the matter further. Proper and timely addressing of the bullying will reduce the adverse effects on individuals and their communities.

Summary

The study investigates the prevalence and impact of emotional bullying at Luyengo Campus. Certainly, the students become aware of the grave effects emotional bullying carries with it in causing psychological problems and hampering their academic pursuit at large. There were so many of these forms: physical, verbal, cyber, sexual, and emotional, which occurred on the campus. Emotional bullying is generally typified as the more subtle strategies such as social exclusion or making fun of someone, such actions may bear terrible consequences. Emotional bullying can be committed by peers, family, teachers, and other authority figures. Factors contributing to victimization include vulnerability, power relations, social status, and others. The emotional consequences of bullying tend to affect a student in concentrating, motivating, and ultimately in the performance of his or her studies. Such students may also have trouble within interpersonal exchanges and develop isolation and poor self-image. There is now a pressing need to tackle emotional bullying, which astronomically requires raising awareness, stimulating empathy, and putting in place sound preventive measures. If we create a more caring and accepting campus atmosphere, we can alleviate the torment imposed on an individual through bullying and offer an inviting platform for students to learn.

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