

# The Family System as a Socio-Ecological Determinant of Bullying among Urban High School Adolescents in Gweru, Zimbabwe: Implications for Intervention

Neddie Ncube<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social Sciences, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

Correspondence: Neddie Ncube, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Midlands State University, Private Bag 9055, Gweru, Zimbabwe. E-mail: neddiencube@gmail.com; ncubeneddie@msu.ac.zw

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## Abstract

The study sought to identify family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying among Gweru urban High school adolescents. A survey design, premised on the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, was used. From the 13 High schools, 2 day-and 2 day-boarding schools were selected using stratified random sampling. Each school had 1 purposively sampled class giving a total of 4 classes comprised of 149 students, from whom 16 bullies were identified. Four class teachers, 1 from each school were consecutively sampled. Bullies responded to questionnaires whereas class teachers had structured interviews. Data was respectively subjected to Spearman's rho correlational computations between determinants and to thematic analysis. Major findings were that the socio-ecological determinants exerted a great influence on bullying, and that they had complex interactions between them. The overall conclusion was that the most influential determinants comprised of malfunctioning family set-ups. Recommendations included that anti-bullying intervention designers could take into cognizance that the identified determinants needed to be addressed, not in their individual capacities, as a change in one is likely to influence a change in others.

**Keywords:** adolescents, bullying, socio-ecological determinants

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of transition from puberty to early adulthood, that is, from about 12 to 21 years (Bonds & Stoker, 2009). According to McNeely and Blanchard (2009), most people regard adolescents as having boundless imagination, rashness, forgetfulness, inconsistency, explosive tempers, extreme vanity and egoism. Because most adolescents are still in school, this makes the school a primary context for their behaviors, and typically the largest and most important socialization institution for them. The authors also refer to world-wide surveys which show the high prevalence of bullying in many schools and its dire consequences, which include suicide, nightmares, carrying of weapons for self-protection and/or retaliation, absenteeism from school and extreme hyper-vigilance. Espelage (2010) gives the various forms of bullying which include physical, verbal, social, cyber, instrumental and inductive bullying.

### 1.1 Explanations of School Bullying

#### 1) Human Developmental Theories

To explain bullying-related behaviors, it is important to understand how adolescents develop. Adolescence is packed with so much development within a very short time frame and in a rapidly expanding context (Santrock, 2006). The author refers to physical, cognitive, emotional, moral, psychosocial and social development: *Physical* development is marked by secondary sexual characteristics, which are set off by sexual hormones first produced at puberty. The new body images sometimes cause frustrations, embarrassments and dissatisfaction causing adolescents to display unbecoming ways, including bullying. About *cognitive* development, Zimbardo (1985) says that adolescents are in Piaget's final stage of formal operations as witnessed by an increased capacity for abstract thought processes. However, there is often poor decision-making and formulation of judgments. Particularly for young adolescents, risk-taking and potentially-rewarding behaviors are common especially in group settings.

According to McNeely and Blanchard (2009), adolescence is full of *emotions*. Sex hormones affect adolescents' moods and are a source of sensitivity and heightened emotions. Concerns with physical changes may result with inadequate sleep, which can lead to moodiness, gloominess, irritability and over-reacting. For some girls, there are irregular and/or skipping of meals to lose weight. Romantic relationships often result with feelings ranging from elation to abject despair. And, as peers gain in importance over parents, there is occasional rudeness, disagreements, bickering, tensions, rebelliousness, conflicts, anger and back-talking. Regarding *moral* development, Skogsberg (2012) says that adolescents are in Kohlberg's pragmatic conventional levels' 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, the law and order orientation stage. At this stage, adolescents conform to set rules only to avoid censure by authorities and the resulting guilt. They have increased moral reasoning, testing of rules and limits, questioning of moral rights and privileges. They behave in certain ways depending on who they want to please, and they often want to please their peers. Adolescents are also in the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of Erikson's *psychosocial* 8-stage theory, called the identity versus role confusion stage. They have multiple ways of perceiving issues from others' point of view and they behave differently in situations according to what they deem appropriate and mostly acceptable to their peers (Swart & Bredekamp, 2009). If they successfully navigate through this stage, they develop a positive self-identity. However, failure to do so results with a negative self-identity and confusion, which often makes them display anti-social behaviors. About *social* development, Strabstein (2009) points out that peer group norm exert the most intense influence on adolescents' self-evaluation, sense of belonging, and their self-esteem. Espelage (2010) adds that peer pressure or conformity is driven by acceptance and popularity, both of which are based on toughness and aggression for boys while appearances are central to girls.

## 2) Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model

The model emphasizes environmental factors as major players in the development and behavior of adolescents. The place/role occupied by adolescents in their environment is called their socio-ecological niche, which refers to where they live, with whom they live, how they relate to those they live with and what and how they do where they live. On the overall, how they fit in their niches. While some niches are aggression-provocative, others are not. According to Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt and Hymel (2010), school bullying is a socio-ecological behavioral problem that is a function of the dynamic interaction between the individual adolescent and his/her niche. Hence the socio-ecological determinants of bullying formed the basis of the current study. The determinants encompass the individual adolescents' characteristics, their peers and their family and community climates. However, the family, being the primary socialization institution for adolescents, plays a significant role in determining their behavioral outcomes. It was in this regard that the researcher opted to focus on the family context of bullying. And hence the study was premised on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model as it explains the family context that drives and sustains bullying behavior. Keating (2009) points out that the model places adolescent development and bullying behavior within 5 nested systems, that is, the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems. The systems are named in order of their increasing distance from the individual adolescent bully.

The micro-system refers to the small immediate environment adolescents live in on a day-to-day basis. This includes their daily relationships, personal interactions and organizations they relate to, such as their immediate family, peers, teachers and the school. Adolescents' own biological make-up is also part of the micro-system. This is because a bad temperament, for example, may predispose them to a misfit within the micro-system, a situation which may result in bullying behavior. Also, how they (re)act to people in the micro-system affects how they are treated in turn, which may cause them to bully others. Secondly, the meso-system refers to the manner in which micro-systems interact. For example, parenting styles and personal parent-child interactions may be influenced by the type of interactions adolescents have with their peers and their schools' expectations of them. The more encouraging and nurturing these interactions are, the better the development and behavior of adolescents: However, if the type of parenting is such that parents do not take an active role in their adolescent child's school work, such as attending parent-teacher conferences and watching their sporting activities, antisocial behavior may result: Adolescents may feel that their parents have more important issues to attend to than to attend to them and hence may seek attention by bullying others.

The third system is the exo-system. It refers to other people and places that adolescents may not often interact with. It includes the parents' workplace, the school governing board, the neighborhood and the media. Though adolescents are indirectly involved, changes in this system can largely influence their behavior: For example, their parents may be retrenched or may be earning low salaries/wages, and the school authorities may be unfairly/strictly enforcing rules thus, resulting in anxiety or frustrations or being easily irritable; The neighborhood may be prone to crime and unsafe due to dangerous bushy lots; And the media may also be showing or reporting on violent movies/events all of which may influence adolescents to be bullies. The fourth

system is the macro-system. It is the over-arching system surrounding the other systems. It includes the cultural and ideological values of society, wars, politics, and policies. It also reflects assumptions of how things should be done and how systems should interact at various levels. And all of these aspects may negatively influence adolescents' behavior: For example, a community marred with violence and which accepts it as a way of solving problems, promotes bullying. Manguvo, Stephen and Chareke (2011) describe a Zimbabwean study on the influence of a community climate on bullying. Findings were that school bullying was reportedly high during the period 2000 to 2008 when the country faced unprecedented socio-economic challenges, extreme poverty as a result of a struggling economy and factors that included exposure to political violence.

Lastly, the chrono-system is to the largest and most remote set of people and things to adolescents but which still have great influence on their behavior. It refers to socio-historical circumstances, to the pattern of environmental events, and to transitions over the course of life. An example of socio-historical circumstances is the increase in opportunities, especially for women, to pursue careers during the last 30 years. This may have reduced quality time parents, especially mothers, spend at home with their adolescent children, reduced monitoring of their peer relationships, reduced supervision and assistance with school work, and reduced psychosocial support in the view that adolescence is a challenging time for most children. Such and other related circumstances may have resulted in increased school bullying.

The family micro-system context of bullying encompasses: Lack of family closeness/connectedness and of parental supervision/monitoring; Inter-parental and/or parent-child conflict/aggression; Neglectful parenting, which is cold and unsupportive, with no warmth, love or caring; Physical abuse of adolescent children and teaching them to physically strike back in handling social problems; Low/no parental expectations of children; Homes with easy access to weapons and drugs; Family instability and disruptions prior to divorce or separation; Inconsistent parenting; Poor communication patterns; Lack of quality time with children; Poor living arrangements/family structures, which are influenced by the family's socio-economic status whose variables include parents/guardians' education and employment status. In addition, Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel and Hynie (2007) add that parents are by far the greatest problems today's adolescent children face: They are far more likely to grow up with parents who get arrested, go to prison, disappear, disown them, and have all their lives messed up.

While the family is only part of an adolescent's micro-system, it influences other systems which in turn influence it. Thus, it is impossible to give family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying without giving reference to the other systems. Hence it was hoped that identifying potential determinants of bullying within the family institution would go a long way in the design and implementation of anti-bullying interventions that included various other systems. This is supported by Olweus (2004), who views Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory as perhaps the most holistic and all-encompassing theory of adolescent children's development and behavior as it posits a reciprocal interplay of contexts. Thus, based on this theory, it was possible to identify family-related contextual determinants that drive and sustain school bullying among adolescents. This was important as it could enable interventions which do not only focus on perpetrators but also focus on prevention by targeting the identified potential determinants/causes of such behavior among High school adolescents.

### 3) Previous Studies on School Bullying among Adolescents

Justice for Children Trust (2009), cited by Manguvo et al. (2011), states that the bullying phenomenon is widespread in Zimbabwean schools. The authors also describe a 2010 Colombian study which showed that 30% of all bullies came from families with socio-economic challenges. In a related study, middle-school students, classified as bullies, indicated receiving substantially less social support from their parents than those students in the uninvolved group. Bonds and Stoker (2009) describe a 2008 Australian study on adolescent bullies' family characteristics: Findings were that 25% of the 254 sampled bullies typically came from families with low cohesion and little warmth, and which permitted aggressive behavior, had physical abuse, poor family functioning, authoritarian parenting and inconsistent discipline. Nine percent of the parents abused drugs, had frequent fights and offered minimum/no supervision of their adolescent children. In addition, Swearer et al. (2010) refer to a 2009 Brisbane study of 759 school adolescents. Findings were that 26% of those who reported lacking something at home over-compensated for that at school. It was concluded that adolescents who were often victims at home turned out to be bullies at school.

### 4) Current Interventions in Zimbabwean Schools

In Zimbabwe, the Circular Minute number 35 of 1999 states that if a school child is found guilty of bullying, the child is excluded, expelled or provided with guidance and counseling depending on the severity of the bullying

(Choga, 2012). Bullying is also listed as a serious misconduct by the Ministry of Education, sport, arts and culture of Zimbabwe. Parents and school authorities were reportedly more punitive and reactive to critical incidents that will have occurred. Hence the future course of school bullying depends to a large extent on the implemented interventions, which must be more proactive by addressing the potential determinants of bullying. Thus, the need for the current study which sought to identify family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying among High school adolescents in Gweru urban, Zimbabwe.

### 5) The Goal of the Study

It sought to answer the following question:

What are the family-related determinants of bullying among Gweru urban High School adolescents?

#### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The various dire consequences of school bullying are of concern to students, parents, education practitioners and the community at large. This is against the background that the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1990) states that every child has a right to feel safe at home, in the community and at school. It is against this background that Olweus (2004) asserts that school bullying is unsafe, is ongoing, and that it does not usually go away on its own but often gets worse and that its eradication is a long way away as it is mostly punitive by only targeting bullies: The author recommends that anti-bullying programmes must be more holistic by also addressing potential socio-ecological determinants of school bullying, key of which is the students' family system. However, the determinants are neither uniform to all schools nor are they static as families that supply children to the schools are themselves dynamic entities.

Thus, the current study sought to identify socio-ecological determinants of bullying unique and peculiar to families whose adolescent children attended High schools in Gweru urban.

#### 1.3 Significance of the Study

Findings of the current study could assist school authorities, parents and intervention programme designers and implementers in coming up with interventions that specifically address the identified determinants of bullying. They might also instill an awareness of the determinants thus, enabling both parents and school authorities to detect and effect early intervention. The findings could enable intervention programme implementers to efficiently commit resources by only targeting the identified determinants. They might also enable intervention programme designers to come up with programmes that are effective as they are needs-analysis-based and research evidence-based. The findings could also be used as a basis for further research on bullying among High school adolescents.

#### 1.4 (De)Limitations

*Delimitations:* The study was conducted in 4 of Gweru urban High schools, which were regulated by the Ministry of education, sport, arts and culture. It only focused on the family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying among High school adolescents.

*Limitations:* Due to the negative and often subtle nature of their behavior, bullies are often difficult to identify (Olweus, 2004). For the current study, bullies were identified using questions adapted and modified from Rigby and Slee's (1993) scoring of the Bullying Prevalence Questionnaire (BPQ) and from Rigby's (1997) Revised Pro-Victim Scale (RPVS) (Rigby & Slee, 1993). Bullies answered questions while together with the rest of the other students and their questionnaires were only isolated later, after the questionnaires had been collected. It was hoped this could make the bullies give genuine responses.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey, which is an ex-post facto design. It enabled the researcher to identify the family-related socio-ecological determinants after they had already had an influence on the adolescents' bullying behavior and continued to do so. The survey also enabled coverage of a wide scope because a great deal of information was obtained. The design was premised in both the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. It was quantitative in that the bullies' questionnaire yielded quantitative data. The study was also qualitative in that data from teachers' structured interviews yielded themes on the family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying. The triangulation enabled the researcher to take advantage of different but complementary data using the 2 instruments.

## 2.2 Population and Sampling

The target population was comprised of Gweru urban High school adolescent bullies. However, by virtue of the nature of the problem behavior under study, the total number of bullies could not be specified. Gweru urban district is one of the administrative districts in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. It was chosen for its easy accessibility to the researcher. Of the 13 Gweru urban High schools, 6 were day-while 7 were day-boarding schools. Stratified random sampling was used to select 4 schools, 2 from each stratum. Stratification into day-and day-boarding schools ensured that each type of school was proportionately represented. On the other hand, random sampling provided an equal chance for every school in each stratum of being selected. Purposive sampling was then used to select Forms and classes on the basis of their being identified by their respective school Heads as having the largest number of bullies. One class was selected from each of the 4 selected schools, giving a total of 4 classes comprised of 149 students. It was from these classes that the 16 participating bullies were identified. Four class teachers, 1 male and 3 female, were consecutively sampled. The class teachers were considered important because their duties as class teachers placed them in strategic positions of being knowledgeable about the following aspects regarding their students': Residential areas; Socio-economic status, with respect to payment of fees and general provision of school items; And their family living arrangements, among other factors indicated by literature as influencing bullying.

## 2.3 Instruments

Students responded to a questionnaire comprised of close-ended questions. Section A was on the 149 students' demographic data. On the other hand, Section B was comprised of 20 items, 11 of which constituted the bully-scale, used to identify bullies, while the rest were filler items. Scoring of the items was interpreted as follows: Never = 1, rarely = 2, often = 3 and very often = 4. Students identified as bullies were those whose scores were between 33 and 44 on the named bully-scale items. Section C items of the questionnaire were meant only for the bullies though all the 149 students responded to them. The items were designed on the basis of potential family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying as guided by reviewed literature. Responses were on an ordinal rating scale for which strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, disagree = 3 and strongly disagree = 4.

Class teachers responded to structured but open-ended questions. The main thrust of the interview was to provide information that consolidated bullies' responses about family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying. It was also reasonable to interview class teachers as their duties appeared to make them be in constant touch with the goings-on among bully students in their respective classes. Each interview lasted about 25 minutes and was conducted in the teachers' respective offices. Responses were coded as the interviews proceeded.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire's Sections A and B was analysed using descriptive statistics. The frequency of the responses was computed into percentages. Section C data was subjected to Spearman's rho correlation coefficient computations of correlational values between variables. Thus, not only did the study identify the family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying, but correlational values also enabled it to show how the determinants interacted in their influence. On the other hand, qualitative data from interviews was analysed using thematic analysis and findings were presented according to emerging themes and patterns.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Bullies' Responses to Questionnaires

Section B of the questionnaire identified 16 (11% bullies out of the 149 selected students). However, some non-bully students indicated a number of bully elements just as some bullies also indicated a number of non-bully elements: Because the number of such students tended to trade off each other, their numbers were not added to either group of students. Students ticked in the boxes that most appropriately described their family climate. Table 1 is on descriptive statistics showing medians for the bullies' responses to questionnaire items on family-related determinants of bullying.

Table 1. Medians for bullies' responses about their family climate [N = 16]

Feature of family climate: My parents/guardians	Median values on the ordinal rating scale
1. Have uncordial/violent relationship	2 = agree
2. Have been financially stable in the past year	3 = disagree
3. Condone me fighting back	3 = disagree
4. Use severe physical punishment on me	2 = agree
5. Monitor my whereabouts and who I am with	4 = strongly disagree
6. Participate in my school activities	3 = disagree
7. Spend quality time with me	3 = disagree
8. Are easy to talk to about my problems	3 = disagree

As shown in Table 1, median values indicate bullies' responses about their family climates pertaining to their parents/guardians.

#### 1) Interpretation of Table 1 Data

About the role of the family system in determining bullying behavior, all except the 3<sup>rd</sup> item (parents/guardians condoning fighting back), seemed to promote bullying. The parents'/guardians' uncordial/violent relationships could have instilled in the bullies the idea that problems were resolved physically, through violence; Financial instability could have made bullies perceive their family lifestyles as unpredictable, a situation which could have been easily frustrating, resulting in them bullying others; Being severely punished could have made bullies see nothing wrong in treating others in the same manner; Lack of monitoring could have exposed bullies to bad company for lengthy periods; Not participating in adolescent children's school activities and not spending quality time with them could have made bullies think that their parents/guardians had more important things to attend to than them. Thus, bullying might have been a way of seeking attention at school since none was offered at home; Bullies could have had unresolved personal problems since they found their parents/guardians difficult to talk to. Such a scenario could have resulted in bullies displaying anti-social behaviors, such as bullying.

Table 2 shows Spearman's rho correlational values among family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying.

Table 2. Spearman's rho correlations [N = 16]

Q Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1.000	.576	-.877**	-.930**	.678**	.499*	.300	.080
2	.576*	1.000	-.592*	-.529	.393	.253	.059	-.220
3	-.877**	-.592*	1.000	.943**	-.656**	-.559*	-.096	-.009
4	-.930**	-.529*	.943*	1.000	-.609*	-.515*	-.097	.057
5	.678**	.393	-.656**	-.609*	1.000	.846**	.225	.305
6	.499*	.253	-.559*	-.515*	.846**	1.000	.143	.462
7	.300	.059	-.096	-.097	.225	.143	1.000	.392
8	.080	-.220	-.009	.057	.305	.462	.392	1.000

**NB:** Question items are numbered 1-8 as in table 1

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 2, values indicate variations of Spearman's rho correlations among family-related socio-ecological determinants of bullying.

#### 2) Interpretation of Table 2 Data

A number of variables were positively correlated to various extents. There was a very strong positive correlation between items 3 and 4, that is, parents/guardians condoning their adolescent children to fight back and the use of severe physical punishment on them. This could be because the 2 variables seemed to consolidate each other as the condoning was exemplified by the bullies being physically punished. Also, a strong positive correlation

existed between items 5 and 6, that is, parents/guardians not monitoring their adolescent children's whereabouts and whose company they were in, and not participating in their school activities. The 2 variables displayed neglectful parenting, which could have driven the adolescent children to seek attention by engaging in anti-social behaviors, such as bullying. Item 1, uncordial/violent relationships between parents/guardians had moderate positive correlations with items 2, 5 and 6 respectively, that is: Financial instability of parents/guardians in the past year, not monitoring adolescent children's whereabouts and whose company they were in, and not participating in their school activities. The bullies could have been frustrated by the financial instability, which fueled the parents'/guardians' uncordial relationships, from which the bullies could have learnt violence; Uncordial relationships could have meant that bullies' parents/guardians directed their energies towards resolving their issues at the expense of the well-fare of their adolescent children, who were likely to be in bad company for lengthy unquestioned periods of time; Uncordial relationships could also have made parents/guardians lose focus on the importance of supporting their adolescent children's school work. Lack of educational demands on the bullies possibly made them lose interest in school, fully knowing that there were no set/expected standards for them to meet. This could have resulted in unbecoming behaviors, including bullying.

### 3.2 Class Teachers' Responses to Structured Interviews

The 4 teachers' demographic data showed that they had all (100%) been with their respective classes for more than half a year and had previously taught and/or were currently teaching them in their various subject areas. This implied that the teachers knew their classes well enough to provide reliable information about the bullies' family-related behaviors. On how serious the problem of bullying was in their respective schools, all (100%) of the 4 teachers reported that the behavior warranted attention. However, they could not be accurate about the prevalence as the known/reported cases could only be a tip of the iceberg.

Regarding the role of the family system in determining bullying, the main theme that emerged was that malfunctioning family set-ups tended to promote bullying. Most bullies were reportedly not staying with their biological parents, some of who were deceased or were in the diaspora. Orphans who stayed with grandparents or were in child-headed families often struggled financially: This was reflected by late payment of fees and/or inadequate provision of school items. However, some bullies' families were said to be financially stable as cited by one class teacher:

*"In this school, students are not allowed to bring cellphones. A bully who once broke this rule incidentally had his phone ringing at assembly. On being identified as the culprit, we found the phone to be of the expensive type. He boasted that the school Head only wanted to confiscate it because he was jealousy of his phone bought for him by his parents in the UK. Material-wise, the boy lacked nothing."*

There were no known cases of bullies' parents/guardians who condoned their children to physically fight back when resolving social problems. However, quite a number were reportedly neglectful and/or uninvolved in their children's school life. One class teacher blamed this neglect on some organisations that paid fees for orphaned and vulnerable children (OVCs), some of who turned out to be bullies:

*"They pay fees for OVCs whose behavior and interest in school they do not bother to find out about. Unfortunately, some of the beneficiaries then look down upon their parents/guardians telling them that they could not have a say in their school work since they were not the ones paying their fees. As a result, the parents/guardians preferred not to involve themselves, a position which made them seem neglectful"*

Another teacher strongly commented that some parents/guardians were genuinely not bothered about their children's behavior and/or school work. She said:

*"A certain boy's father, who had been invited to the school pertaining to his child's bullying behavior, came into the schoolyard fuming. He complained that teachers were paid to do their duty of teaching and disciplining children. He was not to be called in to help as he was fully employed elsewhere and was not paid to do other people's work"*

## 4. Discussion

Findings were that bullies reported having parents/guardians who often fought and quarreled. This feature of family malfunctioning was also expressed by teachers. Bonds and Stoker (2009) support these findings with reference to a 2008 Australian study on adolescent bullies' parental characteristics. Findings were that 25% of the 254 sampled bullies typically came from families with low cohesion and little warmth, had fights and overall

poor family functioning.

Other findings were that bullies' families had been financially unstable in the past year. However, the class teachers reported that not all bullies were from families with financial problems: On one hand, some bullies were orphans who stayed with grandparents while others were in child-headed families, and both types of bullies struggled financially. On the other hand, some bullies were financially spoilt by their parents who worked in the diaspora. In concurrence with these findings is a 2010 Colombian study, which showed that 30% of the bullies came from families with socio-economic challenges (Manguvo et al., 2011).

Bullies also reported being severely punished by their parents/guardians. Bonds and Stoker (2009) concur with these findings by commenting that bullies' parents/guardians are generally physically abusive of their children. Further support for these findings is provided by Swearer et al. (2010), who refer to a 2009 Brisbane study of 759 school adolescents. Findings were that 26% of those who reported being victims at home turned out to be bullies at school.

Regarding whether or not parents/guardians participated in their bullying children's school activities, findings showed that they did not. However, this was against the background that class teachers reported their schools as offering several opportunities for them to participate. According to Bonds and Stoker (2009), such family set-ups are risky for bullying behavior since bullies know that their school behavioral problems never get to be discussed by school authorities and their parents/guardians.

Other findings showed that the bullies were not accorded quality time by their parents/guardians. This problem is explained by McNeely and Blanchard (2009), who say that in such cases, adolescents trade the influence of parents/guardians for the influence of peers, who have time to listen to them. Without the needed adult advice and attention, adolescents' search for identity can take a negative direction and result in antisocial behavior, such as bullying.

Bullies also reported that they found it difficult to talk to their parents/guardians about their problems. Spriggs et al. (2007) explain this by saying that this could be a result of cold, unsupportive and neglectful homes, all of which fuel bullying. In concurrence, Manguvo et al. (2011) comment that most middle-school bullies receive substantially little family social support. The authors add that at adolescence, individuals often strive for recognition, which they do not always get from home and consequently cling to their age-group, which is likely to have bad influence.

## 5. Conclusion

Family characteristics identified as socio-ecological determinants of bullying among High school adolescents were indicated by reports on the parents/guardians' uncordial relationships, their financial instability, their punitive and neglectful parenting, and not according their adolescent children quality time. These determinants seemed to influence bullying not only as individual entities but also in various interactive ways as reflected by a number of positive correlations of various values. Thus, the overall conclusion was that malfunctioning family systems played a role in influencing the bullying behavior of High school adolescents. However, the study could only have permitted the identification of potential or probable determinants rather than undisputed ones: This is explained by Campbell (2005), who refers to the mystery that though many High school adolescents are exposed to one or more such determinants of bullying, alarmingly only a fraction become bullies. Those who do not bully could have protective factors, such as having a positive relationship with a supportive adult. More so, others who are not exposed to such determinants turn out to be bullies. All this could imply the existence of some other confounding variables/risk factors, which were beyond the scope of the current study.

## 6. Recommendations

In view of the discussed findings, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

- Parents/guardians could be educated on the effects of malfunctioning family set-ups on the behavioral outcomes of their adolescent children. The education could include the cultivation of good family interpersonal relationships and effective parenting styles.
- Anti-bullying programme designers and implementers could target the identified determinants of High school bullying: They would also need to take a holistic approach by prioritising those determinants that were found to be highly correlated, bearing in mind that a change in one by necessity demands a change in the others related to it.
- The researcher recommends further research based on bullies' parents/guardians' perceptions of their family set-ups that could be promoting the bullying behavior. This is opposed to the reliance only on the bullies'



perceptions. Further research could also be conducted on the role of the bullies' individual characteristics, their peers, and their school and community climates in determining bullying among High school adolescents.

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