

The Bully and the Bullied: Paying Attention to Secondary Schools

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Abstract: Bullying in secondary schools is a global phenomenon, yet its existence and responses vary across cultural and regional contexts. This research paper explores the dynamics of bullying by synthesizing international literature with a specific focus on secondary schools in the Caribbean region, particularly Guyana. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative studies, the paper examines how socio-cultural factors, economic imbalance, and historical considerations influence bullying behaviours and victimization in education.

The study highlights the role of embedded social hierarchies, community violence, and resource-limited school environments in shaping bullying patterns. Furthermore, it investigates the psychological, academic, and social impacts on both victims and perpetrators within Guyanese schools. Comparative analysis with international literature emphasises the importance of culturally customised anti-bullying frameworks rather than adopting generalized approaches.

The findings advocate for increased investment in teacher training, community engagement, and mental health resources to address bullying effectively. Additionally, the paper emphasizes the need for collaborative regional efforts within the Caribbean to share best practices and implement evidence-based interventions. Concentrating on the experiences of Guyanese students within the global discourse on bullying, this research contributes to a more subtle understanding of how to cultivate safe and equitable educational environments in culturally diverse settings.

Keywords: Bully, Bullying, Bullied, Education, Students, Caribbean Regions, Guyana

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I. INTRODUCTION

School-age bullying is a crucial issue that continues to challenge societies throughout the world. Results from recent international studies have indicated that school-age bullying remains a persistent problem in many countries. According to Abdirahman et al (2012) “about one-third of middle school children worldwide (roughly ages 13 to 15 years) report having been the victim of a bully.” While the news about violence in some schools by students and outsiders has also captured people’s attention, physical protection is only one aspect of school safety. Schools should be free from brutality of any type, including bullying, and these studies have shown that not all students feel equally protected and respected at school. Bullying in schools has emotional and psychological consequences that confound the most earnest attempts to teach and learn. This, of course, defeats the most foundational purpose of schools.

The word bullying, while universally recognized and generally understood, is used in a variety of ways. Bullying may range from innocent youthful prankishness to sexual harassment to racial and religious malevolence. Therefore, it is essential to identify exactly what type of aggression is being talked about, as different types of behaviour that occur in schools need to be addressed differently. During the 1980s, the concept of bullying in schools changed so that it was no longer associated with the behaviours of males in playgrounds but included undesirable and harmful actions of both males and females. It was initially believed that the gender of the bully and the victim was the only distinction between boys and girls, but it became clear that there are more differences between the intent and consequence of the aggression that occurs during bullying.

➤ *Background and Significance*

Newspapers and media worldwide have been reporting an increase in bullying within schools over the past two decades. Researchers from several areas of interest, including criminology, public health, and anthropology, are delving deeper into this subject. Smith & Kilpatrick (2022) state “the phenomenon [bullying] has warranted research attention in developed societies and is shown to have serious short- and long-term implications for individuals, families, and society as a whole.” Despite these growing concerns related to children's health and social function, few studies examine bullying in the Caribbean, particularly primary school bullying experiences.

Thus, the rationale for this research is to begin to close the research/analysis gap within the Caribbean by, first, providing an extensive national identification of the main types of school violence—bullied, bully, bully-victims, and perpetrators of school violence—primarily physical, verbal, and bullying omission using a large sample of Guyanese respondents who attended public primary and secondary schools during the academic school years of 2013 to 2023. Second, this research explores some school, sociodemographic, and peer friendship characteristics of those participants that were identified as primary school-age victims or arrested development cases. This study makes three main contributions to the literature. First, school research, particularly those in the Caribbean that use a less general measure, has tended to focus on secondary students. Second, the exploratory analysis for Guyana is important to assist with effectively targeting and addressing significant transition/withdrawal concerns. Third, it augments one of the few existing databases, which include measures from multiple respondent groups, to analyse the health/social function presence of primary and secondary school-age bullied, bully, bully-victims, and other deviant individuals including those of non-participating tourism areas. The data does not account for a significant section of the country. However, the findings are still informative and useful. Results documenting that many differences exist by gender are particularly informative to health officials attempting to manage the disparities from a preventive management platform.

➤ *Purpose of the Study*

A fundamental purpose of the study is to enhance our understanding of bullying behaviour in the Guyanese region and its relation to the rest of the world. The growing concern and data from the rest of the world lead to the question of whether Guyana has any singular related interpretations. Our methodology will investigate reasons for bullying behaviour in Guyana. It is our belief that given the distinct sociocultural structure present in Guyana, the reasons for such behaviour, while similar to those elucidated in the United States, may have a quirky originality. We first discuss the sociocultural perspective on bullying, then we review the methodological approach adopted in the light of existing research.

The paper's second purpose centres on introducing the audience to the interesting findings from global statistics, investigating physical injury as an outcome of physically bullied behaviour for each of the ten administrative regions, for students between 13 and 15 years of age. These statistics will be compared with those concerned with numerous types of illicit activity found during these developmental years. As the main body of research results is widely associated with earlier and ongoing studies of physical bullying, we shall use the limited paper space to summarize the implications of these results. We will assume that the reader is familiar with the predominant findings related to bullying and that the primary effects—lower academic achievement, psychological distress, criminal activity, higher rates of substance abuse, and later ability to maintain intimate relationships—are shared characteristics in Guyana.

➤ *Scope and Limitations*

Since this paper involves an analysis of statistical data, it is important to place certain limitations on the findings that result from the analysis. This paper uses global data to make statistical inferences about Guyana. However, global data does not always specify individual countries. For example, while there have been several crime victimization studies done in the Caribbean, the focus is normally on a single Caribbean country or on the Caribbean subregion. Apart from newspaper clippings or social media pages, this is not the case in Guyana. Although one hears innumerable stories about bullying in schools from credible sources, these remain largely anecdotal. In Guyana, no known and published research of significance has been done on bullying or its consequences. Certainly, there has been no serious work done examining any possible connection between bullying in schools and the astronomical self-harm and suicide rate in Guyana. Additionally, it would be interesting to have a formal study done to explore the bullying of teachers within and without the school environ.

Regionally, some studies do not measure bullying, have different measuring tools, or no measures at all that are useful from a comparative study perspective. Measurement is a very important variable in relation to generating suitable statistics. Most countries in the global dataset are either high-income European countries, North American, or Middle Eastern countries. These subgroups of higher-income countries often have higher levels of social spending, which translate into data generated from school surveys. Generally, developing countries do not allocate large public resources to this type of social endeavour. Even if data is generated, the data is often not made readily available for comparative research.

Another important limitation is the limitation of meta-analysis. A meta-analysis is the combining of statistical data from different studies that examine the same problem. This technique provides a way to test the robustness of a hypothesis. For example, fewer than fifteen percent of statistical analyses remained significant after a methodological

assessment. Data on the determinants of interpersonal aggression generally becomes suspect when spurious results persist in the econometric models. However, a meta-analysis of school bullying data is still in its infancy. Research from the field of clinical psychology indicates that social indicators that might be related to bullying activity are difficult to measure on a hard scale. Meanwhile, the rise of the practice of meta-analyses may have led some criminologists too far astray. Chen et al (2024) reports that “social indicators may pose significant influence on bullying victimization. However, the association between social poverty and bullying victimisation has not been exclusively discussed.” The reliability of meta-analytic results ultimately depends on the reliability of individual estimates, on the quality of the study reports, and ultimately, the truthfulness of the non-representative human sample.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying is a global issue. The negative impact of bullying is well documented and globally recognized. Past research points out that bullying exists in the Caribbean region. In addition, over the years, research on bullying in the Caribbean region has been conducted. These researchers discovered that the prevalence of bullying in the Caribbean region was relatively high. One study was based in Saint Kitts, while another examined the prevalence of bullying among adolescent students in Trinidad and Tobago. A comparative analysis of the prevalence of bullying in Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was also provided. Unfortunately, but noteworthy, there is no such available statistics for Guyana.

Bullying consists of repeated harmful behaviours between peers, typically involving an imbalance of power. A review by Arseneault et al. (2010) examined the mental health impacts of bullying on children and adolescents, revealing a strong link between bullying and serious mental health issues, such as self-harm and suicidal tendencies. The study also found that the negative effects of bullying can last into late adolescence, independently contributing to mental health challenges. Kallmen & Hallgren (2021) state “bullying was shown to have detrimental effects that persist into late adolescence.”

Since the early 1990s, schools have evolved into environments not only focused on learning but also marked by instances of harassment and peer victimization (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011). Bullying has emerged as a significant social issue, with research indicating that one in three individuals experiences some form of bullying—whether physical, verbal, or social (Misawa, 2010). The impacts of bullying extend beyond the immediate victims, affecting both individuals and perpetrators and potentially leading to short- and long-term consequences (Aleem, 2016). Victims often experience direct and indirect effects that can hinder their

academic performance (Holt, Finkelhor, & Kantor, 2007). Nishina, Juvonen, and Witkow (2005) highlight that school harassment and peer victimization contribute to reduced classroom participation and overall school engagement, negatively influencing academic success. It may not be idle to assume that these would inevitably impact familial relationships.

Schools are crucial settings for student growth and development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). When students receive support from their teachers, they tend to feel a greater sense of belonging, become more engaged, exhibit fewer behavioural issues, and achieve better academically (Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, & Li, 2000). In contrast, toxic school environments can detrimentally impact students' academic outcomes. Academic success is vital globally, prompting numerous studies on the physical factors that influence educational performance (Steinmayr, Crede, McElvany, & Wirthwein, 2016). External factors, such as theft and vandalism, as well as behavioural problems, can negatively affect students' academic achievement. Additionally, internal factors, including symptoms of depression and anxiety, also have harmful effects on academic performance (Tremblay et al., 2012).

Bullying and peer victimization have both direct and indirect effects on victims, often resulting in poor academic performance (Holt, Finkelhor, & Kantor, 2007). The primary aim of education is to achieve high academic standards, and when those standards are not met, the learning process becomes ineffective. Therefore, it is crucial to implement various strategies to promote academic success; and if bullying is a hindrance to academic development, then it would be foolhardy to turn a blind eye. Inability or unwillingness to enact research is to turn a blind eye to a serious problem inhibiting educational development on a national scale.

Academic achievement reflects an individual's performance within the educational setting, encompassing the goals established in schools, colleges, and universities (Steinmayr et al., 2016). Motivation plays a vital role in determining academic outcomes (Effie, 2005). For example, students who lack motivation and find themselves in intimidating environments are likely to experience lower academic achievement (Dweck, 2007).

In 2015, the results of a survey for the Caribbean were compiled. This document provides insight into the prevalence of bullying. Unfortunately, results such as those described either cannot be found or are hidden in the report. Overall, the problem is that a gap exists in our current understanding of the prevalence of bullying in Guyana. The prevalence of bullying among Caribbean students is underestimated or hidden behind other considerations. As a result, the region is unlikely to consider the implementation of effective measures necessary

to bridge this gap and benefit the region. It is against this background that the current exploratory studies were conducted.

Many researchers regard bullying as a global issue. The Kandersteg Declaration against Bullying in Children and Youth (2007) in Switzerland estimates that 200 million children and adolescents face peer abuse. There were some thirty scholars represented from twelve countries. Significantly, no nation from the Caribbean, Latin America, South America, or Africa was represented.

In the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) 2005/06 Survey, which involved 202,056 children from about 40 countries, 12.6% reported being victimized frequently, while 10.7% admitted to bullying others, and 3.6% identified as both victims and perpetrators (cited by the Kandersteg Declaration). Although bullying is widespread among youth, prevalence rates vary significantly across countries, influenced by cultural factors (Currie et al., 2012). Victimization and perpetration are more common among boys, who typically engage in physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, whereas girls are more likely to participate in relational bullying (Currie et al., 2012).

Compared to global studies on bullying in schools, there is a significant lack of research focused on the issue in Guyana. While international efforts have produced comprehensive data and insights into the prevalence and impact of bullying, the understanding of this phenomenon in Guyanese schools remains limited and somewhat superficial. As a result, official and academic attention to bullying in Guyana is practically non-existent, lacking the depth and urgency seen in other countries. The perspective and degree of import of the matter can be seen in an article published in a Guyanese newspaper, *Guyana Times* (2016): “Generally they [bullies] target people because they are jealous, as sad as that may seem. Both young and old bullies compare themselves to you and if you are smart and they have a harder time learning, they lash out. They may be frustrated because your home life seems to be going well and theirs are not. You may be more skilful or well liked at work and they resent that. When their lives are unsatisfactory and they are unable to deal with it, they look for someone to be their punching bag. They lack control over their own lives and so they console themselves with having the control over someone’s emotions and that makes them happy, for a while.” This pathetically superficial statement itself should clearly explain why no noteworthy work has been done in Guyana.

In the Guyanese context bullying is clearly at a peak of severity: students are physically injured, hospitalized, and in several cases result in death. An article published in *Guyana Chronicle* (2017) highlights some of these cases: “The sudden death of 10-year-old Roseann Akeila Harris who was kicked to her abdomen allegedly by a classmate recently has once again brought to the fore how serious the issue of bullying is in schools [in Guyana] ... We have seen videos on social media of physical fights between students with their fellow classmates cheering them on and only last month, a 14-year-old student of Lusignan Secondary School, East Coast Demerara (ECD) was stabbed in the neck by another female student during a fight in proximity of the Beterverwagting (BV) Police Station.”

➤ Definition and Types of Bullying

Varying definitions of bullying exist across the literature. Gladden et al. (2014) present a uniform definition of bullying “bullying is any unwanted aggressive behaviour(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated.” Bullying is defined as a type of violence, intentional aggression, or harm inflicted on an individual or group of individuals by a person or people in different situations and settings. Statistics and studies on bullying appear to agree that repeated exposure to harmful actions creates a vulnerability pattern not only in the victim but also in the individual aggressor. Bullying includes several different types of private and public offenses, such as physical hitting or punching, kicking, stealing, including acts of extortion, verbal harassment, teasing, taunting, name-calling, making threats, and social aggression, which involves hurting someone’s reputation or relationships, destroying a peer’s relationship or social status, and humiliating someone in public.

Frequently, what encloses a group of children into a circle around the victim is the persistence of the act of bullying. Most definitions of bullying include some or all these types of acts, and as a rule, aggressive behaviours are characterized as repetitive actions. Bullying also includes destructive activities, as well as the perpetration of harmful activities with the intention to injure, such as behaviours of exploitation, cavilling, sarcasm, or rumour-spreading. Finally, bullying is about the misuse of power, exhibiting intense aggression, the duration of which will generally lead to the necessity for discipline.

To examine and analyse this dilemma, it is important to understand the characteristics of bullies. Rivers & Smith (1994) presented the following observation on such characteristics:

Table 1 Rivers & Smith (1994) Presented

Types	Typical characteristics	Examples
Traditional bullying	Direct physical (overt physical aggression or assaults)	Pushing, punching, and kicking
	Direct verbal (overt verbal attacks that are highly personal)	Teasing, taunting, or threatening behaviour directed at the victim's appearance, abilities, family, culture, race, or religion
	Indirect and emotional (covert behaviour that damages peer relationships, self-esteem, or social status)	Passing nasty notes, offensive graffiti, defacing or damaging personal property, exclusion, ostracism, and shaming
Sexual bullying	Sexually bothering another person (may also be referred to as 'sexual harassment')	Inappropriate and unwanted touching, using sexualised language and pressurising another to act promiscuously
Cyberbullying	Aggressive behaviour or emotional manipulation delivered through digital technology, specifically mobile phones, the internet, and social media	Spreading false stories about a victim online, posting digital media featuring a victim online without permission, excluding a victim from participation in an online space

The table outlines various forms of bullying, including traditional, sexual, and cyberbullying, each with distinct characteristics. Traditional bullying can manifest itself as overt physical aggression, direct verbal attacks targeting personal attributes, or covert emotional behaviours aimed at damaging relationships and self-esteem. Sexual bullying, often referred to as sexual harassment, involves inappropriate and unwanted sexual behaviours, while cyberbullying takes place through digital platforms, involving actions like spreading false information or excluding someone from online spaces. Each type represents different ways in which individuals can be targeted, whether physically, emotionally, or digitally.

➤ Theoretical Frameworks

The Theoretical Framework is a model to help display the linkages with other relevant work. In this chapter, several theoretical arguments that have been advanced to communicate with the interviewer at both an interpretive and quantitative level are considered. They are not attempting to test these theories; instead, they try to follow the lead of bullying research in general to suggest some broad connections with different areas of the literature. The theories considered in this chapter appear to be manifest both empirically and in the revealed preferences of the community and government regarding agreed-upon constructs that may appeal to individual-level choice.

Community members have bearers: people themselves, both young and old, who experience bullying daily. The choices these people make about their behaviour and other features, such as victims and perpetrators, bear on the various issues concerning the community's role in addressing these behaviours. It is important for the models to provide insights into the underlying choices that lie behind the observed bullying. The goal of the qualitative stage of the research is to reach a state of saturation. Whether the explanatory theories were generated through induction, deduction, or a combination

of the two, these theories should be rich enough to reflect the complexities of reality.

➤ Previous Studies on Bullying in the Caribbean Region

Previous research has been conducted in the Caribbean in youth development, violence prevention, and mental health in several individual territories. This research was not designed specifically to examine either bullying perpetration or victimization. The studies have been completed in jurisdictions including Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Suriname, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, the Bahamas, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Grenada. The research methodology has included self-report questionnaires and structured interviews, conducted in schools, the wider community, and the prison system.

Only one study specifically investigated bullying in the Jamaican context, and it did not address the phenomena from a youth perspective, offering an instance of adult xenophobia as an example instead. The study sought to measure nationality prejudice among Jamaican adults who were students and non-students from different regions across the island using a social distance scale. Most respondents expressed a sense of prejudice against all nationalities, except for Eurasians. Another research project on child-rearing beliefs among inner-city Jamaican mothers found that a preference was expressed for a more authoritarian, choleric, and neglectful parent-training model which, if operationalized, may place youth at risk for engaging in and being victimized by bullying. Religious and cultural country-specific research has also been conducted.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this current research, the method of documentary analysis is employed to investigate the topic of bullying in Guyana. Unlike other research on this matter, which mostly utilizes surveys to collect data, especially from victims, this approach offers a different perspective – that in which documentary analysis is utilized to study the reports produced by various health surveys, and to examine these reports and use other sources to produce an understanding of the concepts represented in these narratives. This method was well suited to the objective of this research, which, as indicated in the previous section, is to explore the ways in which the problem of bullying is disclosed in this region through misrepresented and underrepresented data.

There are limitations to documentary analysis. Firstly, only a limited data set exists at any given time. High-quality data on bullying is difficult to obtain, primarily because it is considered a violation of human rights, private, and unofficial, and many researchers also ignore safety violations. Secondly, the sources of data differ in time, space, objectives, findings, and methodologies. Thirdly, violence is a social process, and researchers arrive at their findings from different sociocultural perspectives rather than from a mechanistic basis, although they do utilize statistics in their studies. Consequently, the present chapter is aware of the need for social interpretation and the multi-methodological strategy. Indeed, this chapter has employed a critical research method to consider the socio-political consequences of bullying statistics and has reviewed prior research on related topics, such as harassment and criminal acts, to do so. However, these sources are limited in number; moreover, the discrepancies between the sources and the data sets do not facilitate further comparisons.

➤ *Data Sources and Collection*

Secondary data were used in this study. The study used globally accessible sources in relation to data collection on the Caribbean subregion.

First, the focus was on 'in-school' violence or bullying and data on adolescents' participation, questions, and indicators regarding adolescents between 11 and 15 years of age from the Caribbean region. The data mainly included public institutions that provide instruction within various locations and settings designed to provide learning experiences. Data collection was exclusively for students' (adolescent) experiences in secondary educational institutions with a focus on occurrences while at school, traveling to and from school, and other events such as school trips. Therefore, only students enrolled in secondary educational institutions, in and out of school activities, and adolescents who had been bullied—being made to feel bad or being hurt—during their lifetime were queried. Bullying indicators such as questions on bullying and childhood experiences of violence have been used in several population-based surveys. These

questionnaires were administered via the self-report model through questionnaires. In this respect, as secondary data were used, the research did not involve adolescents directly.

➤ *Data Analysis Techniques*

This research took global data from international online sources, yet the research was primarily conducted to investigate Guyana, and it only focused on the region's prevalence rate for the ultimately analysed time frame. The data was aggregated accordingly and subsequently compared against any means. Recent prevalence data from islands not recorded in the global area are known; therefore, where data was available from other reputable sources, the data was also captured. Data on bullying was of interest for the student population, but we acknowledge that different aspects of the bullying phenomenon are looked at, including the varied roles that the student can take on in the literature.

Data analysis involved data aggregation on different mechanisms both locally and globally to ensure a large representative sample. It also involved mainly qualitative activities, including some quality assurance to determine what prompted the high rates in response to bullying that were experienced. Such data can provide important clues to national policy for education improvement and future development direction. It also involved a query of the visually displayed global information's statistical properties of any capture and if each is similar in some measure. A vast volume of intergroup bullying manifestations is normally found within these main types, but the main exists. Also, the word bullying has been expanded to incorporate variations that are included in the definition of the phenomenon. However, despite a vast amount of data encompassing these newer variations, prevalence is still used globally, ignoring half of the worldwide existence of bullying data simply because "bullying without power" is a problem in some regions in the country.

IV. GLOBAL STATISTICS ON BULLYING

This section presents findings across regions of Guyana with respect to bullying. The data are consistent insofar as they use definitions of bullying as unwanted aggressive behaviour while remaining mindful of not establishing a mutually exclusive relationship between being a bully and being a victim. Bullying is a multiple and overlapping behaviour. In their respective reports on bullying issues, both institutions acknowledge the difficulties of drawing internationally comparable results. Country-level data range from as low as 0% to close to 30%. However, it is essential to note that it is inappropriate to interpret this data as 30% of the students in a country engaged in bullying at any given time. Bullying is not a one-time event but is normally a repetitive behaviour encompassing all aspects of aggression. At any given moment in time, it is a subset of the student population who are the perpetrators of this kind of activity. It follows then that it is legitimate for more than one student to be identified

as a bully at the same time. Under these circumstances, averages across countries are not meaningful. Every individual is unmistakably unique, even when they look identical to others and vice versa. The same could be said for others. To avoid the distortions introduced by including too many zeros, median data are included in the analysis. Furthermore, it is also recognized that self-report data are not always the most reliable.

➤ *Overview of Global Trends in Bullying*

Bullying, a global anguish that is rarely expressed and little understood, exists in many environments. There are economic reasons for concern about bullying and its impact on people and institutions, but the primary reason for organizing a study on bullying is to add to our understanding of this complicated and distressing behaviour. This study attempts to explain the social context of bullying in schools and the many forms bullying takes. It also seeks to describe the life and culture within these institutions, to illuminate the roots of gender-based behaviours, and to create an organized body of information that can be studied in serious ways. The study further seeks to address and reduce, if not eliminate, behaviours that culminate in bullying.

This article presents work to quantitatively define the major contributing variables involved in school bullying, comparing data from various studies to survey research on this topic. The survey research is based on research that has been conducted in various nations. Because of the purpose and design of each study, no single study provides all the variables that illuminate the actions taking place within these educational sites. However, if a variable can be defined in a similar format, access to a wide array of data on a single topic makes it bigger and more important. Bullying in a school is a multi-variable topic in practice. Therefore, the more definitions of a particular characteristic of schools encompassed, the more comprehensive the explanation and understanding.

According to UNESCO (2019) nearly one in three students (32%) has experienced bullying by their peers at school at least once in the past month. In most regions outside of Europe and North America, physical bullying is the most prevalent, followed by sexual bullying. However, in Europe and North America, psychological bullying is the most common form. Cyberbullying impacts as many as one in ten children globally. Over one-third of students (36%) have been involved in a physical altercation with another student, and almost one in three (32.4%) has been physically attacked at least once in the past year. While data on sexual violence by

peers is limited, evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that boys are more likely to be victimized by a schoolmate than a teacher.

Although teacher-inflicted physical violence is generally uncommon worldwide, in some countries, children report significant levels of physical violence from their teachers. Corporal punishment, a form of physical violence, remains legal in schools across 68 countries and is frequently practiced in many of them.

➤ *Key Findings from International Surveys*

The Global School-Based Student Health Survey has been developed to monitor students' non-communicable disease-related risk behaviours. An unfortunate global feature is the level of reported physical fighting and bullying, particularly among students being bullied in a school classroom. In the Caribbean, Jamaica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines completed the survey in 2003 and 2002, respectively. This paper seeks to describe the central aspects of bullying in the West Indies, using these findings as a basis for the design of a survey that can be administered within the adolescent context, and appeals for such a region-wide survey to be administered within the educational context.

Bullying in the Caribbean appears to be widespread. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the country with the highest reported rate of physical fighting in this report. About 32% of the general school population in St. Vincent and the Grenadines reported that they had been in a physical fight at least once in the past 12 months. In 2003-2004, 15% of 13–15-year-olds had been in a physical fight at least once. St. Vincent and the Grenadines had a school drop-out rate of 30% within a year during the same period. Yet, 54% of students in St. Vincent and the Grenadines reported that at least one parent "rarely" or "never" asked about the school that their children were attending.

Two major international surveys, the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study, collected data from 144 countries and regions worldwide. These surveys reveal key factors that significantly influence the type, frequency, and severity of bullying experienced by children and adolescents. According to the findings from a UNESCO (2019) report, children who are perceived as 'different' in any way are more likely to become victims of bullying. These factors, summarized in table 2, highlight the global risk patterns associated with victimization in schools.

Table 2 Highlight the Global Risk Patterns Associated with Victimization in Schools

Influencing factor	Description
Sex differences	Globally, girls and boys are equally likely to experience bullying.
	Boys are more likely to experience direct physical bullying; girls are more likely to experience direct verbal and indirect bullying.
	Boys are more likely to be perpetrators of direct physical bullying, while girls are more likely to be perpetrators of indirect and emotional bullying.
	Girls are more likely than boys to experience bullying based on physical appearance.
	Globally, there are no major differences in the extent to which girls and boys experience sexual bullying, but there are regional differences.
	Girls are more likely than boys to be cyberbullied via digital messages, but there is less discrepancy between the sexes in the prevalence of cyberbullying via digital pictures.
Age differences	As children grow older, they are less likely to experience bullying by peers.
	Age differences are less pronounced for bullying perpetration.
	Older children may be more exposed to cyberbullying.
Not conforming to gender norms	Children viewed as gender non-conforming are at higher risk of bullying.
Physical appearance	Physical appearance is the most frequent reason for bullying.
	Body dissatisfaction and being overweight are associated with bullying.
Physical and learning disability	Physical and learning disability is associated with increased risk of being bullied.
Race, nationality, or colour	Bullying based on race, nationality or colour is the second most frequent reason for bullying reported by children.
Religion	Compared with other factors, religion is mentioned by far fewer children as a reason for being bullied.
Socioeconomic status	Socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with increased risk of being bullied.
	A similar relationship is seen between self-perceived social status and cyberbullying.
Migration status	Immigrant children are more likely to be bullied than their native-born peers.
School environment	A positive school environment reduces bullying.
Educational attainment	Overall, educational attainment is a protective factor against being bullied.
Peer and family support	Family support and communication can be an important protective factor.

V. COMPARISON OF CARIBBEAN DATA WITH GLOBAL AVERAGES

The Caribbean does not currently have a regional advocacy centre dedicated to awareness and prevention of bullying. Though some countries and territories have integrated anti-bullying campaigns into their health and wellness programs, there is still a gap between the percentage of Caribbean youth reporting exposure to various acts of bullying and Caribbean discipline practices.

We have heard the testimonials of youths who have engaged in bullying actions and its victims. There has been a call from educators for better discipline practices in Caribbean schools. Positive discipline practices have been proven to

lower bullying rates, yet our Caribbean region has bullying rates higher than the global average in just about every category. We do not have recent timelines to evaluate changes happening to these very high rates and the effectiveness of current disciplinary practices. We must also not exclude the unreported acts of bullying from the picture. In the Caribbean, children are expected to follow the rules and do as they are told while leaving critical thinking and evidence-based advocacy in the shadows. Bullying in the Caribbean needs to be taken seriously as a worsening social ailment which will inevitably confound any attempt at socio-economic and educational development.

➤ *Factors Contributing to Bullying in the Caribbean*

The Caribbean region consists of many different cultures and languages and regional nations are socioeconomically diverse. At a stage of development of its educational systems where other priorities such as chronic truancy, high dropout rates, poor quality in learning resources, and heavy reliance on traditional teaching methods are more predominant, bullying may not be seen as a priority. Bullying often goes unreported in the Caribbean, and hence the depth and intensity of this problem is often not fully recognized. One of the possible reasons for its low profile is the lack of significant violence often associated with school. The illusory peaceful environment of a school may send a false message that bullying is unimportant when, in fact, it may be relevant in disrupting an atmosphere conducive to teacher and student well-being. Common problems of the region include high rates of unemployment, poverty, and HIV/AIDS prevalence, and low measurable human and financial resources. While many of these factors are social and financial and are endemic, it is important that the physical school environment is safe and secure. The large number of dropouts reveals bullying as a significant challenge facing Caribbean schools. Of particular importance are the high numbers of primary school dropouts. This suggests that bullying is not a problem confined to a particular school type and that it must be addressed at an early stage in the child's schooling to have the most significant impact. The questionnaire evidence thus fills an important gap in the existing regional research that focuses only on perceptions but also on actual situational factors.

VI. IMPACT OF BULLYING ON CARIBBEAN YOUTH

As young victims are usually ill-equipped with the means to deal with the loss of self-esteem, rejection, isolation, and exposure, they can become withdrawn and develop a low sense of worth, manifest sadness and depression, and show dislike for school. As a result, they may absent themselves or run away from school. In addition, the inability to defend themselves and a fear of school may result in nightmares and sleep disorders. The experience can also negatively affect progress in school, contributing to lower performance and absenteeism, up to and including dropping out of school. Young victims were found to be absent from school at least 8 days per month, young witnesses 3 days, and young perpetrators 6 days in the three months preceding the research. Furthermore, a consequent lack of interest in pursuing an education may also be evident, subsequently limiting career paths and future life choices.

Reports suggest that major negative effects of bullying in schools include the impairment of a peaceful and safe atmosphere for teaching and learning as well as for morale. Some teachers and administrators may feel powerless to minimize or halt bullying or may be unwilling to address difficult issues and support problem-solving dialogues.

Extensive bullying may also symbolize deeper institutional pathology and resentment of existing administrative and conflict management strategies. These beliefs may drive teachers and administrators' reluctance to address problematic behaviours, as well as the willingness of certain staff members to cheerfully ignore their existence. Although a minority of teachers may attempt to set a different standard and approach bullying as a legitimate issue for intervention, they may be at collateral marginal risk.

➤ *Psychological Effects*

Bullying is psychologically damaging and therefore can trigger the onset of anxiety and depression with often severe consequences, including mental breakdown, self-defeating behaviour, and psychological illness. This stress is experienced across the board when it comes to bullying, though the level of intensity may vary, with some feeling the effects in a more pronounced manner than others. Labels such as "weak," "coward," and even "nutcase" accompany bullying, and does nothing but harm to children's self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence. Indeed, to regain some degree of self-worth, the bullied becomes the bully to those perceived as weaker. Bullying produces a climate of fear for the person affected, and this fear can lead to people feeling vulnerable and reluctant to carry out usual day-to-day activities.

Children in abusive environments frequently act defensively, which peers, teachers, and other persons in positions of authority may perceive as "bad behaviour." This may lead to not only irrational punishment but may also be featured as justification for peers or others exercising further bullying activities. Defensive behaviour, perhaps in the form of violence, can become the expected behaviour on a constant basis, as the stance taken is one of defiance to avoid being further victimized. Cowardly acts may, however, suddenly reach a breaking point, and the students in their minds may plan revenge on their mentors. This behaviour can torment the victim and can be the demise of almost any classroom teacher's efforts and children's own learning opportunities.

➤ *Social Consequences*

Being bullied is known to have various short and long-term social consequences. At the very least, it impacts the way the victim interacts with peers and family members; therefore, it is common for victims to become more reclusive, more introverted, and to withdraw from social activities. They may avoid people with whom they were once close, feeling embarrassed or ashamed about the situation they are in. They may even appear frightened or withdrawn. The victim may find it difficult to interact with peers, appear lonely and unsociable, withdraw from activities altogether, and be reticent about discussing what is wrong. Over time, the victim is left with a reduced capacity for interaction with peers and significant family members.

This change in social or community behaviour is due to the feelings that the victims experience. The resulting emotions may manifest themselves in brooding, feelings of inferiority and self-abasement, shame, and hurt when playing. The victims experience a loss of pride, frustration, impotence, anguish, and other related emotional problems when confronted with their bullies, especially on a daily basis. Such emotional problems not only lead to the victim's withdrawal from social activities but may also result in self-harm and suicide.

➤ *Educational Implications*

In this article, we document the prevalence of bullying in the region and examine the factors associated with becoming a bully victim among Trinidad and Tobago high school students. The results of the T & T Study support the conclusion that girls are more likely to be victimized than boys and that bullies have high risks of fighting, skipping school, and carrying weapons. For bully-victims, the risk increases dramatically. To a lesser extent, bullying involvement also generates an additional risk of smoking and substance abuse. After trying to stop bullying, our findings support that the classroom is the most appropriate environment in which to first attempt to stop bullying.

However, bullying is not only a free-time or break-time issue. Schools where teachers are constantly dealing with disruptive behaviour within and outside the classroom are more likely to develop a hostile academic and social environment, which leaves students vulnerable to bullying behaviours even in the classroom. Therefore, comprehensive and well-thought-through policies are essential to address the increasing disorder indicators in a comprehensive school-wide manner, rather than just taking sporadic action against bullying, policies. Policies and activities for reducing bullying can be sustained through the administrative structure and clear guidelines to teachers, counsellors, and social workers.

VII. INTERVENTIONS AND STRATEGIES

In conducting research on the most effective and evidence-based bully prevention and intervention programs, we found four key factors to consider in evaluating the programs:

- Content, i.e., what are these programs meant to achieve
- Method, i.e., how do they work
- Target, i.e., for whom were they developed
- Focus, i.e., type and severity of bullying addressed

Additionally, a program of intervention is more likely to be effective if it is comprehensive and deals with the various aspects of bullying, as well as paying attention to the roles of the other members of the school and community. Planning and Designing Interventions for Bullying provides guidance to schools on how they can establish or improve their anti-bullying policy and program. This guide also suggests other

resources available for conducting research on bullying in schools.

- **Short-Term Strategies** - Short-term strategies refer to interventions that may be only temporary but are helpful in managing bullying behaviour. Such strategies may involve:
 - Increasing the level of supervision and the presence of adults at times when the children are likely to be on their own.
 - Contacting the parents of the bully and victim.

➤ *Preventive Measures*

Preventing bullying must be a priority of every school, regardless of whether bullying is known to be an issue in that school. Bullying is immoral and damages the recipients. The negative consequences of bullying are not confined to individual children but can also affect other children, families, teachers, and the school. Over the past decade, there has been interest in initiatives to combat or respond to bullying in schools. It is reasonable to assume that the more recent attention to bullying stems from the higher awareness about detrimental consequences, as well as the increase in accessible media that may be broadcasting or reporting on negative repercussions of bullying to the public.

Over the past 10 years, there has been a vast amount of literature on suggested school-based prevention and coping strategies. In the United States, research on anti-bullying programs has led to national and state programs with designated funds and alliances. These resources do not only provide information on the negative consequences of bullying but also highlight the importance of programs and legislative efforts to combat bullying. Other countries, including those in the Caribbean region, have launched similar programs and campaigns to combat, reduce, or manage violence and bullying in schools and beyond. Evidently, this is not the case in Guyana; there is no such campaign or program save for the presence of school councillors who are not trained to handle the issue of bullying. This neglect will have predictably devastating consequences.

➤ *Support and Counselling Programs*

If prevention and early intervention efforts fail, children who are bullied or engage in bullying behaviour should be identified and referred to relevant school-based support programs or possibly external support organizations. Support or counselling programs should ideally seek to address the immediate negative consequences of bullying behaviour and to equip both the victim and the perpetrator with lifelong coping skills. A systematic review of effectiveness research has identified a range of school-based programs that effectively reduce the risk of bullying behaviour in the first place, including aspects of the school environment such as improved supervision on the playground, as well as direct support programs. Most of these support and counselling

programs have been implemented and evaluated in the industrialized world.

Detailed information about the implementation of such programs in Germany has been obtained. Based on the described characteristics of the most successful approaches, several programs can be considered potential contenders for being implemented and evaluated in the Caribbean. The programs described share two key characteristics: bullying is viewed as an issue for the whole school, not just the individuals involved, and staff members are supported to take a unified stance against bullying. These findings highlight the necessity of a whole-school approach to effectively reduce bullying and confirm the importance of staff training, as already emphasized in the discussion of protective factors. Such characteristics would ideally also extend to external partners such as parents and law enforcement.

VIII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important value of collecting and interpreting data is its potential to inform policies and interventions. The results of the preceding chapters show consistently strong associations between bullying, health and wellness, academic achievement, and school management. This particular arrangement of risk factors is not likely to change because it is an inherent characteristic of the interaction between a loosely managed social environment and a significant group of young people where there is substantial inequality in social status. Young people who are unwilling or unable to respect the rules of the social environment will be easy prey for others who either want to show off or else just have the urge to establish some dominance in an environment where they feel impotent. Nonetheless, such data can be used to help in determining the scale, intensity, and nature of the problem, and thus convey a measure of the resources and interventions that might be applicable or effective.

The Eastern Caribbean states are in the enviable position of having introduced a considerable range of measures to enhance the quality of their education systems since the 1970s. Many of these achievements are implemented through a healthy consultation process among decision-makers. In the context of the lack of statistical evidence about the true nature and impact of bullying, it is important to review the content and quantity of the data so far collected, make some preliminary conclusions, indicate what people who have used this data have found important (and conversely, what they ignore), and suggest some possible ways forward. This is imperative in Guyana.

➤ *Legislation and Enforcement*

CARICOM member states have enacted legislation on all aspects of education; however, the point to be reckoned with is its rule of law. That is to say, legislation may often be enacted suggesting that all students and educational personnel in the

region are protected against all forms of aggression and violence, yet no clear route to securing or contesting such rights may be available to them. Bullying in schools that proceed unlawfully is a very serious phenomenon that both children and teenagers experience. Its occurrence is a crucial problem whether the participating child is a person who perpetrates it, suffers because of it, or one who witnesses it. Consequently, it is crucial to devise strategies at schools to reduce the negative consequences of bullying. Governments need to support the school staff and parents. School-based interventions serve as the most effective means of preventing bullying. If a child becomes a continuous target of bullying, he or she should report it to school staff, and the school staff—particularly counsellors—can assist the student in overcoming feelings of helplessness caused by the bullying.

To reach such designated interventions, many steps must be undertaken. The foremost step is the establishment of a platform on which to address the problem of bullying in schools across the region and to do so urgently. This can be done through a structured discrete subject area or by making bullying an element in an existing form like health education. Some Caribbean territories have devised education and social studies courses which require students to develop an understanding of human rights issues. In these and others, students are exposed to ideas, experiences, attitudes, and then actively engage in thoughts about human rights and citizenship education. Such an attempt yields a clear objective in that the curriculum calls for the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that would encourage students not only to respect human rights but to participate in human rights activities. Careful thought should also be given to holistic policy frameworks that incorporate relevant legal, pedagogic, curricular, and social measures in keeping victims of bullying behaviour physically and psychologically safe on school premises.

➤ *Institutional Policies and Procedures*

In many Caribbean jurisdictions, there are wide-ranging rules and regulations related to the school as a public institution and as a place of learning. We know, for instance, that all educational institutions operate within the parameters of educational acts, and we also know that school rules and regulations are designed to control behaviours, to develop life skills, and to encourage norms that are in the best interests of the overall school population. While the government should create rules and policies relating to discipline in the public interest, the international convention does not specifically deal with rules, regulations, and guidelines impacting human rights as they relate to bullying, violence, and crime in public institutions.

While laws against assault are filtered through criminal codes to eliminate such negative social behaviours, we argue throughout this paper that such provisions as they relate to the school system are, given the membership of this organization,

contradictory at best and hypocritical at worst. The Rights of the Child are of utmost importance. However, it would be useful to examine how disciplinary measures within the school system run parallel or counter to those Rights.

IX. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

We propose that future research on bullying in the Caribbean region be carried out by researchers from non-social science disciplines, including medical, legal, or public/philanthropic sectors. International organizations and nongovernmental organizations may be more enthusiastic about organizing and funding studies on bullying prevention in the Caribbean if it is more directly linked to overall development and wellness in the region. While some cohort studies have included traditional measures of bullying, future research should aim to measure different types of bullying and their consequences, such as cyberbullying. Furthermore, country-level studies of bullying should capture official statistics at the national level and record data on detailed measures of bullying.

There are few bullying prevention programs in the Caribbean that specifically address the unique issues faced by students and other stakeholders in the region. Current programs tend to use intervention models from Western schools that have not been evaluated using local methodological standards. As a result, policies often have not achieved their desired outcomes, and resources available for other programs are affected. Without ongoing prevention efforts to help them, targets of bullying behaviour carry the damaging effects into adulthood. Evidence-based approaches should be developed. Neither the curriculum lesson nor the entire intervention can be uncritically imported from the West. A collaborative mixed methods approach involving stakeholders who are impacted by the program and those promoting it is needed for thorough and objective evaluation. The benefits of these concepts will be of help not only in reducing bullying in the Caribbean but also in drafting programs for the rest of the world.

➤ *Emerging Trends in Bullying Research*

The results of the first International Survey do not mean that one out of every three children are involved in bullying. However, the number of children affected directly or indirectly by bullying is too high. High prevalence rates of bullying have already been established in several countries. Among the students, the number of bullies is always much higher in the north of Europe than in the south, and the number of victims is higher in the south than in the north. Studies from all the countries with social systems problems are still needed.

At a worldwide level, in terms of victims and bullies of both traditional and cyber bullying and their relationships with gender, findings of the present study show that boys were

significantly more involved in school bullying than girls. The number of girls who are part of traditional bullying and general victims of traditional bullying was both around 20% and 30% respectively. For traditional bullying, the ratio between boys and girls was very similar, in which boys who bullied others in school were around 30%; boys who were bullied by others were around 30%; girls who bullied others in school were around 20%; and girls who were bullied by others were also around 20%. For cyber bullying, the number of girls involved in cyber bullying was much lower than that of boys. The number of boys who were part of cyber bullying was between 40% and 50%, but it was only 25% for girls. The number of girls who were victims of cyber bullying was between 30% and 35%, and it was below 10% for boys.

➤ *Need for Longitudinal Studies in the Caribbean*

There is a need for several longitudinal studies to be carried out in the Caribbean, which will have the capacity to measure and monitor the prevalence of bullying in the Caribbean over time. To monitor trends, several basic considerations related to the methodology and costs of the research must be carefully thought out. It is because of these considerations that an increasing number of countries have been conducting annual or biannual surveys. Understanding bullying problems through a focus on culture that encompasses a variety of research methods and perspectives might enhance our appreciation of bullying, perceived effects, and intervention successes specific to the culture. Countries in the region where few or no studies have been conducted must initiate projects, while those with a sufficient number of studies over time can take their research to another level and conduct assessments of intervention efforts and get involved in translating and bridging the gap between research and action.

Conveying to Caribbean school personnel several elements of a comprehensive approach, as well as specific strategies for addressing victimization behaviours, is one step. Another is to help schools, classrooms, and individual students accomplish the objectives of increasing connectedness, teaching empathy and perspective, broadening viewpoints through critical thinking, and creating core ethical values. In truth, we do not know the extent to which Caribbean educators value or support foundational positive teaching strategies. However, it is clear how educational researchers and practitioners can increase their understanding of bullying issues in the Caribbean region.

X. CONCLUSION

Acts of bullying in the Caribbean region are generally low, even though Caribbean types of bullying remain common; most adolescents do not engage in bullying. When it comes to being bullied, 1 in 10 adolescents report such an occurrence. Girls are bullied more than boys, and the rates of adolescents being bullied increase with age for both boys and

girls. Cyberbullying is especially important, as the rates are more than 10 percent. There are countries in the region that certainly cannot be considered bullying-free based on the fact that around 1 in 3 adolescents report having been bullied. An analysis of bullying prevalence for the Caribbean can suggest the best types and ages for implementing bullying interventions, and this can be further enhanced by the knowledge of the best interventions for a given goal. This study found that bullying is still largely uncharted territory in the English-speaking Caribbean in terms of adolescent experiences. Even so, a lack of comprehensive bullying statistics in no way means that it is not a problem, for if we have learned anything, bullying is a serious problem confronting adolescents in the Caribbean.

➤ *Summary of Key Findings*

The report found that, across the 35 countries in the Americas, Trinidad and Tobago had the highest rate of bullying of girls and the second highest rate of bullying of boys. While at school, it had the highest rate for girls and the third highest rate for boys. A survey found bullying to be one of the non-violent forms of victimization in schools, which saw a significant increase between 2000 and 2009. Jamaica was the seventh worst for girls being bullied at school, sixth for boys bullied at school, eighth for girls being bullied by girls, and fifth for boys being bullied by girls. Grenada was the third worst for girls being bullied at school and the eighth worst for boys being bullied at school, while Antigua and Barbuda were ninth for girls being bullied by girls. In instances of the countries suffering the greatest increase in bullying, The Bahamas was the second worst, while the United States Virgin Islands was the third.

We are aware that there is a certain astringency to statistics; yet they give us cause for worry across the region. That there are no numbers or stats being generated in Guyana, however, signals indifference or apathy, both reasons for alarm.

➤ *Implications for Policy and Practice*

The Caribbean region has seen a proliferation of studies on bullying in recent years; the evidence is clear that prevalence rates in these unhappy biopsychosocial circumstances are as high as in other parts of the world. Children and adolescents are "bothered" by the occurrence of bullying behaviour. As a result, different rules, regulations, and, in some cases, advisory services have been developed by central, regional, and state-level bodies throughout the region to mitigate the problems experienced by individuals, society, and the economy as a whole. Some countries have codified policies designed to attain the objectives, while in other countries an integrated approach requires assessing formal and informal mechanisms that exist to address these concerns within complex school social systems.

The goal of all these policies is to reduce (ideally, to eliminate) the problem of bullying by promoting a social system that rejects violence of any kind as an acceptable response to the difficulties faced by individuals during the school-age years. The weight of the evidence supports the finding that, to date, sound policies and robust practices form an important part of the solution to the problem of bullying in the region as well as in other parts of the world. Using a Caribbean lens, this chapter has sifted and sorted both victimization and perpetration evidence for cases that involve bullying and has contrasted global data with findings reported in the literature. The goal has been to draw meaningful conclusions and to make some generalizations about this global social, psychological, and health issue. With this task accomplished, the purposes of this article were revisited as well as the questions noted at the outset of the study.

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