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# **CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study was to explore the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools. This chapter discusses the background to the study and the statement of the problem. Subsequently, the research questions, research objectives and the significance of the study are discussed. This leads to a discussion of the theoretical framework that informs the study. Finally, the chapter ends with delimitations of the study and clarification of concepts.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Aggression among adolescents in schools is a universal problem (Kaya, Bilgin & Singer, 2012:56). Beating others was the most common form of aggressive behaviour in Turkish adolescents that accounted for 34.5% of the sample (Kaya et al, 2012:56; Arslan, Savaser & Yazgan, 2011:991). Student aggressive behaviour was also a serious problem in several European schools. In British schools (O'Brien, 2011:258; Minton, 2010:131), 29% of boys and 24% of girls in elementary schools experienced some form of physical bullying. Furthermore, approximately 41% of boys and 39% of girls experienced verbal bullying. Cyberbullying prevalence was 9% in the United Kingdom when compared to 24% in Greece (Del Rey, Casas, Ortega-Ruiz, Schultze-Krumbholz, Scheithauer, Smith, Thompson, Barkoukis, Tsorbatzoudis, Brighi, & Guarini, 2015: 145). In Greek and Italian schools, between 15 and 26% of students were involved in peer aggression as perpetrators and/or victims (Athanasziades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010:329; Santinello, Vieno & De Vogli, 2011:236; Vieno, Gini, Santinello & Lenzi, 2011:542; Athanasziades, Kamariotis, Psalti, Baldry & Sorrentino, 2015:31). In addition, Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann and Jungert (2006:271) and Festl, Scharrow and Quandt (2015:13)



established that, in Germany, 12.1% of adolescent students reported perpetrating traditional bullying and 11.1% reported being bullied, while 22% had cyberbullied somebody and 22% had been victimized.

A range of 10-43% of school going age children in the USA experienced persistent, severe and unprovoked traditional and cyber peer aggression (Visconti, Kochenderfer-Ladd & Clifford, 2013:1; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Kochel, 2009:27; Wang, Iannotti & Luk, 2012:528; Radliff, Wheaton, Robinson & Morris, 2012:571; Bhatta, Shakya & Jefferis, 2014:731). But a review of 80 studies established that mean prevalence rates for perpetration of traditional and cyber bullying ,traditional and cyber victimization was 35% for traditional and 15% for cyber bullying (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014:607). Further, in a Canadian study, a total of 49.5% of Canadian students indicated they had been bullied online and 33.7% indicated they had bullied others online. Cyber bullying has been found to be a significant problem in Canada (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk & Solomon, 2010:362; Holfield & Leadbeater, 2014:13). Extant literature suggests student aggression in schools was also a major problem which was on the increase in South African schools (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013:5; Ncube, 2011:170). Between 41% and 83.8% of respondents reported experiencing bullying or witnessing verbal or physical violence (Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard & King, 2008:23; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013:5; Ncube, 2011:170). In addition findings from a national study indicates that 21% of secondary school learners in South Africa who participated in the research reported having experienced some form of cyber violence (Burton & Leoschut, 2013:76).

A study of adolescent student aggression in Zimbabwe by Zindi (1994:23) showed that 16% of boarding school students sampled reported that they were bullied from time to time, while 18% were bullied weekly or more often. Another study by Mutekwe, Modiba and Maphosa (2011:139) of sixth form girls in one of the highly industrialised provinces in Zimbabwe reported that girls were the subject of verbal, physical and sexual aggression by boys and teachers. The aggression against the girls resulted in failure to participate actively in class, poor academic achievement, getting pregnant and dropping out of school. These results are supported by earlier research (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2009:92; Shumba, 2011:175; Due & Holstein,

2008:213).

In addition to the above findings from academic sources, newspaper reports and other sources also reveal the prevalence of bullying in schools. Primary and Secondary Education Minister Lazarus Dokora told Senate in February 2015 that, due to the increase in the number of cases of bullying, government was determined to take stern action against schools that failed to protect pupils from bullies (Langa, 2015). Antonia (2013) reported two incidents of the death of students on school premises at Prince Edward High School in Harare and linked these to bullying (Antonia, 2013). In another case, Chikwanha (2012) reported an incident where a 12 year-old school girl had attempted suicide at Bradley High School in Bindura after being bullied. The same article cited another case of attempted suicide at St Dominic's High School in Harare (Chikwanha, 2012). A case of bullying linked to a suicide of a Grade 7 pupil at Wadilove Primary School in Marondera was reported in *Newsday* (Langa, 2015).

To the knowledge of the researcher, there is no Zimbabwean study that addressed the topic as it is but some related studies are given. Available Zimbabwean studies have studied bullying in boarding schools (Zindi, 1994:23); bullying in secondary schools in Gweru (Gudyanga, Mudihlwa & Wadesango, 2014:70); bullying in a secondary school in Masvingo (Mudhovozi, 2015:118), child abuse by teachers (Shumba, 2011:169), sexual harassment of female students (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2009:88) and gender and academic achievement (Mutekwe et al, 2011:111). It is against this background that this research looked at the causes and manifestation of classroom aggression and its impact on students' physical and mental health, academic performance and dropout rate in Harare urban secondary schools. Harare was selected in this study because it was assumed that effects of chrono-system factors were likely to be more salient because a large number of residents are displaced due to urbanization. Aggression is likely to be more prominent because people relate to each other more anonymously in big cities. The city is multicultural in character and the sample would likely to reflect this characteristic which is very important for this study.

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The background to the study has emphasised the high prevalence of aggression in schools the world over (Kaya et al, 2012:56; O'Brien, 2011:258; Minton, 2010:131; Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010:329; Santinello et al, 2011:236; Vieno et al, 2011:542; Scheithauer et al, 2006:271; Mishna et al, 2010:312; Del Rey, Casas, Ortega-Ruiz, Schultze-Krumbholz, Scheithauer, Smith, Thompson, Barkoukis, Tsorbatzoudis, Brighi, & Guarini, 2015: 145; Burton & Leoschut, 2013:76; Bhatta,Shakya & Jefferis, 2014:731; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014:607; Athanasiades, Kamariotis, Psalti, Baldry & Sorrentino, 2015:31; Festl, Scharkow & Quandt, 2015:13). It has also highlighted the fact that bullying, as a form of aggressive behaviour, is prevalent in Zimbabwe secondary schools (Due & Holstein, 2008:213; Gudyanga, Mudihlwa, and Wadesango, 2014:70; Shoko, 2012:80; Chitiyo, Chitiyo, Chitiyo, Oyedele, Makoni, Fonnah & Chipangure, 2014:1100; Zindi, 1994:23; Mudhovozi, 2015:118). It was also observed that, to the knowledge of the researcher, there are no Zimbabwean studies specifically focused on classroom aggression in urban secondary schools although there are related studies that have been carried out. The purpose of this study was to provide an answer to the following main research question: What are the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression in Harare Urban Secondary Schools?

This study was guided by the following sub-research questions:

- To what extent do biological and social factors cause classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools?
- To what extent does classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools manifest in physical, relational, cyber and verbal forms?
- How does classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools relate to student mental health, teenage pregnancy, academic performance and school dropout?
- What strategies and a model can be implemented to prevent and reduce classroom aggressive behaviour in urban secondary schools in Harare?

## **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

In line with the research questions outlined in the above section, the specific research objectives of this study were, firstly, to determine the extent to which biological and social factors caused classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in Harare. Secondly, the study sought to investigate how classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools manifested in relation to the physical, relational, cyber and verbal forms. Further, it was the objective of the study to examine the extent to which classroom aggression amongst Harare urban secondary school students related to student mental health, teenage pregnancy, academic performance and school dropout. These objectives were related to the researcher's endeavour to develop a model for use in the prevention and reduction of classroom aggressive behaviour in urban secondary schools in Harare.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study may benefit adolescent students by giving them an insight into the causes, forms and impact of peer aggression and strategies to prevent the phenomenon. Also, this study is significant because it has the potential to provide student teachers and practicing teachers with guidelines on managing classroom aggression in secondary schools. The findings from the study may benefit policy makers as it provides them with information from both students and teachers on the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression so that future policies can address this problem. Further, findings from this study can benefit the researcher as it deepens his understanding of the problem of classroom aggression and its impact on student outcomes. This understanding can improve the quality of teaching he offers to trainee teachers. The study will also act as a baseline study for future studies on classroom aggression.

## **1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1.6.1 Bio-ecological theory**

This study is informed by the Bio-ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:373; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:793) and Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1980a:327; Weiner, 1992:329) which are explained below.

Bronfenbrenner (1977:513) presented the ecology of human development model which was later revised to the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and the introduction of chaos theory into this model (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000:121, Espelage, 2014:257). This model is relevant for this study as the researcher like other scholars researching aggressive behaviour, recognized that adolescents are situated in systems that have direct, indirect, and dynamic influences on development and behaviour (Espelage, 2014:257). Bronfenbrenner (1979:129) defines a person's development as a lasting change in the way a person perceives and interacts with his/her environment. Developmental outcomes such as aggressive behaviour are the result of the individual's interaction with his/her environment. Bronfenbrenner conceptualized the child's environment as a "nested" set of organized linked multidimensional element (i.e. system) (Wachs, 2015:2). The system has inherent properties, for example any element in the system can influence both the structure and effect of other elements (Von Bertalanffy, 1968:67; Wachs, 2015:2). A distinction is made between the objective (actual) environment (environment as it is) from subjective experience (environment as perceived) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:478). For example in relation to classroom aggressive behaviour adolescent reactions to social interactions with peers (environment), varies depending on the causal attributions and interpretations of social cues they make (Fontaine & Dodge, 2009:117, Weiner, 2014:354; Wachs, 2015:8) The system elements and the linkages within and between these will be discussed next.

The microsystem is the innermost level which can be conceived as patterns of interaction (proximal processes) between the adolescent and his or her physical (e.g.

objects) and social environment (e.g. parents, peers, teachers) (Wachs, 2015:2). The microsystem has physical, social dimensions that are linked functionally (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:39). Physical aspects of the classroom environment such as classroom size and density have been shown to affect learning and social behaviour. High-density classrooms have been linked to high levels of aggressive behaviour and decreased social interaction (Moore & Lackney, 1994:7). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006:796) submit that negative outcomes such as classroom aggressive behaviours can result from proximal processes and personal characteristics. They argue that proximal processes consist of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between the person and the environment over an extended period of time. There are limited number of studies that have examined the extent to which person characteristics can moderate the impact of proximal processes on negative developmental outcomes such as classroom aggressive behaviour as posited by Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006:810). The present study fills this gap.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006:796) also explain that there are personal characteristics which include resource characteristics, demand characteristics and disposition or force characteristics. Resource characteristics can be viewed as a motivational force that acts either as a barrier (developmentally-disruptive) or facilitator that influences the capacity of the individual to engage in proximal processes. Demand characteristics are “personal stimulus” characteristics that act as an immediate stimulus to another person such as age, gender, skin colour or physical appearance (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796). Lastly, disposition or force characteristics are differences in temperament, motivation or persistence (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:795). These personal characteristics shape one’s future development and are integrated in the conceptualisation of the environment as nested systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796). Characteristics of the person appear again in the model as developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:798).

Personal characteristics can be further divided into several sub-types, including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. The microsystem is the innermost environmental layer. It refers to the activities and interactions that occur in a person’s immediate surroundings. Personal

characteristics of the aggressive adolescent student (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:191; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796) are part of the microsystem. The microsystem also includes characteristics of parents, relatives, close friends, teachers and mentors who interact with the developing adolescent student regularly over an extended period (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796).

The exosystem consists of social settings that adolescent learners do not experience directly but which nonetheless influence their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:193). It affects development through shaping lower level microsystem and mesosystem attributes. For example research findings in Europe and the Middle East revealed that a parent's work place environment and neighbourhood characteristics as exosystems result in the development of aggression (Wachs, 2015:4; Boxer, Huesmann, Dubow, Landau, Gvirsman, Shikaki, & Ginges, 2013:174; Lochman, Powell, Boxmeyer, Sallee, Dillon, & Powe, 2016:349). It is not clear if a similar situation exists in Zimbabwe.

The microsystem is nested under the mesosystem, which is defined by the connections or interrelationship among microsystems such as homes, schools, and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:420; Wachs, 2015:3). Understanding mesosystem influences on classroom aggression requires understanding the nature of mesosystem linkages (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013: 354). According to Wachs (2015:4) there are four classes of linkages, namely implied linkages, functional linkages, cognitive linkages and structural linkages. One can deduce that there is a functional linkage when an adolescent's presence in one microsystem is related to what happens in a second microsystem. A child's membership in a gang may be regarded as a functional mesosystem link to the family when gang membership weakens the influence of good family upbringing (Tolan, German-Smith, & Henry, 2003:287). Structural mesosystem linkages on the other hand occur when parents discuss a child's aggressive behaviour with the teacher at the school (McIntosh, Lyon, Carlson, Everette, & Loera, 2008:86). These linkages have not been explored with regards to classroom aggressive behaviour in Zimbabwe and this study intends to fill this gap.

The macrosystem, as another sub-system in personal characteristics, consists of the

larger cultural or sub-cultural or social class context in which the microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:195). The cultural patterns are reflected in the belief systems, customs, life course options, living conditions and opportunity structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 515; Bronfenbrenner, 1999: 210). According to Wachs, (2015:9) through structuring the nature of the lower order proximal processes higher-order ecosystem dimensions indirectly contribute to development. For example young children exposed to societal violence have demonstrated greater aggression (Walker, Wachs, Grantham-McGregor, Black, Nelson, Huffman, Baker-Henningham, Chang, Hamadani, Lozoff & Gardner, 2011:7)

Finally, there is the chronosystem, which includes consistency or change in the life of the individual or the environment that occur over time and influence the direction of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:xvii; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796). The chronosystem may affect aggressive behaviour directly through external events such as divorce of parents or internal events like puberty (Espelage, Rao & Rue, 2013:11). The chronosystem may impact on aggressive behaviour indirectly through for example cyberbullying (Espelage et.al. 2013:11). It is important for the current study to establish whether chronosystem in particular, and the bio ecological environment as a whole with its interactive systems has a bearing on classroom aggressive behaviour and its impact on student health and academic performance in urban high schools in Harare.

By basing the study on the bio-ecological theory, the researcher takes into account not only individual characteristics but also the multiple systems in which a child exists (e.g. the family, the school, peer relationships and community) to address the problem of aggression (Shriberg, Song, Miranda & Radliff, 2013:255). This framework explains the complexity of aggressive behaviour (Barboza, Schiamberg, Oehmke, Korzeniewski, Post & Heraux, 2009:102; Limber, 2006:331; Leff, 2007:406; Swart & Bredenkamp, 2009:408). Furthermore, the adoption of the ecological system framework allows the researcher to move away from the medical model towards an ecological understanding of human functioning (Schriber, Song, Miranda & Radliff, 2013:20) in line with the paradigm shift in school psychology. Finally, the adoption of the ecological theoretical framework also facilitates the assimilation of the findings



from the empirical study within the person, process, context and time factors in order to answer the research question posed in the study. While there have been studies applying the bioecological model on child development there are very few studies that have focused on classroom aggression in urban secondary schools. There is thus a research gap in applying this theoretical framework that this study fills.

Bioecological theory describes the interplay between the student who has biological, cognitive, socio-emotional, cognitive attributes with the varied social context which results in aggressive behaviour. The importance of the distinction between environment and experience in bioecological theory has been discussed above. This important element of the model makes it compatible with attribution theory which also emphasizes the importance of participants' interpretation of cues in the environment for negative outcomes such as classroom aggression. Causal attributions make up the cognitive repertoire of the student, the peers, teachers and the community members who form key players in the social environment. Attribution theory will be discussed below in relation to the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggressive behaviour.

### 1.6.2 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, formulated by Weiner (1980a, 1992, 2012) posits that causes of social behaviour such as aggression, as well as causes of success and failure in achievement contexts, can be located in three causal dimensions: stability, locus and control. These dimensions are explained as follows: *locus* refers to the location of a cause, which may be related to either to internal factors (e.g. a student's personal characteristics) or to external factors (e.g. the situation or circumstances) (Weiner, 2000:4). *Controllability* refers to the student's perceived control over the causes of behaviour (Kauppi & Porhola, 2012:1061). Some causes may be viewed as controllable, whereas as others may perceived as impossible to change. Locus and controllability are feeling states that evoke emotions (Weiner, 2000:4).while all causes of behaviour can be located within this three-dimensional causal framework, there can be disagreement about where exactly some causes are located because it depends

on “how it seems to me” (Weiner, 2000:5). *Stability* refers to the duration of a cause. Some causes are viewed as constant whereas others are perceived as unstable or temporary (Weiner, 2000:5). These three dimensions of attributions that impact subsequent communicative behaviours and social actions, such as coping with victimization (Weiner, 1991:173). Attributions are also relevant to the current study as it examines how students and teachers make sense of behaviours and motives helping to understand how participants respond to different events (Shelley & Craig, 2010:14).

One concept relating to attribution theory of relevance to this study is the self-serving bias (Weiner, 1985:560; Kauppi & Porhola, 2012:1062). Individuals have a tendency to overemphasize internal causes when they interpret other people’s negative behaviour. Conversely when they interpret other’s good behaviour or outcomes they are likely to overemphasize the situation causes rather than the internal ones.

Students and teachers’ attributions of causes of aggression are important in the research on student aggression (Thornberg, 2011:178, Thornberg, 2010:311, Frisé, Holmqvist & Oscarsson, 2008:105). These researchers found that students tend to attribute the causes of aggression to the victim by perceiving him/her as deviant or different. Students also attribute the causes of aggression more to the bullies in terms of instrumental motives and psychological causes and less to peer groups, school settings or human nature/societal reasons. Teachers who are involved in working with aggressive students will often make causal attributions concerning the origins of such behaviour (Miller, 1995:460). These causal attributions for aggressive student behaviour and corrective/negative teacher behaviour mediate the relations between aggressive, pro-social behaviour and peer disliking (McAuliffe, Hubbard & Romano, 2009:665).

Fiske and Taylor (1984) extended the attribution model by including judgements about the responsibility for affecting a solution to a problem as well as its original cause. This model is derived from Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn and Kidder (1982:368). This model posits that an individual may be perceived as having responsibility for solving a problem even though he or she may not be responsible for its origin i.e. the moral model and the compensatory model respectively (Miller,

1995:461). If on the other hand an individual was judged as responsible for the origin of a problem but not responsible for its solution this is referred to as the enlightenment model, but where he was not responsible for its origin and its solution this is called the medical model (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). The attribution theory is central to this study. The attribution principles described above can be applied to the study of adolescent student aggression. The differences between teachers and students' attribution of meanings to terms related to aggressive behaviours have implications for intervention policies against aggression. For instance, teacher attributions, as part of teacher cognition, influence the choice of a teacher's disciplinary measures to manage aggressive student behaviour. Therefore, any strategies to reduce student aggression need to change student and teacher causal attributions.

One metaphor associated with attribution theory is that the person is a scientist with a particular focus on understanding the causes of events (Weiner, 2011:5; Furnham & Henderson, 1983:107; Hollin & Howells, 1987:375; Bohm & Pfister, 2015:1). This study sought to examine these lay explanations of students of participants of the causes and manifestation and impact of classroom aggression. Moreover, research on aggressive behaviour shows that participants attributions are multidimensional including student-related, family related, school related, peer related which is compatible with bio ecological theory (Miller, 1995:457; Bronfenbrenner, 1999: 11; Bronfenbrenner, 2006:796).

The second metaphor related to attribution is that when an individual identifies the intent of other people actions, they make a judgement, which affects their subsequent interactions with the peer or student in the case of teachers (Weiner, 2011:5). Attribution theory therefore compliments bio ecological theory by adding these dimensions to the study of classroom aggression and interventions to reduce its occurrence. The study therefore integrates these two theories so that it examines the extent to which student and teacher participants make causal ecological attributions about classroom aggression and its impact.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The major limitation of the study is the use of a qualitative research design that relied on self-reported data which may contain potential bias such as memory distortions. The second limitation relates to the researcher's lack of access to certain sites and interviewing adolescent female students when interview questions touched on sensitive matters. These matters limit the external generalizability of the results of the study beyond urban secondary *schools* in Harare Metropolitan Province.

## **1.8 OVERCOMING LIMITATIONS**

When an qualitative interview based study uses sampling, a four point approach is recommended, namely, defining a sample universe by way of specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria for potential participants, deciding on a sample size, selecting a sampling strategy such as convenience sampling and issues of sample sourcing (Robinson, 2014:25; Creswell, 2013:155). The current study met the aforementioned criteria which are explained in detail in Chapter 3. The study employed purposive sampling which specified categories of teachers and students to be included, the selection of multiple research sites were stratified while, for sample sourcing, snowballing sampling was used. The sampling approach ensured that the two school categories and gender representation were catered for even when access was denied at one school. The study used triangulation of participant sources and methods, i.e., adolescent students and teachers were selected to minimize bias due to self-reported data.

Where there are sensitive issues, some participants may feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive information in a group setting rather than in a face-to-face interview (Seidman, 2013:79). The study used both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as well as a trained female assistant to conduct focus group discussions for female students where sensitive issues arose. A pilot study was also conducted to check participants' reactions to sensitive issues.

## **1.9 DELIMITATION OF STUDY**

The focus of the study was to identify the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province. The scope of the study was therefore limited to this urban area. The empirical research was limited to the adolescent students and teachers in the above schools. The data in this research is limited to the views of these two groups of participants and cannot be generalised beyond the population studied.

## **1.10 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.10.1 Aggression**

Aggression is any behaviour whether physical, social, verbal or symbolic with the intent of physically or psychologically harming another person who wants to avoid the harm (Colman, 2015:18; Van den Bos, 2007:30; Kempes, Matthys, Vries & Engeland, 2005:11; Taylor, Davis-Kean & Malanchuk, 2007:132; Van Acker, 2007:6; Pellegrini, 2007:87; Ramirez & Andreu, 2006:278; Ramirez, 2010:264; Parrott & Giancola, 2007:280). In this study, aggression means any form of behaviour carried out whose immediate goal is to inflict harm on another person who wants to avoid such harm.

### **1.10.2 Bullying**

Bullying is a subset of aggression which is characterised by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim, is intentional, is harmful and occurs repetitively (Olweus, Limber & Mihalic, 1999:7; Mehta & Pilonia, 2014:1143; Swearer, Espelage & Napolitano, 2009:2). In the present study, bullying refers to

classroom behaviour that is a form of aggressive behaviour that is intentional abuse of power that occurs repeatedly.

### **1.10.3 Academic performance**

Academic performance refers to the actual execution of class work in the school setting and is typically assessed by the use of teacher ratings, examinations and grades (Muwonge & Ssenyonga, 2015:50; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012:26; Batlis, 1978:1178). For the purposes of this study, scholastic performance entails public examination scores at “O” and “A” levels and scores in teacher administered tests. Reports on performance in Physical Education and Sports also constitute scholastic performance. The study also relied on narration of academic performance from teachers and students. The study did not involve subjecting the scores to statistical analysis/tests.

### **1.10.4 Adolescent student**

An adolescent is a young person experiencing puberty who is in the transition between childhood and adulthood (Keating, Lerner & Steinberg, 2004:viii; Pickles, Pickering, Simonoff & Silberg, 1998:243). In this study, an adolescent student is a person aged between 12 and 18 years who is enrolled in school.

### **1.10.5 Secondary School**

A secondary school is a school that is intermediate between elementary school and college that includes both middle and high school where general, technical and vocational classes are organized such that the focus of instruction is on application of skills within specific domains. Students’ progress from form one to six (Shi, Zhang,

Ma, Yi, Liu, Johnson, Chu, Loyalka & Rozelle, 2015:1049; Foegen, 2000:176; Malete, 2007:95). A secondary school is also known as a high school in the United States of America. In the present study, a secondary school is a registered institution offering instruction to students from form one to form six.

## **1.11 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS**

Chapter 1 contains the following: introduction, background to the study, the statement of the problem, the sub-research questions, research objectives, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, delimitations of the study, clarification of concepts and conclusion.

Chapter 2 focuses on an in-depth literature study of the phenomenon of adolescent aggression. It contains the following sub-headings: manifestations, causes and impact of aggression. This allows the reader to understand the research questions framed for the study.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology used in the study to find answers to the research question above. The following subheadings are contained in Chapter 3: introduction, research design, population, sample, procedure, instrumentation, pilot study, data analysis, ethical issues, and conclusion.

Chapter 4 reports on the data analysis and discussion. The data is presented, analysed and discussed in relation to the research questions posed in the study. This leads to Chapter 5 which entails a discussion of the results. In Chapter 5, the results are discussed in the light of the reviewed literature for answers to the research questions. Finally, the chapter is concluded with recommendations relating to teachers as well as future researchers in order to address implications of the findings of this study on the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression in Harare schools. A proposed model is presented.

## **1.12 SUMMARY**

This introductory chapter has discussed the background to the problem of student aggression in Harare secondary schools. Focus was also on the statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives and the significance of the problem. The theoretical framework was also discussed in this chapter. Further, the chapter outlined the delimitations of the study and clarified certain key concepts. The next chapter reviews literature on the causes, manifestations and impact of classroom aggression. It serves to indicate what other researchers and studies have established on the phenomenon of adolescent student aggression and highlights gaps in knowledge.



# **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED INTERNATIONAL AND ZIMBABWEAN LITERATURE ON CAUSES, MANIFESTATION AND IMPACT OF CLASSROOM AGGRESSION**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The study analysed causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression on students' physical and mental health, academic performance and dropout levels in secondary schools. As indicated in the previous chapter, the study focused on schools in Harare, Zimbabwe. In this chapter, literature related to the causes, manifestation and impact of aggression in class is reviewed. The gaps to be filled by the present study are highlighted.

## **2.2 CAUSES OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Literature indicated that there are several causes of aggressive behaviour among students. However, this section will discuss only two broad causal factors, biological and social factors, and how they were linked to the present study.

### **2.2.1 Biological Factors**

The literature indicated that there are several causes of aggression that are closely linked to biology. These include puberty, hormones, the brain, temperament and several other factors, as discussed below.

### **2.2.1.1 Puberty**

Hempil, Kotevski, Herrenkohl, Tombourou, Carlin, Catalano and Patton (2010:303) and Marceau, Ram, Houts, Grimm and Susman (2011:1389) found that the pubertal stage was associated with both physical and social related aggression in a sample of girls from the USA and Australia. Susman, Dockray, Schiefelbein, Herwehe, Heaton and Dorn (2007:811) examined two causes of anti-social and aggressive behaviour, the relationship between morningness/eveningness and the morning to afternoon cortisol ratio. Their focus was on the interactions of these vulnerabilities with puberty and anti-social behaviour in adolescents.

Morningness/eveningness (M/E) refers to individual differences in sleep-wake patterns and preferences for activity and alertness during the morning or evening and, putatively, has biological, psychological and contextual components (Carskadon, Veira & Acebo, 1993:261). Morningness is also proposed to have a genetic component, although the results are inconsistent. The study by Susman et al (2007:1549) concluded that M/E and circadian cortisol changes were linked to aggressive and anti-social behaviour in children and young adolescents in the 8-13 year age range. The study also concluded that eveningness was associated with antisocial and aggressive behaviour in boys while early timing of puberty was related to self-reported Conduct Disorder symptoms in boys and relational aggression in girls. The present study sought to fill the gap in the literature by investigating whether morningness/eveningness and circadian cortisol changes were linked to classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools.

### **2.2.1.2 Hormones, the brain and human aggression**

Mehta and Beer (2009:2362) examined how endocrine and neural systems work together to influence aggressive behaviour. Mazur and Booth (1998:356) conclude that testosterone is not related to all forms of aggression but may specifically control impulsive aggression in response to social threats. Mehta and Beer (2009:2362)

established that higher testosterone levels predicted subsequent aggressive behavioural reactions to unfairness. The findings suggested that testosterone influences aggression through reduced activity in the medial Orbitofrontal Cortex. These findings also suggested that testosterone increases the propensity towards aggression because of reduced activation of the neural circuitry of impulse control and self-regulation. The present study sought to establish whether hormones influenced aggressive behaviour in Zimbabwean adolescents.

### **2.2.1.3 Temperament and aggressive behaviours**

Temperament was defined as “constitutionally based individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation in the domains of affect, activity and attention” (Rothbart & Bates 2006:100). Temperament is conceptualized as biologically based. Through interaction with environmental factors temperament is a building block for personality (Rothbart & Bates, 2006:100). Researchers have established that three broad dimensions represent the structure of temperament: extraversion/surgency, negative affectivity and effortful control (Rothbart, 2004:495).

A study guided by Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory was conducted in the western United States. The study started on the premise that Bronfenbrenner’s theory posits that similar experiences in a given context may have differential influences on the characteristics of the person. The study tested Besky’s differential susceptibility hypothesis that proposes that children and adolescents with certain temperamental traits, such as high levels of negative emotionality or impulsivity are not only more likely to be impacted by adverse environmental experiences but may also be more responsive to positive environmental influences (Chen & Jacobson, 2013:8). This study established that impulsivity was positively associated with adolescent delinquency. There was also a negative relationship between family warmth and delinquency was significant for adolescent with high levels of, but not for those with below average levels of impulsivity. The study thus consistent with the bioecological theory that posits that proximal processes are the key drivers of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:826). This study, while revealing that

there is a link between impulsivity and delinquent behaviour, is cross sectional and correlational hence one cannot infer causality. The authors also observed that some of the relationships could be bi directional.

A recent study in the Canada was carried out to assess the perceptions and attributions of bystanders to cyberbullying (Holfield, 2014:5). This experimental study established that many bystanders (32% males and 43% females) provided external characteristics for the student's victimization, indicating that the factors and characteristics (e.g. temperament) of the bully resulted in the cyberbullying. The author concluded that the study findings were consistent with Weiner's (1985) attribution theory. The findings from the research are limited in their generalizability because the definition of cyber bullying is contested and the results are also affected by measurement issues (Grading, Strohmeier & Spiel, 2010:6). The study used one scenario to gauge the bystander's understanding of cyber bullying which is problematic in that the measure fails to capture all aspects of the construct of cyber bullying. There is therefore a gap in our understanding of how bystanders would react to cyber aggression. This study will use qualitative research that has the advantage of ecological validity to address this gap.

Brook (2011:66) examined whether the person characteristics moderated ecological influences leading to different manifestations of aggressive behaviours. The findings revealed that a poor fit between an adolescent temperament susceptibility and parental personality type was likely to lead to higher levels of aggression. These findings complement Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip and Campbell's (2007:418) study on personality traits and adolescent aggression. The study by Brook used a survey design as a result it fails to give detailed information about participants' experience of aggressive behaviour and lacks internal validity (i.e. it cannot reveal why something happened) (Babbie, 2016:180; Mitchell & Jolly, 2013:286). This finding is however consistent with ecological theory which explains aggressive behaviour through the mechanism of goodness of fit (Wachs, 2015:15). The current study which employed a qualitative research design sought to find out if participants endorsed causal attributions to person characteristics (such as temperament) for classroom aggression in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

### **2.2.1.4 Personality Factors**

Beitchman, Zai, Muir, Berall, Nowrouzi, Choi and Kennedy (2012:125) found a significant association between callous-unemotional traits (CU) in children and adolescents with extreme aggression and polymorphism on the oxytocin receptor. Callous-unemotional traits include lack of empathy, lack of guilt and shallow emotions. Literature indicates that callous traits are strongly genetic (Viding, Blair, Moffit & Plomin, 2005:595). Furthermore, the oxytocin receptor genetic polymorphism is associated with social aspects of autism spectrum disorder (Campbell, Datta, Jones, Batey, Sutcliffe, Hammock & Levitt, 2011:107). Frick and White (2008:362) established that there is an association between CU traits and aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents. The authors added that these findings point to a substantive genetic influence on the measure of CU traits. Viding, Jones, Frick, Moffit and Plomin (2008:20) agreed that CU traits do have a heritable component, Furthermore, CU traits seemed to show a temperament that is characterised by deficits in emotional arousal to fear and distress as well as abnormalities in responses to cues of punishment and danger (Frick & White, 2008:362-366). But later research seems to challenge this view by showing that it is the callousness aspect that predicts self-reported proactive aggression rather than the unemotionality when the antisocial process screening device self-report is used as in several studies (Ansel, Barry, Gillen & Herrington, 2015:213; Pechorro, Ray, Barroso, Maroco & Gonçalves, 2016:350). The sub factors that have been associated with the Inventory for Callous-Unemotional traits have been called into question however (Ray, Frick, Thornton, Steinberg & Cauffman, 2015:8). There is therefore a gap in our understanding of the association between callous-unemotional traits and proactive aggression. These temperamental characteristics may be linked to distinct neural mechanisms that maybe involved in the development of the aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

Blair (2010:77) suggested that the above specific emotional and cognitive deficits could implicate deficits in the amygdala functioning and neural circuitry. Therefore, children and adolescents who show both reactive and instrumental aggression show

higher levels of CU traits. A study by Howard, Kimonis, Munoz and Frick (2012:1241) showed that witnessing violence mediates the links between callous-unemotional traits in adolescents, physical aggression and drug delinquency. There is a gap in our understanding of the link between CU traits and aggressive behaviour as it is unclear whether context might influence the self-reported aggression. Therefore, the current study intends to fill this gap by examining the teachers and students' attributions of the relationship between individual characteristics of adolescent students and ecological factors and classroom aggression.

Boes, Tranel, Anderson and Nopolous (2008:677) contributed to the ongoing effort to clarify the biological underpinnings of aggressive and anti-social behaviour by examining variation in emotional processes. The authors assessed aggressive and anti-social behaviours in a large sample of normal children and adolescents in relation to the volume of two cortical regions with prominent roles in emotion processing and that have also been implicated in social behaviour: the Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC) and Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex. The results of this study demonstrated that aggressive and defiant behaviour is associated with decreased right ACC volume in boys but no significant reduction in left ACC volume in girls. These results are consistent with the notion that the right ACC acts as a neuroanatomical correlate of aggressive and defiant behaviour in boys. The authors did not find a significant relationship between aggression-defiance and Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex volumes (vmPC) in either boys or girls. Further, increased levels of negative emotions such as anger are commonly associated with temper tantrums, aggressive outbursts and, more generally, antisocial behaviour (Boes et al, 2008:677).

Previous research led scientists to believe that the ACC has a prominent role in modulating arousal, which is a central feature of negative emotions. ACC activity correlated with overall cortical arousal which is weakened following ACC damage (Paus, 2000:66; Critchley, 2005:157; Tranel & Damasio, 1994:427).

The role of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and frontopolar cortex in regulating emotion is supported by research findings by Strenziok, Krueger, Heinecke, Lenroot, Knutson, Van der Meer and Grafman (2011:2). Aggressive behaviour, according to

these authors, was thought to reflect a failure in the integrity of the brain structures promoting emotion regulation, among other functions. The authors observed that the prefrontal cortex plays a key role in the regulation of aggressive behaviour. The frontal cortex undergoes significant developmental changes until the late 20s (Giedd, 2008:338). Frontal grey matter reaches peak thickness in preadolescent boys at the age of 10.5 years and then begins to decrease gradually. Frontal grey matter is currently thought to be related to a combination of synaptic elimination and increasing white matter volume from ongoing myelination (Giedd, 2008:337).

Strenziok et al (2011:8) uses functional and structural magnetic resonance imaging to measure the blood oxygenation level-dependent signal and cortical thickness. In this block-designed experiment, 14-17 year old adolescents imagined aggressive and nonaggressive interactions with a peer. The study by Strenziok et al (2011:8) showed reduced vmPFC activation associated with imagined aggressive behaviour as well as enhanced aggressive-related activation and cortical thinning with increasing age. Reduced vmPFC activation was associated with greater aggression, indicating that its normal function is to modulate physical aggression in 14-17 year-old healthy male adolescents.

Pauw and Mervielde (2010:318) proposed an integrated taxonomy of temperament/personality traits. Based on this taxonomy, they concluded that there is evidence of differences between temperamental profiles of adolescents who express instrumental proactive aggression and those who become aggressive as a reaction in response to being provoked or frustrated. Further, proactive aggressive adolescents are characterised by callousness and a lack of emotions or empathy. They would score low agreeableness neuroticism. As a result, their aggression is expressed instrumentally and mercilessly.

Adolescents who manifest reactive aggression are characterised by low agreeableness in their personality and, within a temperamental framework, by high anger/irritability. The adolescents display high scores on neuroticism facets of fear, anxiety and sadness. In addition, the adolescents are described by lower Effortful Control and, more specifically, by lower Inhibitory Control. In terms of temperament, these adolescents display more activity and hence are more extroverted. Research

has implicated the construct of callous-unemotional traits, together with two other personality traits, i.e., narcissism and Machiavellianism, in the development of aggressive behaviour (Lau & Marsee, 2013:355). This finding is consistent with bio ecological theory that states that generative dispositions such as temperament characteristics can affect the child's exposure to negative life events such as aggressive behaviour (Lengua & Wachs, 2012:19; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:810). The present study sought to establish whether personality factors were associated with classroom aggression in Zimbabwean urban secondary schools.

### **2.2.1.5 Narcissism**

It has been suggested by previous research that CU traits show a moderate relationship to problem behaviour. Therefore there might be need to consider other factors such as narcissism that might combine with CU traits to increase the risk for adolescent aggression (Lee-Rowland, Barry, Gillen, & Hansen, 2016:2). Narcissism is a personality disorder defined by grandiose self-views and an inflated sense of entitlement and personal superiority (Thomaes & Bushman, 2011:207). In addition, adolescents with narcissistic tendencies engage in proactive aggression, maintain a sense of superiority at all costs, manipulate others and show little empathy for peers (Lee-Rowland et al. 2016:2). Thomaes, Stegge and Othoff (2008:1797) examined the role of shame in inducing aggression in narcissistic adolescents. They found that narcissistic adolescents were more aggressive than others, but only when shamed. Narcissistic adolescents seemed highly motivated to create a grandiose view of themselves. As shameful situations constitute a threat to grandiosity, narcissistic shame-induced aggression can be viewed as a defensive effort to maintain self-worth.

Recent research using both laboratory and field methods indicated that narcissists are aggressive when their ego is threatened (Thomaes & Bushman, 2011:207; Bushman, Baumeister, Thomaes, Ryu, Begeer & West, 2009:427). Thomaes and Bushman (2011:209) however noted that there were controversies relating to research findings on self-views and aggression. Some of the unresolved questions



related to methods of measuring aggression and its conceptualisation.

Prior research (Barry, Frick, Adler & Grafeman, 2007:508; Barry & Kauten, 2013:1) indicated that dimensions of adolescent narcissism differ in their associations with indicators of positive and negative dimensions of psychological functioning. The study by Barry and Kauten (2013:1) investigated correlations between pathological and non-pathological narcissism in adolescents. Results from their study indicated that pathological narcissism was associated with various indicators of maladjustment, including aggression, low self-esteem, internalising problems and poor perceived interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, non-pathological narcissism was positively associated with self-esteem and aggression but negatively associated with internalising problems.

Ojanen, Findley and Fuller (2012:104) examined adolescent narcissism, temperament and social goals in association with peer reported physical and relational aggression. The study established that narcissism was associated with physical aggression via dominance goals for boys and with relational aggression via dominance goals for both genders. This finding is supported by Barry, Grafeman, Adler and Pickard (2007:933). This study has limitations in that it measured narcissism with an instrument used in adults and did not utilise longitudinal data.

Lau and Marsee (2013:363) established that narcissistic traits uniquely predicted overt aggression, relational aggression, delinquency, behavioural dysregulation and emotional dysregulation. Furthermore, the association between narcissism and behavioural and emotional dysregulation suggested that adolescents characterised by narcissistic traits were especially prone to impulsive and irresponsible behaviour, to experience intense emotions (e.g. anger, worry) and to have trouble controlling their emotions (Lau & Marsee, 2013:363; Thomaes et al, 2008).

Munoz, Kimonis, Frick and Aucon (2013:473) argued that different patterns of emotional reactivity characterise proactive and reactive functions of aggressive behaviour and that these types of aggressive behaviours were linked to narcissism. In a study of adolescent boys at a detention centre, Munoz et al (2013:473) found, firstly, that psychopathy-linked narcissism was uniquely related to unprovoked

aggression (i.e. proactive aggression) and to heightened attention to pictures depicting others in distress. Secondly, the findings suggested that there are two kinds of narcissistic people: those who are emotionally stable and aggress proactively, and those who are emotionally labile and aggress reactively. These results were consistent with descriptions of narcissistic individuals as being hyper vigilant to negative cues and exhibiting poor emotional regulation. These characteristics may lead to aggressive and violent behaviour aimed at maintaining dominance over others. These findings may not be generalised to a large community sample of boys and girls since the study was based on a sample of detained boys. Furthermore, the measure used to assess narcissism did not measure all dimensions of narcissism that may be important for understanding aggression. More recent research findings show that psychopathy linked, vulnerable narcissism was positively related to both proactive and reactive aggression and higher levels of vulnerable narcissism when combined with higher levels of CU traits predicted higher levels of aggression in an adolescent sample in the United States (Lee-Rowland, et al. 2016:9).

The studies cited above were mostly cross sectional in nature, using a quantitative approach. Secondly, there existed a conceptual gap in the studies reviewed above in that they failed to integrate biological and social factors to explain aggressive classroom behaviour. This study sought to fill this conceptual gap by adopting a qualitative design to find out how participants attributed the role of biological factors in an ecological framework in explaining classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools.

### **2.2.2 Social factors**

Literature indicated that some of the factors contributing to classroom aggression were social in nature. The following section discusses the different social factors contributing to classroom aggression.

### **2.2.2.1 School Factors**

Several factors associated with the school have been identified as contributing to classroom aggression among students. Classroom structure refers to how teachers design tasks, maintain authority and evaluate student achievement (Bergsmann, Van de Schoot, Scholer, Finsterwald & Spiel, 2013:159). Classroom structure is an important concept in relation to teaching quality (Ames, 1992:261). Bergsman et al. (2013:170) and Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers and Sugars (2008:357), for example, found that classroom structure and teacher quality influenced students' verbal but not physical aggression. Another study guided by bioecological theory that examined revealed that that situates within a bio ecological framework, the classroom structure revealed that in classes with higher norms of teacher support students indicated more prosocial behaviour. But in classes where there was greater teacher conflict students reported more aggression (Henderix, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, Cillessen & Brekelmans, 2016:37). But, unexpectedly, in the aforementioned study differential teacher support was positively related to prosocial behaviour. The authors explain these student behaviour outcomes as due to the teacher functioning as a social referent that influenced peer ecology. The study was a correlational study and as a result, one could not make causal inferences based on the data presented. There is therefore a gap in our knowledge of the role of classroom structure given the contradicting findings that were reviewed above.

In addition, disconnectedness to school may be a causative factor of aggressive behaviour among adolescent secondary school students (Mapfumo & Muchena, 2013:567). Further, Grunseit, Weatherburn and Donnelly (2008:528) examined whether characteristics of the school (e.g. lack of clarity about school rules, school responsiveness to racism, school size, and ethnic composition) were related to the risk of physical violence between students, once individual and family risk factors for violent behaviour had been considered. Developmental factors, including weak parent-child attachment, poor parental supervision, ineffective discipline, parental criminality, large numbers of children and/or family dissolution, led to lowered self-control (Gottfredson & Hitshi, 1990:105). It was hypothesised that most school

violence resulted from the proclivity of students with low self-control to be violent and a failure by school authorities to establish and reinforce norms against violence.

The study by Gruselt et al (2008:541) established that school characteristics and developmental factors both play a role in shaping the risk of violence. Kimble, Russo, Bergman and Galindo (2010:446), O'Neill and Calder (2014:218), and Sukys, Zakrasienne-Staneviciute, Nickus and Sukiene (2011:74), in an enquiry on aggression and school athletics, concluded that aggression from opponents leads to reciprocal aggression from athletes. They further concluded that aggression increased due to competition and, when the emphasis was on winning at all costs, aggression was encouraged. Aggressors specifically targeted outstanding female athletes. Therefore, sporting may significantly contribute to aggression in the school. This outcome may be consistent with other research findings supporting bio ecological theory that reveals that competitiveness in school sport may reduce connectedness and lead to victimization by peers (Berkbigler, 2015: 40).

Scholte, Sentse and Granic (2010:795) examined the extent to which classroom factors (i.e. classroom anti-bullying attitudes and behavioural norms) contributed to individual bullying, after accounting for individual differences. They established that individual anti-bullying attitudes and the general level of bullying in the classroom were related to individual bullying. This points to the importance of peers as socialising agents and is consistent with research findings on aggression showing that contagion exists in adolescence (Cohen & Prinstein, 2006:978).

There are several mechanisms whereby classroom norms influenced an individual's behaviour. An individual can learn through observation that aggression is rewarding as it leads to increased social status or dominance within the class (Cohen & Prinstein, 2006:979). In addition, an adolescent can imitate the behaviour and beliefs from peers that exemplify the identity they want to hold (Duffy & Nesdale 2009:136). Further, poor student-teacher relationships and association with at-risk peers were significantly associated with school violence in Taiwan (Chen & Astor, 2010:1402). Low social status was associated with greater social worth and reactive aggression (Davis & Reyna, 2015:14). Behaviour norms, therefore, foster compliance and conformity from group members (Juvonen & Galvan, 2009:299).The findings

therefore can be explained by attribution theory which states that students seek social approval from peers and peers and adopt impression management strategies to achieve this (Juvonene & Weiner, 1993:338). There is however a gap in our knowledge about the relationship between these group norms and classroom aggressive behaviour in urban multicultural settings.

The studies reviewed above related to factors in countries outside Zimbabwe. There was little research available on school as a social factor within an integrated attribution- ecological framework that causes classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe. This study sought to address these conceptual and geographical gaps in the literature by examining the extent to which school, as a social factor, contributed to classroom aggression in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

#### **2.2.2.2 Peer group Influence**

Closely related to the issue of adapting behaviour norms, discussed above, is the issue of peer influence. Peer groups are known to play an important function in determining adolescents' aggressive behaviour (Cappella & Hwang, 2015:83; Farmer, Xie & Cairns, 2007:215; Estrada, Gilreach, Astor & Benbenishty, 2014:244; Estrada, Gilreach, Astor & Benbenishty, 2013:630). A peer group usually consists of individuals who show similar behaviour patterns and personal attributes (Farmer et al, 2007:215; Sussman, Pokhorel, Ashmore & Brown, 2007:1602; Kirui, Mbugua & Sang, 2011:232). Adolescents with high levels of aggression tend to affiliate with each other, a propensity called "homophily" (Farmer et al, 2007:215, Pokhorel, Sussman, Black & Sun, 2010:250). Pokhorel et al (2010:249) defined adolescent peer group identification as adolescents' affiliation with reputation-based peer groups such as "Goths" or "Jocks". They examined whether adolescents' baseline peer group self-identification predicted their self-reported relational and physical aggression in adolescents in California, USA. The study concluded that peer group self-identification was a salient predictor of physical and relational aggression across gender and school type. Adolescents who identified with high-risk peer groups

tended to report higher levels of physical as well as relational aggression a year later. The results of the aforementioned study might not be generalizable as a convenience sample was used and it was negatively affected by attrition. The study findings can however be explained by peer group interactions within the peer microsystem in bio ecological theory (Swearer, 2014:259).

Another study by Smokowski, Guo, Cotter, Evans and Rose (2015:13) in the United States examined the multilevel risk factors and developmental assets on longitudinal projections of a sample of rural adolescents. The study found that negative peer relationships such as rejection, peer pressure and deviant friends' behaviour significantly predicted aggressive behaviour. Aggressive peers urge their friends to engage in aggressive behaviour through peer pressure. Due to the importance of social status for adolescents, this pressure is difficult to ignore and adolescents might engage in aggression to placate friends and avoid losing social status. The instrument used in the study to distinguish between different types of aggression (e.g. proactive from reactive) limits the interpretation we can make from the results. Nevertheless, the results are consistent with bio ecological theory.

USA studies on adolescent relationships by Letendre (2007:360), Cauffman, Farruggia and Goldweber (2008:353), Guerra, Williams and Shadek (2011:305), Letendre and Smith (2011:48), Adamshick (2010:550) and Waldron (2011:1315) led to a number of conclusions. Firstly, the studies concluded that girls' fights arose from perceptions of slights and insults from other girls and competition for male attention. Antisocial girls were more likely to choose romantic partners who condoned or encouraged aggressive behaviour. Further, girls got bullied by boys and other girls due to sexuality and competition for romantic partners. Also, girls tended to focus on relationships, which they learned from their mothers. They may lack relationship skills, resulting in fights with peers who threatened their social status or their relationships with romantic partners. The studies also arrived at the conclusion that fights over sexual reputations and "stolen" boyfriends were quite common in girls' only schools. When a girl went out with another girl's ex-boyfriend this could lead to verbal and physical aggression. Girls who fought were also framed as "ghetto girls" – a racist stereotype implying students who lived in low-income inner city housing projects associated with crime and violence. The aggressive behaviour that was

caused by frictions over romantic fights could also be explained by bio ecological theory. The girls fight to achieve social status could be accounted for by individual characteristics (microsystem) level peer relationships that are typical of adolescence (Espelage, 2014:258).

There is a gap in our understanding of peer group contribution to aggressive behaviour in classrooms in Zimbabwe secondary schools. Most of the research articles reviewed did not employ an emic research strategy where adolescents themselves are regarded as experts in their experience of classroom aggression. Therefore, the current study closed these methodological and geographical gaps in the literature by examining the role of peer groups in the development of classroom aggressive behaviour in Zimbabwe.

### ***2.2.2.3 Family and adolescent aggression***

Cui, Donnellan and Conger (2007:1549) regard adolescents and their parents as forming a dynamic family system marked by mutual influence. This was premised on the view that parenting depended on reciprocity in parent-child relationships. The study by Cui et al (2007:1551) established that marital conflict over child rearing was a significant predictor of adolescent aggressive behaviour and depressive symptoms and, likewise, adolescent problems significantly predicted conflict over child rearing. The authors, therefore, concluded that there is a bidirectional nature of marital harmony and adolescent functioning. The study however was based on a rural sample and was a passive longitudinal design which limits generalizability to an urban environment. The lack of an experimental design also limits generalizability of the findings. The finding of the study however is consistent with research guided by bio ecological theory showing that the family characteristics (microsystem) such as violence and abuse predicted bullying in school (Espelage, Low, Rao, Hong & Little, 2013:337; Espelage, Low & De La Rue, 2012:313).

According to Poipoi, Agak and Kabuka (2011:30), home factors that predict aggression in Kenyan secondary school students included poor relationships

between parents and children, the manner of disciplining children at home and low levels of home supervision. In addition, parenting and adolescent relationships were related to aggression and delinquent behaviour through parenting domains (Steinberg & Silk, 2002:121; Eichelsheim, Buist, Dekovic, Wissink, Frijns, Van Lier, Koot & Meeus, 2010:293). These parenting approaches were the harmony domain (e.g. support), the autonomy domain (e.g. disclosure, autonomy granting), the conflict domain (e.g. hostility and conflict).

Regarding the harmony domain, previous research showed that high levels of (perceived) parental support were directly or indirectly related to low levels of adolescent delinquency, aggression or other adjustment problems. The autonomy domain showed that higher levels of behavioural autonomy granting and disclosure were associated with low levels of adolescent adjustment problems, whereas, in the conflict domain, negativity in the parent-child relationship (e.g. conflict and hostility) was found to be a strong predictor of adolescent externalising problem behaviour.

Using two Dutch samples, Eichelsheim et al (2010:298) established that adolescent disclosure was more closely related to delinquency than aggression. This indicated that conflict and hostility in the parent-adolescent relationship was mainly related to aggression. The findings of the aforementioned study need to be interpreted with caution as this study used cross sectional data and single informants i.e. adolescents. Some aspects of the study findings contradict other researchers such as Georgiou and Stavrinides (2013:165) that found that while parenting at home seemed to be related to classroom aggression at school parental monitoring was not. The study found that child disclosure was negatively correlated to and was a powerful predictor of bullying (but not victimization). But this study also concurred with Eicheschem et al. that parent –child conflict predicted classroom aggression. This finding was consistent with research in Greek secondary schools, for example, by Bibou-Nakou, Tsiantis, Assimopoulos and Chatzilambou (2013:53) who found that peer aggression was related to family violence, inadequate parenting styles and domestic abuse. The findings are also consistent with bio ecological theory which regards the family as a microsystem context. Parenting is a one of the microsystem level antecedent of adverse peer relationships (Hong, Espelage, Sterzing, 2015:5). The present study examined the association between parent-adolescent



relationships and classroom aggression in secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

Gershoff's (2010:498) study examined the disciplinary practices of mothers in six countries (China, India, Italy, Kenya, The Philippines and Thailand) as well as the relationship between those discipline techniques and child aggression. The study concluded that only three techniques were significantly associated with levels of child aggression and only four techniques were significantly related to levels of child anxiety. Specifically, using corporal punishment, expressing disappointment and yelling or scolding were each associated with increased child aggression, while giving a time out, using corporal punishment, expressing disappointment and shaming were associated with increased child anxiety. The data was cross-sectional and therefore could not allow the author to say conclusively whether the use of these disciplinary techniques predicts more aggression in children or aggressive children elicit more discipline. Gershoff (2010:498) suggests that data points more to parental effect and was inconsistent with "child effect". Longitudinal data would allow a definitive answer to this question. The study also concluded that normativeness moderated the association of corporal punishment frequency with child aggression and child anxiety and yelling and scolding with child aggression. The current study examined the relationship between disciplinary practices and classroom aggression in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

According to Gomez and McLaren (2007:160), Hoeve, Dubas, Eichelsheim and Van der Laan (2009:763), and Rutter (2012:337), there was strong evidence that family factors (e.g. marital discord, negative parenting styles and insecure attachment) are closely associated with aggressive behaviours. Gomez and McLaren (2007:160) examined the relationship between mother and father attachment, self-esteem and aggression. The findings of the study showed that both mother and father attachment were associated positively with self-esteem and negatively with aggression.

A cross-sectional study by Chen and Astor (2010:1403) on a large Taiwanese adolescent student sample did not indicate significant associations between school violence and family socioeconomic status, family conflict, parental monitoring, school engagement and academic achievement. This unexpected finding may be a result of

the Chinese people's choice of conflict handling styles (Tsai & Levenson, 1997:600) and procedural moderators such as research design (Kawabata, Airlink & Tseng, 2011:248). This finding was however different from results of a study in Virginia, USA showing that family members supported physical aggression in schools by their adolescent children (Jaggi & Kliwer, 2015:14). The cited studies are cross-sectional designs which make it difficult for a researcher to make causal inferences. These findings however are consistent with the attribution- ecological theoretical framework which regards the family as an important context for adolescent development.

The studies reviewed showed that there were inconsistencies in findings on the contribution of family factors to classroom aggression in different cultures and adolescents of different sexes. The current study aimed at shedding light on the role of family factors in classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in a largely collectivist country like Zimbabwe

## **2.3 MANIFESTATION OF AGGRESSION**

Literature indicates that there are several ways in which aggression can be realised in the school setting. This section focuses on discussing these numerous forms of aggression.

### **2.3.1 Physical aggression**

Physical aggression is expressed as hitting, kicking and punching. Students enact physical fighting in school as documented by a number of researchers (Larson, 2008:49; Underwood, Beron & Rosen, 2009:357). A study by Kim, Kamphaus, Orpinas and Kelder (2010:95) examined how the manifestation of overt aggression changes during early adolescence. The results of their study indicated that physical aggression declines during early adolescence. With regards to physical aggression trajectories, Kim et al (2010:95) concluded that the male gender predicted higher

physical aggression. They also concluded that indirect aggression was more equitably enacted by girls and boys than direct aggression and physical and indirect aggression were overlapping manifestations of childhood aggression. Studies have also noted a decrease in mean levels of physical aggression over the period from middle childhood to early adolescence (Underwood et al, 2009:357; Card, Stucky & Salawani, 2008:1193; Benson & Buehler, 2012:1222).

From the review of research on physical aggression, it was apparent that there were few studies that had examined the prevalence of physical aggressive behaviours in urban secondary school classrooms in Zimbabwe. Little was known about the gender and age differences in the perpetuation or experience of physical aggression in Zimbabwean classrooms. It was an aim of the current study to fill this gap in the literature.

### **2.3.2 Relational aggression**

Relational aggression has been divided into several smaller and distinguishable sub-types of aggression. These include gossiping, spreading rumours and exclusion as outlined in detail below.

#### **2.3.2.1 Gossiping**

Gossip is the circulation of value-laden information about an individual in the context of privacy and intimacy through friends (Noon & Delbridge, 1993:25; Rosnow & Fine, 1976:11). The following researchers have established that gossiping, as a sub-type of aggression, was experienced by female adolescent participants in schools (Gouws, 2009:72; Gomes, Davis, Baker & Servonsky, 2009:180; Breet, Myburg & Poggenpoel, 2010:522). Coyne, Archer and Eslea's (2006:304) study established that gossiping was perceived to occur more frequently than other forms of indirect aggression. Girls reported more malicious gossiping than boys.

### **2.3.2.2 Spreading rumours**

Colman (2015:666) defines rumour as unverified story or report in a community, circulating by word of mouth. Rumour spreading is therefore a sub-type of aggressive behaviour that differs from gossip in terms of the context (i.e. public circulation versus private). Several researchers have established that adolescent boys and girls were perpetrators of this type of aggression (Gouws, 2009:73; Juvonen, Espinoza & Knifesend, 2012:168; Breet et al, 2010:517; Brook, 2011:76; Young, Boye & Nelson 2006:298; Ojanen et al, 2012:104 Coyne et al, 2006:302; Merrel, Buchanan & Tran, 2006:346). The cited studies are quantitative in design using questionnaires which fail to give detailed description of relational aggression. A qualitative study would be better in revealing detailed descriptions of this type of aggressive behaviour.

### **2.3.2.3 Exclusion**

Peer exclusion is a covert form of rejection that refers to being ignored, avoided and excluded by peers (Menzer, Oh, McDonald, Rubin & Dashiell-Aje, 2010:291; Lunde, Frisen & Hwang, 2006:29-32). The study conducted in the USA by Menzer et al (2010:291) established that withdrawal was associated with exclusion only for European American girls. Several other researchers in the USA (Gazelle, 2008:1604; Sullivan, Farrell & Kliwer, 2006:129) revealed the same results. The cited studies are quantitative in design and therefore fail to give details about the experiences of exclusion as a form of aggressive behaviour. The results from studies reviewed that examined the manifestation of the various sub-types of relational aggression are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological theory as these aggressive behaviours do not occur independent of context. The students who reported experiences of these forms of relational aggression were describing what was happening in the microsystem. The aggressive behaviours either flourish or are discouraged depending on the relationship between the student, the family, the peer group, the school and the culture. There are few studies however that have

examined gender differences in exclusion among Zimbabwean adolescents therefore this phenomenon is included in this study.

### **2.3.3 Cyber aggression**

Studies in the USA and Spain showed that cyber aggression is an increasingly common manifestation of indirect aggression in most countries where mobile phones and the internet are available and where adolescents use websites, instant messaging, text messaging, e-mails and chat rooms (Mishna et al, 2010:362; Ortega, Elipe, Mora-erchian, Genat, Brighi, Guarinin, Smith, Thompson & Tippetti, 2012:342; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010:216; Barnett, Nichols, Sonnentag & Wadian, 2013, 2225). These research findings are consistent with Weiner's (1980.1995) cognitive (attribution)-emotion-action-model of motivated behaviour. The findings are also consistent with the bioecological theory as they reflect chronological linkages as indicated earlier (Espelage et al. 2013:11). The studies reviewed above however used survey methodology which fails to reveal detailed portrayal of the students' experience of this form of aggressive behaviour. In addition the studies used questionnaires which often fail to include the three criteria in that distinguish traditional from cyber bullying e.g. 24/7 nature of cyber bullying, the different aspects of anonymity, the potentially broad audience and fail to report in detail psychometric properties of the assessment instruments (Berne, Frisén, Schultze-Krumbholz, Scheithauer, Naruskov, Luik, Katzer, Erentaite, & Zukauskiene, 2013:322). There are therefore conceptual and geographical gaps in our current understanding of the manifestation of cyber aggression. This study intends to fill this gap by using a qualitative research design using interview guides and focus group discussion guides.

### **2.3.4 Verbal aggression**

Verbal aggression is perpetuated by individuals who engage in arguing, insulting,

making threats, cursing, taunting and using hate speech (McCloskey, Lee, Berman, Norblett & Coccaro, 2007:51; Basch, 2011:620; Geiger & Fischer, 2006:342). Name calling and teasing are the two components of verbal aggression. These two forms of verbal aggression will be discussed in detail below:

#### **2.3.4.1 Teasing**

Teasing is a form of verbal aggression that is common among children and adolescents as evidenced by various studies pointing to this fact, for example, Pšunder (2010:219), in a Swedish study, emphasised that this is a discreet form of aggression that is less noticeable by teachers but can cause a greater impact in the long term than physical aggression. Pšunder (2010:224) submitted that the most common type of teasing referred to the students' physical appearance, often to their being obese, and less often to being short or skinny. The students were also victims of teasing because of the shapes of their faces, their haircuts, clothes and use of accessories (e.g. glasses). In addition, students were teased about their intellectual performance. In addition a quantitative study in the Midwest part of the U.S.A. found that there were sex differences in the relations between teasing experiences and externalizing behaviour. Self-esteem predicted externalizing behaviour among male adolescents but not for females (Gregg, Somers, Pernice-Duca & Dale, 2016:378). The aforementioned quantitative studies that were reviewed used survey research methodology that fails to provide details about students' experience of verbal aggression. The instruments used in these studies for example, The Teasing Questionnaire –revised (Storch, Roth, Coles, Heimeberg, Bravata, & Moser, 2004:681) do not measure all types of teasing while in other cases their psychometric properties are not disclosed. There is therefore a gap in our understanding of this form of verbal aggression in Zimbabwean urban classrooms. The current study using a qualitative design will try to fill this gap.

### **2.3.4.2 Name calling**

Basch (2011:620), Varma-Joschi, Baker and Tanaka (2004:175), Espelage, Low, Polanin and Brown (2013:180), Aboud and Miller (2007:804) reported that the use of hate speech against victims (i.e., words about race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability) was a common form of verbal aggression among adolescents in Canadian schools. Aboud and Miller (2007:803) established that perpetrators of name-calling targeted personal characteristics of victims such as appearance, academic strength, clothes (especially girls), physical weakness (especially boys), skin colour and gender. The quantitative studies that utilized a survey research design which is poor at identifying processes that led to outcomes such as name calling (Patton, 1990:94; Maxwell, 2013:673). The research findings are nevertheless consistent with Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological theory in which students, teachers, and school administrators may reciprocally influence each other resulting in verbal aggression such as teasing and name-calling. The current study that employs a qualitative research design sought to verify that name-calling is the commonest form of classroom aggression among adolescents in schools in Zimbabwe.

## **2.4 IMPACT OF AGGRESSION**

Besides causes and manifestation of aggression, this study was interested in the impact of aggression in the school. The following section reviews literature on the different impacts realised from the perpetration of aggression on victims.

### **2.4.1 Aggression and mental health**

Aggression has also been associated with mental health and the mental state of the individual involved in aggression. This subject is dealt with in detail in sub-section

2.4.2 of the study.

### **2.4.2 Suicidal ideation, depression and aggression**

Rigby (2001:322), in an Australian study examining the health consequences of peer victimisation, concluded that victims of peer aggression were more likely to experience distressing mental and physical states, were more anxious, depressed, socially dysfunctional, less physically well, and more prone to suicidal ideation than other children.

More recent studies such as Nickerson and Slater (2009:227), Kim, Leventhal, Koh and Boyce (2009:23), Hinduja and Patchin (2010:216), Liang, Flisher and Lombard (2007:169) concur that both traditional bullying and cyber-bullying were related to suicidal ideation among adolescents in the USA and that victims of aggression were more likely to attempt suicide than non-victims. Also, violent behaviour and peer victimisation variables were uniquely related to suicidal behaviour while bullying increased the risk for the persistence of suicide ideation for victims and perpetrators among Korean and South African adolescent students, respectively.

Further, a study by Kerr, Washburn, Feingold, Kramer, Ivey and King (2007:817) examined the consequences of aggression on the trajectory of suicidal behaviour and suicide risks among acutely suicidal adolescents in the USA. The study established that aggression may play a role together with other risk factors such as depression in predicting suicide attempts. Another study by Gomes, Davis, Baker and Servonsky (2009:180) using a meta-analysis established that peer relational aggression was significantly correlated with depression among African American adolescent females. This was supported by Young et al (2006:303). Similarly, Nylund, Bellmore, Nishina and Graham (2007:1719), in a study conducted in the USA, established that aggression negatively impacts on adolescent students' wellbeing. Boys in the study felt that the school environment was unsafe. This led to other maladjustment indicators such as depressive symptoms.



Omoniyi (2013:74) found that bullying had a significant effect on depression and suicidal ideation in girls when compared to boys. In fact, the impact of being bullied on depression was higher in those who had suffered indirect bullying than in those who were victims of direct bullying. Bonanno and Hymel (2010:433) suggested that general feelings of hopelessness were not found to be significantly related to self-reported victimisation among a sample of Canadian adolescent students. Social hopelessness was found to be significantly related to both victimisation and suicidal ideation. Bonanno and Hywel (2010:433) observed that this meant that social hopelessness partially mediated the relationship between victimisation and suicidal thoughts. In addition, perceived social support from family was a potential factor moderating the link between victimisation and suicidal ideation. The major limitation of the studies so far reviewed, as highlighted by Kim and Leventhal (2009:133) and Heilbron and Prinstein (2010:390), was the cross-sectional nature of the design. As a result of such a design, one could not make causal inferences. These findings however are consistent with bioecological theory, which regards family as a critical context influencing proximal factors and the resultant developmental outcomes.

Heilbron and Prinstein (2010:388) examined concurrent and longitudinal associations among peer victimisation, peer status, and self-injurious thoughts and behaviours (i.e. suicidal ideation and non-suicidal self-injury) in a sample of adolescents in the USA. The major finding was that experiences of overt victimisation were significantly associated with increases in trajectories of suicidal ideation in girls only over a two-year follow up period. Overt victimisation was also concurrently associated with non-suicidal self-injuries. The effects of aggression on suicidal ideation and non-suicidal injuries were observed even after controlling levels of depressive symptoms.

Another study of interest was by Swearer, Napolitano, Collins, Haye, Radliff and Wang (2011:45). In their review of literature on internalising problems in students involved in bullying, they noted that adolescents who are depressed typically report feelings of sadness, anger, worthlessness and hopelessness. They may also experience distorted thinking and poor problem solving skills, loss of appetite, insomnia, psychomotor agitation, fatigue and suicidal ideation. They also submitted that victims of bullying experienced the highest rates of depressive symptom

disorders and individuals who were victimised typically experienced social anxiety. According to Swearer et al (2011:45), the adolescent student victim of bullying may manifest his or her anxiety by skipping classes shared with the perpetrator to avoid potential conflict and harassment. Other common problems co-occurring with anxiety were depression, loneliness and school refusal behaviours.

Swearer et al (2011:49) further examined the developmental relations between negative psychological outcomes for students involved in bullying such as depression and anxiety in a longitudinal study of American adolescents. The results of the study indicated that students who previously or currently bullied others engaged in significantly more physical and relational aggression than students who were victims or were not involved in bullying. Further, victims of bullying were significantly more depressed and more anxious than both bullies and the students who were not involved in bullying. Generally, Swearer et al (2011:49) noted that the experience of bully perpetration and victimisation had a long-term negative impact on externalising and internalising symptoms.

Nabuzoka, Ronning and Handegard (2009:849) carried out a study in England to examine the levels of different types of exposure to bullying of secondary school students and the extent to which those exposed would endorse reactions of avoidance and of retaliation/vengeance. It also investigated the psychological adjustment of the children associated with exposure to bullying and their reactions. The results of the study by Nabuzoka et al (2009:859) showed that, among the victims, boys scored higher than girls on the desire for retaliation/vengeance as externalising behaviours while girls scored higher than boys on internalising behaviour. Experience of bullying victimisation, rather than merely witnessing it, was associated with internalising behaviours for both boys and girls.

The results of the study by Nabuzoka et al. (2009:860) discussed above show that the direct experience of being bullied resulted in psychological maladjustment. Furthermore, the study indicated that gender, type of exposure to bullying and the way these two factors interact are significant for determining the consequences of bullying.

Another study reporting on the consequences of traditional and cyber bullying was by Ortega et al (2012:342). The results of this European study indicated that the emotion most often reported by pupils, for both traditional and cyber-bullying, was feeling “angry” (with the exception of Spanish cyber victims who reported not being bothered). About 40% of victims reported feeling angry after being bullied. The anger response means that the victim wants to take action to curtail the danger. English victims were the most affected, particularly compared to the Italian sample. With regards to gender, the study established that repetitive bullying episodes were predictive of intense emotional responses of anxiety and depression in girls but not in boys. In addition, younger students were more likely to be affected than older ones. This implies that, as students mature, they are better able to manage the emotional impact of bullying (Ortega et al, 2012:353). These findings mean that bullying, irrespective of type, had a damaging impact on the majority of victims.

A Swedish study by Lunde, Frisen and Hwang (2006:29-33) examined the impact of bullying and other forms of victimisation on different aspects of 10 year-old Swedish boys’ and girls’ body self-esteem. Body self-esteem, according to Lunde et al. (2006:25), refers to people’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their bodies and its appearance. The results of the study indicated that social exclusion was related to 10 year-old girls’ evaluations of their general appearance, to evaluations of their weight, and to beliefs of how others perceived their appearance than did bullied boys. Appearance teasing was associated with girls’ poor body esteem in terms of general appearance and beliefs of others’ views of their appearance. For boys, teasing was associated with poorer body image in all dimensions.

Results of a meta-analysis by Underwood et al (2009:1207) led the researchers to conclude that direct aggression was more strongly and uniquely associated with emotional dysregulation, conduct problems, low peer acceptance and peer rejection. In contrast, indirect aggression was more strongly and uniquely associated with internalising problems.

A study in the USA examined the relationship between suicidal ideation and school bullying experience after controlling for depression and delinquency (Espelage & Holt, 2013:527). The results of the aforementioned study revealed that involvement

in bullying in any role is linked to increased risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour. There was a lack of research on the impact of classroom aggression on depression or suicidal behaviour in adolescent boys and girls in Zimbabwe secondary schools, hence this study.

The findings of the studies reviewed that revealed that the experience of aggressive behaviour is associated with suicidal behaviours are consistent with the attribution-ecological theoretical framework and research that guides this study: The negative peer interactions within the microsystem predict suicidal behaviour. Attribution theory also posits that adolescents who are perceived as generally at fault are treated harshly by peers and resort to suicidal behaviour and similarly those adolescents who make characterological self-blame attributions are likely to suffer from depression or suicidal ideation. There is a gap in the literature in that limited research has been done that examines the relationship between classroom aggressive behaviour in Zimbabwean urban secondary schools that looks at the bio ecological system as a whole. The studies cited above are quantitative, specifically, surveys which are cross sectional in character. These studies cannot make accurate conclusions about aggressive behaviour being the cause of suicide because of the problem of methodological weakness. Where a longitudinal design was used, the sample selected was not representative of a diverse population and the instruments employed measured a very narrow range of suicidal behaviours. Therefore, the results may not generalize to Zimbabwe. The current study will use a qualitative research design, which might give a more detailed explanation of the way aggression relates to suicidal behaviours.

### **2.4.3 Aggression and teen pregnancy**

Fite, Johnson-Motoyama, Rubens and Peaches (2014:1) evaluated the link between proactive and reactive functions of aggression and teen parenting in a sample of 142 Latino high school students residing in the USA. Proactive aggression was uniquely associated with teen pregnancy. This was consistent with previous research based on problem behaviour theory and other developmental models (Jessor 1992:374;

Moffit, Caspi, Dickson, Silva & Stanton, 1996). Proactive aggression was also associated with callous-unemotional traits (Fite, Stoppelbein & Greening, 2009; Marsee & Frick, 2007), which may contribute to adolescents ignoring potentially negative outcomes associated with their problem behaviour. Proactive aggression was less common than reactive aggression and was viewed as the more serious function of aggression (Fite et al, 2013:8). A second study examined the relationship between bullying behaviour at the age of eight and becoming a mother under the age of 20 in Finland (Lahti, Sourander, Klimke, Niemela, Sillanmaki, Piha, Kumpulainen, Tamminen, Moilnen & Almquist, 2011:49). The results indicated that female bullies were at risk of becoming teenage mothers, regardless of the baseline psychopathology or previously known family-related risk factors. The two studies reviewed seemed to suggest that some forms of aggressive behaviour were associated with teen pregnancy. It was not clear whether aggression independent of other factors influenced adolescent girls' sexual behaviour leading to teenage pregnancy. The current study proposes to examine the relationship between classroom aggression and teenage pregnancy in Harare urban secondary schools using a qualitative research design. The studies cited in the review are based on quantitative research designs, which are mostly surveys, and therefore the conclusions reached may not be accurate i.e. one could not safely conclude that aggressive behaviour resulted in teenage pregnancy. The present study uses a multi-method qualitative design to overcome some of the methodological problems in the studies reviewed. The findings from the cited studies nevertheless support ecological theory which posits that the child- family interactions influence peer relationships leading to teenage pregnancies. For example, girls' pre-marital sexual behaviour is related to whether the mother was a teen parent or not.

#### **2.4.4 Aggression and academic performance**

Pioneering work by Loveland, Lounsbury, Welsh and Buboltz (2007:167) investigated the role of the "Big Five" personality traits of agreeableness, openness to experience, conscientiousness, neuroticism and extraversion and physical

aggression in predicting grade point averages (GPA) of adolescent British students. The results indicated that physical aggression accounted for significantly more variance in the GPA of females than males, even after controlling for the Big Five traits. Lounsbury et al. (2007:172) suggested that the aggression was negatively related to academic achievement. Firstly, aggressive students experienced trauma associated with social rejection, which led to academic difficulties. Secondly, teachers allocated lower marks to aggressive students because they interfered with classroom management.

Another study related to the above, by Barthelemy and Lounsbury (2009:166), investigated whether aggression added incremental validity above the Big Five personality factors in predicting grades in an English adolescent sample. The study used archival data analysis. The results indicated that aggression did add incremental validity above and beyond the Big Five. There was a stronger correlation between aggression and academic success than any of the Big Five personality traits. Further, there was a high correlation between aggression and GPA for females. Barthelemy and Lounsbury (2009:168) offered two possible explanations for these findings. One of the findings was that the adolescents acted out aggressively to mask their academic problems. A second explanation was that females who were acting out aggressively may not have been particularly engaged in their academic work.

The results of a longitudinal study conducted in the USA by Ma, Phelps, Lerner and Lerner (2009:888) suggested that involvement in bullying as a bully negatively predicted academic competence above and beyond the influences of sex, maternal education and academic competence in the prior year. Another key finding was that both educational expectations and school engagement were found to serve as developmental assets in the context of bullying. These developmental assets enhanced academic competence for adolescents involved in bullying.

Aggression may inhibit school engagement and social relationships (Farmer & Xie, 2007:464). Students who were chronically victimised (either physically or socially) by peers were more likely to withdraw from instructional activities, have chronic attendance problems and experience academic difficulties (Juvonen et al, 2012:394).

Peer exclusion, victimisation and low academic self-concept worked together to contribute to academic engagement difficulties and subsequent problems (Buhs, 2005:407). Omoniyi (2013:73) observed that victims of bullying often fear school and consider it an unhappy and unsafe place. Dropout rates and absenteeism were higher among victimised students (Beane, Miller & Spurling, 2008:205).

Beran and Lupart (2009:82), in a Canadian study, established that adolescents who were bullied did not necessarily obtain low marks at school. Rather, adolescents who were harassed were likely to do poorly in school if they had difficulty interacting with peers and managing behaviour problems such as hyperactivity and misconduct. Beran and Lupart (2009:82) observed that research has yielded inconsistent results about the relationships between bullying and achievement. They noted that some studies (Olweus, 1978; Perry, Kusel & Perry, 1988) showed that pupils who were bullied experienced a drop in academic performance while others showed no significant relationship between them (Woods & Wolke, 2004:150). Beran and Lupart (2009:83) argued that the relationship between these two variables was complex and not direct. Specifically, when adolescents were bullied, their sense of competence for social and academic situations may be impaired only when they experienced behaviour and peer problems. In addition to personal competence, another explanation for the indirect relationship between bullying and achievement was the experience of fear. Victimised students may fail to report bullying and may not trust teachers. Victimised students may also avoid approaching teachers when they encounter academic problems.

To illustrate the complexity of the relationship between aggressive behaviour and academic achievement, another study by Jenkins and Demaray (2015:235) was reviewed. It also examined the role of academic self-concept on the relationship between victimisation and academic achievement in an American adolescent sample. The results of the aforementioned study found a significant indirect effect on the relationship between victimisation and academic achievement for girls but not for boys (Jenkins & Demaray, 2015:243). The gender differences could not be satisfactorily explained through depression for girls.

Another study by Lacey and Cornell (2013:278) conducted in 284 high schools in

Virginia, USA. revealed that self-reported teasing and bullying was not related to academic performance. This finding seems to contradict previous research findings. The studies reviewed are quantitative and utilize surveys with the result that one cannot really infer a causal relationship between the variables with confidence. But despite this weakness, the findings are consistent with the attribution and ecological framework guiding the study. Aggressive students attribute responsibility for achievement outcomes to external factors beyond their control, which reduces their personal responsibility. Poor academic performance occurs because of negative interactions involving peers, teachers and parents.

Basch (2011:619), in a study based on a review of literature, established the association between exposure to, and exhibition of, aggression and violence and unfavourable educational outcomes. Basch (2011:619) found empirical support for cognition, school connectedness and absenteeism as causal pathways through which aggression and violence impeded learning. Evidence cited by Basch (2011:621) showed that aggressive behaviour impacts academic performance negatively through internalising and externalising behaviour. (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara & Kernic, 2005:1026; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer & Perry, 2003:311; Juvonen et al, 2012:395). Students who were victims of aggression lacked connectedness; as a result, they failed to participate in school. But the directionality of the association between aggression and connectedness was not clear.

Fite, Hendrickson, Rubens, Gabrielli and Spencer (2013:201) examined unique associations between reactive (aggression in response to provocation) and proactive (goal-oriented calculated aggression) sub-types of aggression and academic performance in a sample of adolescents in the USA. Further, the study evaluated whether peer rejection accounted for the link between these aggression subtypes and academic performance. Findings of the study by Fite et al (2013:201) indicated that high levels of reactive, not proactive, aggression were uniquely associated with low levels of academic performance and that peer rejection accounted for this association. Our current understanding of the relationship between classroom aggression and academic achievement was unclear. The research reviewed has been conducted in developed countries and few studies have been conducted in Zimbabwe secondary schools to examine the exact nature of this relationship.



### 2.4.5 Aggression and student dropout

Rumberger and Rotermund's (2012:498) model of high school performance suggests that there are three interrelated domains consisting of achievement, persistence and attainment. Achievement is usually reflected in grades and test scores while educational persistence is reflected in students remaining in school or dropping out. Finally, attainment is reflected in a student progressing in school. The study by Rumberger and Rotermund (2012:501) suggests that misbehaviour, e.g., aggression, may result in student dropout.

Townsend et al (2008:21) sought to investigate whether bullying predicted high school dropouts in Cape Town, South Africa. The findings of their study indicate that girls in the "bully-victim" category were significantly more likely to drop out of school. Bully-victims were at an elevated risk of a range of adverse psychosocial and school-related consequences of bullying behaviour. In addition, continued involvement in bullying behaviour means continued exposure to the negative effects of bullying, such as absenteeism, poor academic performance and psychological distress. Townsend et al (2008:29) concluded that the accumulation of these adverse consequences may possibly lead to dropping out of school. These findings were supported by a correlational study in the USA by Cornell, Gregory, Huang and Fan (2012:145) whose results suggest that the level of teasing and bullying reported by both grade nine students and teachers was predictive of cumulative dropout counts over four years after the cohort reached the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Cornell et al (2012) argued that the student may decide to drop out of school for a number of reasons. Firstly, prevalence of teasing and bullying may lead to disengagement and avoidance of school, distraction and inattentiveness in the classroom and, ultimately, poor academic performance (Juvonen & Graham, 2014:169; Juvonen et al, 2012:395; Ayers, Clarke & Murray, 2015:74; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012:496). In addition, students involved in teasing and bullying may be more likely to receive disciplinary measures such as suspension that would also contribute to further disengagement and academic difficulties (Ma, Phelps, Lerner & Lerner, 2009:866). Finally, teachers may find their jobs difficult and spend more time

dealing with disruptive behaviour by trying to engage unmotivated students.

Adolescent students who were victims of peer aggression have lower academic performance and engage less in academic tasks than do other students (Rothon, Head, Klineberg & Stansfeld, 2011:583). However, Juvonen et al (2011:168) could not make causal inferences about victimisation experiences affecting academic performance on the analysis presented. In addition, Rothon et al (2011:583) established that high levels of support from friends and moderate (but not high) family support was able to protect bullied adolescents from poor academic achievement. Unfortunately, support was not sufficient to protect adolescents against health difficulties such as depression that resulted from bullying.

Research indicated that not all students involved in violence absent themselves from school, however. The aggressive students' perceived support was important in influencing their sense of safety and fear of attending school. Berkowitz and Benbenishty (2012:67) examined the type of involvement in school violence and the student's perception of teachers' support, safety and absence from school because of fear. The authors found that the bully-victim group among Israeli adolescent students reported the lowest levels of teacher support and feelings of security and missed school because of fear more often. These students missed school because they feared getting hurt (McClure & Shirataki, 1989:488; Gastic, 2008:399). The authors further noted that this group felt the highest level of insecurity since they experienced a lot of victimisation and, at the same time, were very aggressive towards others. The studies reviewed are mainly quantitative and their conclusions are limited because they cannot draw accurate conclusions because of the design. The samples studied are drawn from mainly American and European populations. As a result of these characteristics, the findings may not generalize to the Zimbabwean situation. The research findings from the studies reviewed are however consistent with the attribution-bio ecological framework guiding this study. The risk for aggressive students to dropping out of school results from the reciprocal interaction between the adolescent and the social network of family, school, peers and community. The risk of dropout is also dependent on whether they adopt adaptive or maladaptive attributions.

There were no recent studies that have examined the relationship between classroom aggression and student dropout in Zimbabwean secondary schools. The present study set out to close this gap in the literature.

## **2.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed related literature to locate the study in the context of broader and existing pool of knowledge. The literature review carried out in this chapter was organised according to three aspects of classroom aggression, namely, its causes, manifestation and impact. These three aspects of the topic derive from the sub-research questions listed in Chapter 1. The causal factors of aggression that have been examined in the literature reviewed include the biological factors and social factors. The research findings reviewed indicated that classroom aggression manifests the following subtypes of aggressive behaviour: physical aggression, verbal aggression, relational aggression and bullying. Cyber aggression was a more recent form of aggression that is found in the literature. Gaps in the literature were also identified and the results are related to the theoretical framework. The next chapter discusses the research methodology and provides a rationale for procedures implemented to accomplish the objectives of the study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to determine the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression on adolescent students in Harare. In Chapter 2, a review of the related literature on the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression was done. This chapter discusses the research methodology for the study. A rationale for the qualitative research design that was selected for the study is provided. The population and the sampling strategies for the study are described. This is followed by a description of the instruments and data collection procedures. Thereafter data analysis procedures are described. A discussion of how the study addresses ethical issues is done. Finally, the strategies of verification implemented to demonstrate validity of the study are outlined.

### **3.2 PARADIGMS**

Researchers should have an awareness of the beliefs and philosophical assumptions that they bring to any study they engage in (Creswell, 2013:15; Lincoln & Guba, 2013:35). The philosophical ideas influence research practice through paradigms. The concept of paradigm was drawn from Kuhn for whom it meant a collection of beliefs, values, techniques shared by members of a given community (Maxwell, 2013:42). But for social science researchers, a paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that influences action” (Maxwell, 2013:42; Lincoln & Guba, 2013:59).

A paradigm comprises four philosophical assumptions, namely, ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (how knowledge is known), axiological (values) and methodology (procedures) (Lincoln, Lynam & Guba, 2011:91; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:13; Creswell, 2013:22). Constructivism was selected as the research paradigm on which this study is anchored. This paradigm will be discussed in more detail

below.

### **3.2.1 Constructivism**

A constructivist paradigm upholds that there are multiple and valid realities to human experience that are uncovered through intense reflection (Schwandt, 1994:118; Schwandt, 2007:257; Lincoln & Guba, 2013:41; Creswell, 2013:20-21; Denzin, Lincoln & Guba, 2011:92). Such reflection is nurtured through participant researcher interaction and dialogue. Therefore, it is accepted that the researcher and the participant co-construct findings and interpretations from their dialogue (Creswell, 2013:25; Silverman, 2010:112; Merriam, 2009:8; Lincoln & Guba, 2013:40).

In the present study, the researcher was interested in the experiences of aggression of learners and teachers on what they thought were the causes of such aggression, its manifestation and impact on students' wellbeing. The researcher assumed that there would be multiple realities, where one student or teacher's experience would differ from another's. By engaging participants in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher assumed that a new understanding of classroom aggression, its causes and impact would be co-constructed in the historical and cultural context of Harare urban secondary schools.

## **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.3.1 Introduction**

Researchers concur that a research design is a plan for conducting the study (Creswell, 2013:49; Babbie, 2011:91). In this plan, what should have been salient was what the researcher needed to find out and a justification of the best way of doing it. Kumar (2012:94), on the other hand, defines a research design as a

procedural plan that is adopted by the researcher to answer questions, validly, objectively, accurately and economically. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:20) observed that “a research design is the procedure for conducting the study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data will be obtained”. They added the research design indicates the general plan: how the research is set up, what happens to the participants, and what methods of data collection are used. This view is similar to that of Mason (2002:30) who suggests that the plan for the study should provide answers to three broad questions: (1) What is my research about? (i.e. what is the phenomenon to be investigated?) What might constitute the evidence of that phenomenon? Why is this phenomenon worth investigating? (2) What is the strategy for linking research questions, methods and evidence? (3) How will the proposed research take account of relevant ethical, political and moral concerns?

There are researchers who believe that a research design should not be pre-packaged but should be like an interactive model (Maxwell, 2013:3; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013:17-19). This is conceptualised as an interactive model consisting of the following components: goals, conceptual framework, methods and validity that clustered around the research question (Maxwell, 2013:3).

The present study adopted a qualitative design, which is discussed below, to explore and understand the issue of adolescent aggression.

### **3.3.2 Qualitative design**

A qualitative research design is a plan that provides the logical structure that guides the researcher to address the research problems and answer the research question using non-numeric empirical evidence (Staller, 2010:1159; DeForge, 2010:1253). The qualitative research design was selected because the overall purpose of the study was to understand how students made sense of their lives and their experiences of classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe (Merriam, 2009:23). The qualitative research design thus enabled the researcher to focus on process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:322; Creswell, 2013:48).

Qualitative research is carried out in the field, in the participants' habitat (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:348). In this study, a naturalist research refers to research in which the researcher is firmly positioned within the community and setting under study (Athens, 2010:87). The researcher engages in activities that are naturally occurring in such settings, e.g., talking to people (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:8). When participants are in their natural habitats, they are likely to show normal behaviour (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:348). Furthermore, the qualitative research design allows the researcher to have context sensitivity (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:46; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:322). The qualitative research design is appropriate as it allows the study of a phenomenon to be conducted in natural settings such as schools and school classrooms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:3; Creswell, 2013:45; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:348). This study qualified as a qualitative research because the researcher carried out the research on classroom aggression in naturalistic settings, i.e., school classrooms.

Qualitative researchers try to create a holistic account (Creswell, 2013:47; Lichtman, 2010:15). For researchers to develop a complex understanding and explanation of a phenomenon under study, they need to examine it from multiple perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:324; Creswell, 2013:47). The current study used a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups in order to create a deep understanding and explanation of classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools.

Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through document analysis, observation and interviewing participants (Creswell, 2013:45; Lichtman, 2010:16). The researcher is therefore the key instrument. This is applicable to the current study as the researcher designed the focus group questions and semi-structured interview schedules and collected the data himself.

Qualitative research is mainly characterised by the use of inductive logic (Merriam, 2009:15). This occurs when researchers collect data from interviews and focus group discussions, for example, to construct themes. But it has been argued that qualitative research also uses deductive logic as it uses a theoretical framework to interpret and build themes from the data (Merriam, 2009:16; Creswell, 2013:45;

Lichtman, 2010:14). Researchers can use methods such as content and thematic analysis to generate themes. These methods can be used inductively or deductively depending on the purpose of study (Vaisimoradi, Tururen & Bondas, 2013:401). The use of inductive and reasoning is applicable to a study in which data analysis is thematic.

Qualitative researchers try to establish and understand the meaning that participants impart about the phenomenon or issue (Creswell, 2013:47; Merriam, 2009:14). Furthermore, it is argued that those participants' interpretations of their experiences may further imply multiple perspectives on a subject and diverse views (Creswell, 2013:47). This was applicable to the current study as it used focus groups and in-depth interviews whose primary aim was to establish participant meanings.

Ethnographic approaches are used in educational contexts to explore meaning making and produce "thick description", with the aim of "making the strange familiar" or "rendering the familiar strange" (Runswick-Cole, 2011:77; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:343). Ethnography uses methods in qualitative studies that include interviews and focus groups (Runswick-Cole, 2011:77; Creswell, 2013:93). The present study was suitable as an ethnographic qualitative design as it helped the researcher to analyse the experiences of aggressive students in classrooms in Harare schools whose voices and meaning making was inadequately represented in ordinary forums.

### **3.4 POPULATION**

Population refers to the entire set of people or data that are of interest to a researcher (Beins, 2009:107). Population is the total group of individuals to which the results can be generalised (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:159). The target population is the specific population used in the study (Neuman, 2009:92). The target population for this study consisted of 87,937 adolescent students aged between thirteen and eighteen years and 10,362 teachers in 92 urban secondary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province (Ministry of Primary and Secondary



Education, Provincial Education Office, 2014).

### **3.5 SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

A sample is a group of subjects or participants from whom the data is collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:129). The study used non-probability sampling strategies that are recommended for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009:77). The study combined purposive with snowball sampling (Patton, 2002:181). The purposeful or purposive sampling was selected as a form of non-probability sampling (Merriam, 2009:77; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:138). Purposeful sampling is a method of identifying participants on the basis of some characteristic which the researcher chooses to enable him to explore the central themes in detail and questions pertinent to study (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014:113; Bryman, 2012:18). The members of a sample are selected to represent a type in relation to key criteria (Ritchie et al, 2014:113). This is meant to ensure that the key constituencies of relevance to the research question are covered. In addition, this ensures that, within each of the key criterion, enough variety is included so that the influence of the characteristic concerned can be explored (Ritchie et al, 2014:113).

There are different approaches to purposive sampling, designed to yield different types of sample composition depending on the study's aims and coverage (Ritchie et al, 2014:114). Some examples of purposive sampling are: homogenous samples, maximum variation samples, extreme cases, stratified purposive sampling, critical or typical case sampling and politically important cases (Ritchie et al, 2014:114; Miles & Huberman, 2014:31; Creswell, 2013:154). This was applicable to this study that used purposive sampling to select participants for in-depth interviews. The criteria for inclusion are discussed in greater detail below.

The students and teachers, who were selected to participate in the present study, had personal experience of classroom aggression in school, which was the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2013:156; Merriam, 2009:77; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:138; Miles & Huberman, 2014:32). The researcher believed that

these participants would be information rich cases from whom most could be learnt (Merriam, 2009:77). This decision was supported by other studies showing that, in purposeful sampling, people who are informed (knowledgeable) about a phenomenon are selected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:38; Chireshe, 2013:351; Braun & Clarke, 2013:56). In addition, for student participants, the other criteria were prioritised as follows: that they were: adolescents between 13 and 18 years of age, conversant with the English language, male and female and all ethnic and racial groups. In Zimbabwe, students enrol into secondary schools at about the age of 13 years and complete “A” level at about the age of 18 years. English is the language of instruction in Zimbabwe from primary school and throughout the secondary school. This criterion would minimize the need for translation and possible distortions of participant explanations. Teacher participants, on the other hand, had to have had experience of student aggressive behaviour, be it male or female, and were between 25 and 64 years of age. Trainee teachers need to complete four years of secondary school. They would be aged about 21 years to get a diploma in education but would be slightly older to get a degree and a teacher’s certificate. The minimum age of 25 is meant to ensure that participants had experience in teaching students in a secondary school. Teachers retire at age 65 years. The cut off date of 64 therefore was meant to include only teachers who are actively engaged with students and were familiar with interacting with aggressive students in classroom. Personal experience of classroom aggression would it was assumed yield rich data as argued earlier.

There were certain difficulties in accessing aggressive adolescent students because, if they were perpetrators, they feared being identified as they might be punished by the school or, if they were victims, they were embarrassed and did not wish to make their circumstances known. Aggression is a characteristic that adolescent students do not readily disclose to a researcher (Ritchie et al, 2014:129). In addition, the antecedents of aggression may relate to sensitive factors such as drug use, gang membership or sexual abuse. For these reasons, the group that the researcher accessed may be viewed as a “hidden population” (Neuman, 2009:104). The present study therefore also used “snowball” sampling to access hidden or vulnerable populations (Neuman, 2009:90; Babbie, 2011:193; Braun & Clarke, 2013:58). In

snowball sampling, participant referrals are the basis for choosing a sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:327).

In the present study, after the interview took place, the researcher asked the participant if he/she could suggest another student who met the criteria but who was dissimilar to him/her and might want to be interviewed. The requirement that those sampled on the basis of a referral by a participant who had been interviewed be dissimilar was a strategy to limit the tendency of snowball sampling to compromise the diversity of the sample frame (Ritchie et al, 2014:129). The same inclusion criteria, which were derived from the purpose of the study and the research question, were used to select participants for both purposive and snowball sampling (Willig, 2013:3742; Creswell, 2013:155; Merriam, 2009:77).

### **3.6 Sample Size**

There is no definitive and unambiguous guidance from qualitative research practitioners on how large a sample size should be (Bryman, 2012:18). When answering the question “How many interviews is enough?”, most seasoned qualitative researchers’ response is that “it depends” (Edwards & Baker, 2012:6). Some researchers recommend that data collection continues until saturation is achieved (Creswell, 2013:157; Ritchie et al, 2014:117; Edwards & Baker, 2012:5). While saturation is ideal, researchers fail to specify the sample size at the beginning of a research project.

Edwards and Baker (2012:8) further note that to determine the sample size in qualitative research depends on a number of reflections such as heterogeneity of the population, the number of selection criteria, the extent to which nesting of criteria is needed, groups of special interest, multiple samples within one study and type of data-collection methods. Ritchie et al (2014:117) suggest that, as a rule of thumb, a study involving individual interviews has usually fewer than 50 participants. Adler and Adler (2012:10) advise a sample size of between 12 and 60, with 30 as the average.

Taking into consideration all the above views, the researcher decided that, to answer the research question adequately, the study had purposive samples consisting of forty students and fifteen teachers from ten registered urban secondary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province for in-depth interviews. The schools are designated as S1 if they are former Group A, i.e., formerly only for white students and S2 schools which are formerly Group B schools that were reserved for black students. The characteristics of the participants are summarised in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Descriptive profile of sample of school sites and participants**

Participant	School Type	Number	Biographical variable	Variable description	Number
	S1	6	Gender		
Students	S2	4		Female	19
				Male	21
				Total	40
			Age		
				13-15	16
				16-18	24
Teachers			Gender	Female	7
				Male	8
				Total	15
			Age	30-39	7
				40-49	6
				50-59	2

### 3.7 Instrumentation

Focus groups and in-depth interviews are often used in the same study in a qualitative multi-method design (Finch, Lewis & Turley, 2014:1423; Galletta, 2013:22; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:176; Creswell, 2013:45). Focus groups might precede or follow individual in-depth interviews in order to explore relevant aspects of a topic and to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Finch et al,

2014:1423; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:177). In the present study, the researcher adopted a multi-method qualitative research design that combined focus groups and in-depth individual interviews to produce rich data and to get a deep understanding of aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, it was considered that the use of two qualitative methods would be a form of triangulation that would enhance trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.7.1 Semi-structured Interview schedule**

The present study used semi-structured interview schedules to collect data from individuals.

Interviews are used because they are suited to the process or experience-type research questions about the meaning of events and activities used in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013:1830; Kvale, 2007:10; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:1). Seidman (2013:7) highlighted that qualitative research is the study of meaning and requires access to subjective interpretations that people attach to their objective circumstances. This is provided by the use of the semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:241).

The semi-structured interview is used in qualitative studies because it resembles everyday conversation (Packer, 2011:47). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:5) suggest that an “interview is a conversation that has a structure and purpose”. In addition, the semi-structured interview is used in qualitative research because of its adaptability as it accommodates a wide range of research purposes and allows the researcher to engage the participant more fully into the topic under study (Galletta, 2013:833).

The interview stage is normally prepared with a script or interview guide that structures the course of the interview (Galletta, 2012:70; Kvale, 2007:56). An interview guide is a script that structures the course of the interview more or less tightly (Kvale, 2007:56). The advantage of using an interview guide is that it allows the researcher to collect the same general information from each candidate and yet it

is flexible enough to allow him/her to take into account perceived prompts from the participants (Smith, 2009:58; Rubin & Rubin, 2011:147).

### **3.7.2 Focus group discussion guide**

A focus group discussion involves a small homogenous group of people with a moderator who asks a set of targeted questions designed to obtain collective views about a specific topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:363; Merriam, 2009:93).

A number of studies have found that it is appropriate to use focus groups when investigating sensitive issues involving “vulnerable” or “hidden population” (Finch et al, 2014:1707; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:176; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013:389). Focus groups facilitate the discussion of sensitive issues involving vulnerable groups by offering peer support and reassurance to participants when they make disclosures (Finch et al, 2014:1707). While the above observation is accepted, it is recommended that researchers should observe that when sensitive topics are discussed in focus groups, the questions should be broad (Hennink, 2014:27). The focus group also allows the researcher to generate data from multiple voices (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:167). The researcher therefore found the focus group suitable as the subject of aggression was a sensitive issue and the adolescent students who made the bulk of the participants were a vulnerable group.

Recently, it was noted that two perspectives affect the design of focus groups and the type of evidence that is generated (Ryan, Gangha, Culbertson & Carlson, 2013:2; Belzile & Oberg, 2012:461). The first perspective is the individualised social psychology perspective which disregards group interaction in data analysis (Belzile & Oberg, 2012:461). The second is the social constructionist perspective that regards group interaction as important when analysing data (Belzile & Oberg, 2012:462; Ryan et al., 2013:4). A narrative type of data analysis was therefore adopted to capture the multiple meanings and richness of the conversations (Ryan et al, 2013:4; Finch et al, 2014:5746; Morgan, 2012:168). The current study utilised the constructionist approach, which subordinated the role of the moderator so that

participants were able to create narratives of their experiences of aggression spontaneously. This approach was in tandem with the research question and the paradigm guiding the study.

One downside regarding focus groups is its susceptibility to “group think” which is the tendency for participants to withhold information (Rauf, Baig, Jaffery & Shafi, 2014:29; Babbie, 2011:323). In order to minimise this negative effect of “group think”, some scholars have suggested that moderators can play a devil’s advocate (McDougall & Baum, 1997:533; George, 2013:261). In the present study, the researcher used this strategy to encourage the focus group members to look at alternative explanations.

Focus groups are normally a group of six to eight participants, purposefully selected based on a homogenous characteristic, who engage in a face-to-face discussion of a limited set of topics (Ryan et al, 2013:2; Hennink, 2014:37; Willig, 2013:1776; Ritchie et al, 2014:231; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:2608; Redmond & Curtis, 2009:64). Focus group research often utilises some type of purposive sampling scheme, such as typical or maximum variation (Grumbain & Lowe, 2010:501; Merriam, 2009:94). As with one-to-one interviews, purposeful sampling should include people who know the most about the topic (Merriam, 2009:94). The size of the focus group can vary depending on the mode or the age of the participants. In the case of adolescent student participants, the size may be smaller (four to six participants) (Ryan et al, 2013:2). The second important issue regarding focus sample size is the number of focus groups in a research project. A study reviewing PUBMED focus group studies established that the sample size varied greatly with a mean of 8.4, median 5, range 1 to 96 (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011:2). Krueger and Casey (2010:387), however, recommend three to four groups per category of participants in a research project. This recommendation implies that, in a study in which a researcher wants to compare views of students and teachers, for example, the plan would be to have three or four groups for students and three or four for teachers. The rationale behind Krueger and Casey’s (2010:387) guidelines is that saturation is likely to occur after three or four groups with one participant type. The present study used five focus groups with variable number of participants in each. These comprised five focus groups for students. The details of the sample are shown in Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2: Descriptive Profile of focus group demographics**

Participant	Focus group	Number	Biographical variable	Variable description	Number
			Gender		
<b>Pilot study</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>Female</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>2</b>			<b>Male</b>	<b>8</b>
Students	3	12		Female	6
				Male	6
	4			Female	0
				Male	7
	5			Female	7
				Male	0
			Age	13-15	16
				16-18	24

Most focus groups are conducted within one and a half hours (Willig, 2013:1787). But, for children and adolescents, researchers recommend focus groups of shorter duration (40-60 minutes) (Liamputtong, 2011:68). The present study conducted focus groups for adolescent students for one and half hours.

Focus groups can be used to develop instruments such as semi-structured interview guides (Silverman, 2011:197). In the study, focus groups of adolescent students' discussions were conducted as suggested by other researchers. The focus group consisting of 12 adolescent students was convened. The researcher was the moderator. The discussion centred on the questions in Appendix A. The interview schedule was then pilot tested. The pilot study is discussed in the section 3.9 on validity below.



### 3.7.3 Validity and Trustworthiness

In order to influence practice and policy, qualitative research must meet goodness or quality criteria (Merriam, 2009:2010; Lincoln & Guba, 2013:120; Creswell, 2013:243). The criteria derived from the positivist paradigm include validity and reliability. Validity suggests truthfulness (Neuman, 2009:122). It has been argued that alternative criteria to judge such validity/trustworthiness and authenticity are credibility, transferability and conformability, which are more applicable to naturalistic axioms (Lincoln & Guba, 2011:108).

An alternative quality criteria framework was proposed by Whitemore, Chase and Mandle (2001:529). Whitemore et al (2001:533) found four primary criteria of validity consisting of credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity.

Credibility refers to the conscious effort to establish confidence in the accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data (Whitemore et al., 2001:530; Creswell, 2013:248). In the study, credibility was established through a prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of information from several data sources, member checking and using participants' own words to justify themes. There is however no consensus on the use of member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013:282-5). These strategies were in line with recommendations from other researchers (Creswell, 2013:252; Maxwell, 2013:2769; Merriam, 2009:217). Authenticity involves the portrayal of research that reflects the meanings and experiences that are lived and perceived by participants (Whitemore et al., 2001:530). Authenticity was established in the study through thick description and short quotations that represented the participants' language. This allows the reader to connect with the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:335). Criticality means there ought to be a critical appraisal of all aspects of the research (Whitemore et al., 2001:531; Creswell, 2013:248). Integrity means there ought to be evidence that the researcher is self-critical (Whitemore et al. 2001:531; Creswell 2013:248). Both criticality and integrity are akin to Guba's conformability (White, Oelke & Friesen, 2012:247). In the present study, the researcher kept an audit trail to address the criteria of criticality and integrity. In addition, the researcher examined negative cases.

Whittemore et al (2001:531) note that validation perspectives are made up of primary and secondary criteria (Creswell, 2013:248). Secondary criteria are identified as explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity. These terms will be explained below and details regarding their implementation in the present study are indicated.

Explicitness is similar to auditability which means that the results should support the conclusion of the research. Addressing the researcher's bias, decisions and interpretations are part of meeting the criteria of explicitness. Vividness, on the other hand, is the presentation of thick and faithful descriptions with artfulness and clarity (Whittemore et al, 2001:531). This study addressed Whittemore's explicitness and vividness criteria by developing a clear audit trail and using participants' own words to illustrate themes identified. In addition, the researcher kept a journal outlining biases. Repetitive questions by the supervisors regarding biases also assisted in meeting the explicitness criteria.

Creativity is achieved by building novel methodological designs, data presentation and analysis to answer specific research questions within scientific processes (Whittemore et al, 2001:532). Holloway and Todres (2007:17) observe that "good qualitative research adds imagination and creativity, combining art, science and craft". In this study, the researcher tried to resonate with readers by naming, organising and presenting the themes in a creative manner so that they were related to the research questions.

Thoroughness refers to adequate sampling (saturation) and complete, consistent and comprehensive analysis (Whittemore et al, 2001:532). The present study met the thoroughness criteria by ensuring that saturation was achieved. Therefore, sampling was adequate. In addition to the sampling, the researcher undertook iterative data reviews to identify, revise and test the themes outlined. The result was a comprehensive analysis.

Congruence refers to the fit between different parts of the thesis, including its research questions, methods, findings and philosophical underpinnings (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013:449). One way of addressing these criteria is for the researcher to

construct a matrix as a way of thinking through the research process (Maxwell, 2013:423). In this study, the researcher tested these themes against the research questions to ensure a close relationship between the two and against the extant literature to test their logical congruence with current knowledge (Hoek, Gendall, Gifford, Pirikahu, McCool, Pene, Edwards & Thompson, 2012:633).

Sensitivity refers to research that is implemented in ways that are sensitive to the nature of human, cultural and social contexts (Whittemore et al, 2001:532). This includes appropriate ethical considerations throughout the study (Whittemore et al., 2001:532). The researcher followed ethical principles to ensure the well-being of participants throughout the research process. This was demonstrated by obtaining permission from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education before collecting data, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, obtaining informed consent from participants and making participants aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The researcher used member checking to ensure that his interpretation of the data was in tandem with the participants' intentions. The author was honest in reporting data and avoided plagiarism. In addition, the findings of this study can be used to benefit the communities studied by implementing the recommendations outlined in the report.

The study, which is embedded in a constructivist paradigm, adopted criteria for validity identified by Whittemore et al. (2001:529). The validity criteria were implemented as summarised in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3: Techniques for demonstrating validity**

Type of technique	Technique	Examples drawn from the study
Design Consideration	Developing a self-conscious research design	Pilot study Supervisor provided good guidance on research design and ensured correct methods were used to address research questions.
	Sampling decisions (adequacy of sample)	
	Giving voice	The researcher in Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and discussion allowed research participants to speak for themselves by quoting them. Use of focus groups.
	Employing triangulation	Corroborated Interview evidence from students and teachers to shed light on themes. Use of focus groups Member checking
	Sharing prerequisites of privilege	Chapter 4: in reporting results of the study faithfully reports the phenomenon of student aggression through the words of participants. The study acknowledges the role played by participants in the preliminary pages of the report. The participants will get recompense from publication of their stories.
	Expressing issues of oppressed groups	The study articulates the views and experiences of victims of adolescent student aggression e.g. interviews with Participants S1.18, S2.13, S2.5
Data Generating	Demonstrating prolonged engagement	Data collection was done for a protracted period beginning in 2009.
	Providing verbatim transcription	Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.
	Demonstrating saturation	
Analytic	Articulating data analysis decisions	
	Member reflection (Member checking)	Solicited views from focus groups on appropriateness of themes on aggression. This allowed for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings and providing opportunities for questions, feedback and collaboration.
	Expert checking	Supervisor provided guidance and advice to ensure scientific quality.
	Using computer programs	Used in vivo coding to keep an audit trail of evolution of codes, categories.
	Performing a literature review	A review of the literature on causes, manifestation and impact of student aggression was done in Chapter 2.
	Analysing negative case analysis	

One way of increasing the validity of the interview guide was to pilot it as detailed below.

### 3.8 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study or test is defined as a feasibility study that the researcher carries out before the main research project (Creswell, 2013:165). It is also defined as a small-scale implementation of a larger study or of part of a larger study (Schreiber, 2008:625).

Piloting the protocol with the population who reflect the researcher's criteria for participation assists the researcher in establishing if there are shortcomings in the interview design and allows him or her to make necessary revisions prior to implementation of the study (Sampson, 2004:385; Creswell, 2013:165; Galletta, 2013:70). The pilot study also assists the researcher with the refinement of research questions, procedures and to practice interviewing (Smith, 2009:191; Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 58; Silverman, 2010:199; Maxwell, 2009:223; Creswell, 2013:165). The refinement of the questions usually means interrogating the phrasing of the questions, their order and the usefulness of the questions (Galletta, 2013:70). The structure of the interview might also change as a result of the pilot study. Finally, the pilot study data analysis also assists the researcher identify validity threats and improve reliability of the instrument (Maxwell, 2009:218; Neuman, 2009:123).

In the present study, a pilot study of individual interviews and focus groups was conducted with students. Changes were made to the interview guide as a result of the pilot study. The feedback from the participants resulted in the modification of the final instrument as shown in Appendix C. Some examples of changes in the interview guide/agenda are: For question 1, an alternative to aggression (hostile or violent behaviour) was inserted because many student participants who were second language speakers found it difficult to understand. In question 2, in order to assist participants to focus on experiences they themselves were involved in, the word

“personal” was added. Question 5 was reworded to “What could have contributed to your getting involved in the aggression incidences you described above?” The sequence of questions was also changed so that they began with the participants’ conception of aggression, followed by causes, manifestation and impact. This grouping of questions was a more natural order and evolution of the research questions as shown in both Appendices B and C. There were slight changes in wording of some questions to facilitate understanding. The researcher wanted to debrief the participants. He thus added the following: “I have no further questions. Do you have any questions before we finish the interview?”

For focus groups, it is recommended that researchers pilot the interview guide with a few individuals (Hennink, 2014:68; Ritchie et al, 2014:173). In the present study, the researcher piloted the questions with a few teachers and students.

### **3.9 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE: MAIN STUDY**

#### **3.9.1 Semi-structured interviews**

According to Herzog (2012:209), interviews are social processes in themselves. Interviews have been viewed as an “inter-view”, that is, an interchange of views on a common subject between the researcher and the participant who travel together on a conversational journey (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:57). Other researchers view the interview as part of the practice of constructing a reality anchored in the social, structural, historical, cultural and circumstantial contexts in which it exists (Herzog, 2012:209). From this perspective, the selection of the location of the interview should be regarded as more important than a logistics issue. There are researchers who suggest that interviewees should be given the option to choose an appropriate venue (Finch et al, 2014:235) but the aims and constraints of the interviewer must also be taken into account (Herzog, 2012:210).

Herzog (2012:210) and Lichtman (2010:142) concur that the interview location

should be a socially constructed and negotiated part of the interview itself. The physical location in which the interview is conducted is one of the most concrete expressions of the process of boundary crossing (Herzog, 2012:210). In this study, teacher participants were given a choice to select the location of a venue for the interview. Most participants chose an office in the school but there was one interview held at a restaurant. For students, the school allocated an office. The venues were quiet and offered privacy. The interview was audio-recorded with the consent of the participant.

### **3.9.2 Focus group discussions**

For productive focus group discussions, the researcher needs to select an appropriate venue that furnishes participants with privacy and an informal atmosphere that is not only comfortable but permits them to feel at ease (Limputtong, 2011:80; Finch et al, 2014:5846). Furthermore, for focus groups to express themselves fully, researchers should accommodate the participants' preference for "safe places" where they can express themselves fully (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013:65). Finch et al (2014:5840) also highlight the importance of the aspects of access, proximity and room size. The venue should also offer privacy so that participants can talk without fear of being overheard by outsiders (Finch, et al, 2014:5846). Lastly, the researcher should ensure that the surroundings have no distractions such as background noise (Finch et al, 2014:5846). In the present study, focus groups for both adolescent student participants were conducted in classrooms provided by the school. These classrooms provided accessibility, comfort, safety, privacy for the participants, electrical power and a quiet environment needed for recording.

The physical arrangement of the venue is also an important aspect of focus group preparation (Finch et al, 2014:5818). It has been recommended by scholars that a table and chairs be arranged in a circle to facilitate discussion and group interaction (Finch et al, 2014:5846; Hennink, 2014:82). The circular arrangement allows all participants to face each other and also allows the moderator to see them (Finch et

al, 2014:5846; Hennink, 2014:82). A table placed in the middle may make participants more comfortable by offering psychological protection and personal space between group members (Liamputtong, 2011:15; Finch et al, 2014:5846). In this study, therefore, the researcher adopted a circular arrangement of chairs with a table in the middle on which a recorder was placed.

Group composition is a critical aspect of successful focus group discussion (Morgan, 2012:168). While diversity can aid discussion, it can inhibit disclosure (Finch et al, 2014:5746). A substantial number of scholars share the view that homogeneity in groups makes participants feel comfortable in discussing a topic and increases interaction among members (Hesse-Biber & Leavy; 2011:179; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013:28; Krueger & Casey, 2010:382; Finch et al, 2014:5746; Morgan, 2012:168; Hennink, 2014:71). Homogeneity refers to similarity with reference to the topic (Morgan, 2012:168). In the present study, the researcher recruited participants who had personal experience of aggression within the secondary school environment.

When conducting the focus group discussions, the moderator needs to create a friendly tone in the introductions (Hennink, 2014:71). This technique facilitates the building of rapport and a sense of group cohesion (Liamputtong, 2011:97). It has been observed that it helps to have a moderator who is similar to the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2010:393). This makes participants more comfortable. In this study, the moderator introduced himself to the group in a friendly way. After this, participants were invited to introduce themselves and were also encouraged to participate. A trained female assistant moderator conducted a session involving female students after the researcher had introduced her to the group. This strategy was designed to encourage the girls to talk about issues relating to aggression with a moderator of the same sex.

Morgan (2012:170) recommends that, to promote interaction in groups, the definition of the situation needs to be defined for the participants. This usually means in less structured focus groups that the moderator should encourage the expression of diverse opinions (Morgan, 2012:170). In this study, the moderator started the session by encouraging participants to talk about their experiences and opinions



even if they differed from the others'. This helped participants understand the moderator's genuine interest in hearing different opinions and experiences, while also indicating when they should be sharing their differences and providing a model for how to state their differences. The moderator needs to establish a non-threatening and non-evaluative environment before the first question is asked (Krueger & Casey, 2010:381). In this study, the researcher ensured that the participants settled down by providing background to the study and letting the participants chat to each other.

After defining the situation, the next step is to ask the first question that encourages diverse contributions to the discussion immediately after the instructions (Morgan, 2012:171). In the present study, the researcher began the session by asking the participants to share their understanding of aggression in the school based on their different experiences.

It has been suggested that the researcher should ensure that dominant talkers, shy participants and those who claim to be experts did not make the running of the focus group challenging and problematic (Krueger & Casey, 2009:100). Liamputtong (2011:104) suggests that dominant talkers could be requested to sit next to the moderator so that body language can be applied to control the individuals. Shy participants, on the other hand, could be encouraged to sit opposite the moderator to maximise eye contact. It is argued that eye contact is often sufficient to encourage the shy participants to speak (Krueger & Casey, 2009:100; Macnaghten & Myers 2004:72). In this study, the researcher utilised these subtle means of seating arrangements and body language to control turn taking. These were found adequate to ensure every participant made his/her view known.

Researchers prepare interview guides (also referred to as topic guides or question routes) for focus groups to direct the discussion and to cover key issues that they wish to examine in a session (Krueger & Casey, 2010:388; Hennink, 2014:59). Focus group interview guides ensure effective group discussions (Hennink, 2014:59). The number of questions should be between 12 and 15 for a one-hour session (Hennink, 2014:62). The questions in the interview guide should address the purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2010:387). The interview guide for the

current study contained 12 questions.

Morgan (2012:173) suggests that, depending on the goal of the study, researchers organise the focus group interview guides following either a funnel or reverse funnel type. A funnel technique (also called hour-glass design) is based on beginning the interview with general questions and progressing to more specific ones (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:191; Hennink, 2014:51, Liamputtong, 2011:117). The reason for using a funnel form is to begin by letting the participants expand on the topic, so that the researchers themselves can consolidate the discussion around their own specific interests. When employing the reverse funnel type technique the interview moves from more specific to general aspects of the topic to allow conceptualisation (Morgan, 2012:173). Conceptualisation relates to belief schemas about a phenomenon such as an illness and its causes. In the current study, the researcher utilised some of these suggestions to design a focus group interview guide that was similar to the inverted funnelling process as shown in Appendix B. The researcher found conceptualisation relevant to the study as its theoretical framework is based on causal attributions of students and teachers of aggression in secondary schools in Harare.

After the focus group discussion, it is recommended that the moderator debrief the participants by asking them if they had anything else to add and to relate their experience of the session (Liamputtong, 2011:45; Ritchie et al, 2014:98). Additionally, the moderator can finish off the session by summarising a few key points and thanking the participants for their valuable contributions (Krueger & Casey, 2010:396). In the present study, the researcher ended the session implementing these two suggestions which were incorporated in the focus group topic guide.

## **3.10 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

### **3.10.1 Data transcription**

Before engaging in data analysis the researcher needed to adopt a strategy to transcribe the interview and focus group data. There are different ways of transcribing depending on the goal of the research (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004:65; Ten Have, 2007:95; Kowal & O'Connell, 2014:74). The present study used verbatim transcription so that themes could be generated from the data and also to meet ethical requirements, i.e., that the transcription be as close to the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee as possible (Runswick-Cole, 2011:95).

Qualitative data analysis is regarded as an ambiguous term (Bernard & Ryan, 2010:4). In the present study, it means the interpretive study of interview and focus group discussion texts. The researcher was able to extract the deeper meaning or multiple meanings in these texts.

When analysing interview and focus group texts for meaning and language, researchers can use a narrative approach (Bernard & Ryan, 2010:248; Hennink, 2014:139; Seidman, 2013:127; Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2014:205; Denzin, 2009:151; Barbour, 2014:320; Roulston, 2014:304; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015:253; Creswell, 2013:71). According to Roulston (2014:304) and Creswell (2013:71), the narrative approach informs the analysis of interview data in a number of ways. The first way involves the examination of story telling by participants thematically (what was said) and structurally (the nature of telling). The second way of analysing narrative stories is the dialogic (i.e. who the story was directed towards). The approach involves analysing empirically derived narratives for themes.

The present study adopted a narrative analysis of interview and focus group texts to generate themes from the data. The researcher decided that the method was located within the epistemological and theoretical framework of the study.

According to Bernard and Ryan (2010:55), the term "theme" connotes the

fundamental concepts that are described. But Braun and Clarke (2006:82) propose that a theme captures something important about the data relative to the research question and represents some level of patterned meaning within the data set. These definitions suggest that a theme includes a pattern or a concept that is relevant to a particular study. For this study, a theme referred to a particular, recognisable configuration of meanings which co-occur in a way that is meaningful and systematic rather than random and arbitrary (Willig, 2013:2551). In addition, what counts as a theme in the thematic analysis depends on the research question and the epistemological approach the research took (Willig, 2013:2551). In the present study, both the latent and the manifest meaning captured by the theme were used in line with Joffe (2012:209).

### **3.11 ETHICAL ISSUES**

Ethics in research relates to the principles that guide research with the aim of protecting the rights of participants (Sullivan, 2009:186).

Scholars consider that research is ethical if it conforms to the standards of conducting scientific enquiry (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:140; Creswell, 2013:55). Research ethics focus on principles rather than fixed rules and have been developed to balance two competing values, the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the rights of the participants (Sullivan, 2009:186). The ethical issues that were considered in this study are permission, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and harm to participants.

#### **3.11.1 Permission**

In order to get access to research sites and participants, the researcher needs to submit a formal request to the relevant authorities (Fetterman, 2009:579; Creswell, 2013:58; Roberts, 2010:40). Normally, a researcher prepares a brief statement that

specifies the purpose of the study and its design, the sites, the participants and activities, the protection of human subjects and the informed consent forms (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:351, Fetterman, 2009:55).

For the present study, approval was sought and obtained from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Zimbabwe) to collect data after the presentation of proposals and documents from the supervisor supporting the application, as indicated in Appendix D. Permission was also sought and obtained from the Provincial Offices of Harare District and the principals of the schools involved (Appendix E).

Care was taken to ensure that sites were selected that did not have vested interests in the outcome of the study (Creswell, 2013:57). For instance, a school was left out of the study because the condition to gain access was that a teacher be present when the researcher interviewed the would-be student participants. The researcher felt this would violate the ethical issue of confidentiality and therefore, as a result, the school was excluded from the study.

### **3.11.2 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is created when a researcher can identify the participants' responses but protects them by keeping the data from the public or does not disclose information that permits linking specific individuals with specific responses (Neuman, 2011:73; Babbie, 2011:67). According to Liamputtong (2011:43), the main ethical concern with using the focus group method is that there is more than one research participant in a group at a time. Participants may disclose the contents of a confidential discussion outside the group. The present study addressed the issue of confidentiality by assuring the participants that reports would not contain any information that could be used to identify them. The study removed all identifiers at data collection and data cleaning in order to uphold the privacy of all participants. In addition, the researcher began each focus group by asking participants to respect the confidences of all group members.

### **3.11.3 Anonymity**

Anonymity is the ethical protection that participants remain nameless, their identities are free from disclosure and remain so (Neuman, 2011:73). Focus groups present a problem on the issue of anonymity, as Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013:2045) say, “the public nature of focus groups problematizes the issue of anonymity as well as the theories of self upon which the very idea of anonymity is grounded”. They add that focus groups should be conceptualised as groups and not as collections of individuals. In the present study, the researcher announced at the beginning of each focus group that the contents of the focus group should not go beyond group members. This procedure of assuring participant anonymity was repeated for participants in in-depth interviews as well. When reporting results for the present study the researcher used pseudonyms for the participants and codes for the school sites where data was collected (Creswell, 2013:174).

### **3.11.4 Informed Consent**

According to Sullivan (2009:258), informed consent is an overt indication of one’s willingness to participate in research and the understanding of such participation. Assent, on the other hand, is an overt indication by a vulnerable person of his or her willingness to participate in research and the understanding of such participation. For vulnerable research participants, the legally responsible party provides informed consent. The purpose of informed consent is to protect participants from harm. To address the ethical issue of informed consent, researchers should ensure that the participants are informed about the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2013:57; Willig, 2013:26; Kumar, 2012:244).

Researchers need to disclose full information about the purpose of research to avoid deceiving the participants (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015:94). But, on the other hand, informed consent also invokes the question of how much information should be given and when. A careful balance should be maintained between too much

information and leaving out aspects of the design that may be significant to the participants. In some interview studies, such as those using funnel-shaped questioning techniques that gradually narrow down on the subject matter, the specific purpose of a study is initially withheld in order to obtain the interviewee's spontaneous views on a topic and to avoid leading them to specific answers. In this case, the full information should be given in a debriefing after the interview. In addition, researchers need to inform participants that their participation was voluntary (Creswell 2013:58; Lichtman, 2010:64; Babbie, 2011:64).

In the present study, the researcher briefly informed the participants about the purpose of the study, highlighting that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time during the interview or focus group. Participants were interviewed or included in focus groups after they signed a consent form. In the case of children under the age of eighteen, parents were requested to sign the consent form and the children's assent forms. The consent and assent forms for teachers, parents and adolescent students respectively are shown in Appendices F, G and H.

### **3.11.5 Harm to participants**

Non-maleficence is an ethical principle which seeks to ensure that researchers have an ethical obligation not to harm participants in research (Munro, 2011:149; Wassenaar, 2006:64). In research involving sensitive issues, distress and emotional harm may occur (Laimputtong, 2011:43). One strategy that has been recommended is that, in focus groups, the moderator needs to observe stress levels of participants and be well prepared to intervene (Smith, 1995:483). Other scholars suggest that, to avoid harming participants by avoiding disclosing information that can cause harm to them, researchers should use composite stories so that individuals cannot be identified (Creswell, 2013:59).

In the present study, the researcher conducted interviews and focus groups mostly in offices and classrooms respectively provided by each school. The participants were therefore safe from physical harm (Neuman, 2009:67). As a further precaution,

participants in both in-depth interviews and focus groups were informed that counselling was available in case they experienced any emotional distress during or after the interview session. The moderator was alert for any signs of distress in the participants so he could ask if they were prepared to continue. A counsellor was available at each school by arrangement. Lastly, the researcher minimised risk and harm by avoiding deceiving the participants. As discussed above, the participants were briefed about the purpose of the study at the beginning of each interview and focus group session.

### **3.12 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the research methodology implemented in the study was discussed. The discussion centred on the basic qualitative research design and non-probability sampling strategies of selecting participants. A data collection instrument, namely, a semi-structured interview guide, was discussed. Procedures for data collection and analysis were described. Furthermore, an outline of procedures to address trustworthiness and credibility was given. Finally, a discussion took place on how ethical issues were handled in the study. In the next chapter, the results of the empirical study will be presented, analysed and discussed.



# CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to establish the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression on student's physical and mental health, and academic performance in Harare urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe. In the previous chapter, the research design, data collection methods and procedures were discussed. Data analysis procedures and ethical issues were also discussed. This chapter will present, analyse and discuss the findings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions which are structured in relation to the sub-research questions of the study. For each sub-research question, firstly, data from interviews and focus group discussion with students is presented and analysed and this is followed by data from interviews with teachers.

The key findings are discussed based on the following identified themes: biological factors, social factors, manifestation and impact. In the discussion, reference is made to available literature in order to validate the findings and illustrate the relationships between them.

## 4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Table 4.1: Descriptive Profile of sample of school sites and participants**

Participant	School Type	Number	Biographical variable	Variable description	Number	Frequency
	S1	6	Gender			
<b>Students</b>	S2	4		Female	19	47.5%
				Male	21	52.5%
				Total	40	100.0%
			Age			
				13-15	16	40.0%
				16-18	24	60.0%
			Residence			
				Day scholars	34	84.0%
				Boarders	6	16.0.0%
			<b>Total</b>		40	100%
			Form			
				Form 1-2	16	40.0%
				Form 3-4	15	37.50%
				Form 5-6	9	22.5%
			<b>Total</b>		40	100%
<b>Teachers</b>			Qualification			
				Diploma in Education	5	33.3%
				Bachelor's and PGDE	8	53.4%
				Med	2	13.3%
			<b>Total</b>		15	100%
			Teaching experience In years			
				1-5	8	53.4%
				6-10	5	33.3%
				11-15	2	13.3%
			<b>Total</b>		15	100%
			Gender	Female	7	47%
				Male	8	53%
			<b>Total</b>		15	100%
			Age	30-39	7	47%
				40-49	6	40%
				50-59	2	13%
			<b>Total</b>		15	100%

Table 4.1 gives the educational background of the student and teacher participants in both in-depth interviews and focus groups. There were more students enrolled as

day scholars compared to boarders.

Teacher qualifications varied from diplomas to masters' degrees. There were fewer holders of diplomas and masters' degrees than those who possessed a first degree in education or a first degree and post-graduate diploma in education. The teaching experience of participants varied from one year to fifteen years. The majority of the participants had teaching experience of between one and ten years when compared to those who had more.

Following the biographical data section, a graphical presentation of the themes and subthemes is presented in the section below.

**Table 4.3: Visual presentation of themes and subthemes**

Causes of aggression	Biological Social Shortage of learning material Abuse of alcohol and drugs
Manifestation of aggression	Physical aggression Relational aggression Verbal aggression Cyber aggression
Effect of aggression	Physical health and mental health Academic performance Teenage pregnancy

Table 4.3 shows the three themes: causes of aggression, manifestation and effect of aggression and subthemes from the findings to be related to the sub-research questions are presented in detail in the section below.

## 4.3 BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS THAT CAUSE CLASSROOM AGGRESSION IN HARARE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

### 4.3.1 Responses from students

Data from students' in-depth interviews and focus group discussions showed that students believed that aggressive behaviour was caused by biological factors. They mentioned that the predisposition to be aggressive may be inherited and that there were some students who got angry easily and had difficulty controlling their anger. This finding is demonstrated in the following extracts:

There are some students who seem to have inherited a tendency to be aggressive from their parents and ancestors. They will not solve simple problem without threatening to fight it out. Their parents and grandfathers are known as warriors **(Student participant 18)**.

We have some very difficult students. They easily get angry and once they are upset they will want to fight. It takes a lot of persuasion by the prefects and several teachers to calm them down once they are agitated. This is probably due to their biological makeup **(Student participant 24)**.

Data from students' interviews and focus groups discussions indicated that students attributed some aggressive behaviour by girls to hormonal imbalance during the menstrual cycle. This finding is supported by the following extracts:

When I am having my periods I do not want to be provoked because I will be in an aggressive mood **(Student participant 1)**.

I am also irritable and experience tension during this time. Consequently I do not tolerate provocations when experiencing my periods **(Student participant 4)**.

The study revealed that students believed that aggression was also caused by social factors such as low family cohesiveness. They mentioned that aggressive behaviour could be due to the fact that students lived away from their families or were orphans. Where students lived with family members, they may have experienced parental violence. In addition, step-parents may have abused them. Those whose parents

had separated or divorced or lived in newly constituted families or poor families also attributed their aggressive behaviour to these family circumstances. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

I live alone except for some lodgers at home. My parents are late. So when this fighting incident occurred I was feeling really lonely. The girl had agreed that I accompany her before her former friend hit me because he did not want me to fall in love with her **(Student participant 26)**.

Some students who are aggressive fight other students with the intention of hurting them. This may be due to the fact that their parents are unable to supervise and control them as they live in rural areas **(Student participant 3)**.

There are students who bully others in the classroom. Some of them may be doing so because they have been sexually abused **(Student participant 30)**.

Simon bullies girls in class. His parents often fight in public. He has learned that aggressive behaviour is normal **(Student participant 18)**.

Some of the students who are aggressive come from families where the mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend. Fighting and use of vulgar language is common in such homes **(Student participant 35)**.

At the time I got involved in the fight with Temba, things were really going badly for me. Teachers would look down on me because my parents were failing to raise school fees **(Student participant 25)**.

At one time my father and mother fought and we had to leave home and sought shelter at my mother's relative. When I eventually came to school after a period of absence there was a rumour circulating that I was pregnant since I had eloped. I really got mad and physically threatened those I suspected of spreading the rumour **(Student participant 4)**.

My father and mother have separated. They both live with a new partner. I live with my stepfather and mother. Last term I ran away when my parents fought. This has taught me to fight anyone who threatens me **(Student participant 1)**.

My mother is now divorced and does not have a steady boyfriend. Last year she was involved in a fight with one of her boyfriends and sustained injuries. I think one should retaliate physically if one is slighted **(Student participant 2)**.

Our home is good for me but I know some family in the neighbourhood where the

parents often fight and this may be the reason their children also fight and gossip at school **(Student participant 3)**.

In our family, when my parents fight, my father is not keen to pay fees. My mother does not work. This results in them sending me away to collect fees and I then miss lessons **(Student participant 7)**.

There are some students who are aggressive in the classroom who are not living with their parents. The students do not have parents to control their bad behaviour **(Student participant 23)**.

Some parents are aggressive and their children also tend to be like them and are aggressive. This sort of attitude in the family encourages the siblings to fight other students at school too **(Student participant 38)**.

Data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with students indicated that students attributed some of the classroom aggression to students who experienced frustrations because they lived in a poor and crime-ridden neighbourhood, students' religious beliefs and peer pressure. This finding is demonstrated in the following extracts:

We now learn with some students who bully others in class. Tom and Shingai, for example, kicked me intentionally in the Maths lesson when the teacher went to the staff room. I am convinced that their strange Muslim religion teaches them to be violent towards students who do not belong to their church **(Student participant 30)**.

Usually when students are being aggressive against others the teacher will be absent from classroom. The teachers should be in the classroom so that students can learn **(Student participant 15)**.

Our class contains a number of students from Arcadia. These students are aggressive towards others when we are in the classroom. Their bad behaviour maybe caused by the stressful and crime-ridden neighbourhood **(Student participant 31)**.

Data from student interviews and focus group discussions indicated that students attributed school aggression to conflicts between different student groups during class related outdoor activities. The students mentioned grudges between different sports teams and stress due to increasing competition as causes of aggressive

behaviour. This finding is illustrated in the following extracts:

There was fighting between groups of students from our school and School A because the outcome of a game was disputed. Several students were injured **(Student participant 38)**.

When competition got stiff, some students in the soccer team got stressed and resorted to fighting opposing team members **(Student participant 27)**.

Data from student in-depth interviews and focus group discussions showed that students expressed the view that fighting occurred as a result of romantic relationships. They mentioned situations where a jealous male student would beat up a girl or the new partner when they broke up a relationship. In addition, competing suitors might also fight for girls. This finding is illustrated in the following extracts:

Aggression occurs because of such issues as immature love relationships between boys and girls. You find that if they break up, the boy is bitter and may beat up the girl **(Student participant 19)**.

Both of us were in love with a girl at the school. When he found out that I was closer to the girl and that she was no longer interested in him, he got upset. On this particular day, I had left the school in the company of the girl. After the girl had left, he confronted me. He punched me in the face and I fell on the ground **(Student participant 26)**.

A form four girl fought over a boyfriend. She beat up the other girl pulled her earrings – she had studs. The victim sustained injuries to her ear **(Student participant 12)**.

The girl might know a boy here. Fights might arise over the girl. But such fights are few. But mostly, fights occur when we are invited out to other schools. We then try to look for girls to socialise **(Student participant 13)**.

When we had a trip to High school B Mary and I had a problem because we had a crush over Michael who was in U6 at that school. She verbally abused me on our way back **(Student participant 6)**.

A girl who saw me walking by my cousin's side threatened to beat me up because she thought I was in love with him. She did this out of jealousy **(Student participant 4)**.

Two boys have been sent for counselling because they regularly fight over a girl

in form three. They disrupt lessons whenever this happens **(Student participant 34)**.

Data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with students indicated that they reported that some prefects were aggressive towards students and that there were students who threatened prefects. They mentioned that some students threatened prefects, prefects forced some students to fight, and that some prefects fought over colours. This finding is illustrated in the following extracts:

One cause of aggression has to do with some male students who are rude. They don't take orders from prefects. These aggressive students threaten prefects **(Student participant 33)**.

This fight happened when I was in form one. I was coming from my home in high-density suburb A in the company of my best friend. We started arguing as we entered the school. Prefects then called us. They told us to come to the prefect study. They asked us why we were quarrelling if we were friends. They forced us to fight. The fight was not reported to or witnessed by teachers **(Student participant 37)**.

We had gone to a university in Harare for Sports. Orton and I fought after he took my colours without my consent. The school did not expect that, as a prefect, I should act like this **(Student participant 13)**.

Prefects are bullies. For example, a prefect gave me an empty two litre plastic container of Mazoe and asked me to fill it up with Mazoe orange crush syrup, biscuits **(Student participant 34)**.

A prefect just asked me to polish his shoes as punishment. But I had done nothing to deserve this humiliation **(Student participant 38)**.

The study established that students in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions believed that new students were victimised at school during the first term of joining a new school due to social factors such as group social dynamics. They mentioned that form one students were bullied or asked to surrender their groceries to older students by more powerful students. The students thought that perpetrators of aggression wanted power. They also mentioned peer pressure as a cause of aggressive behaviour. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpts:

You got bullied if you were new in the school and you did not have a friend



among senior students or relative among staff members to protect you **(Student participant 8)**.

The senior students just treated us ruthlessly by demanding that we give them part of our grocery, our parents had bought for us for the term. They just want to demonstrate that they have power **(Student participant 33)**.

The boy who punched me wanted to show that he has power. He is the leader of a popular group in the classroom. It's like he wanted to be recognised as the big one. He said, "I'm the boss around here" **(Student participant 17)**.

Some students who fight and verbally abuse others do this out of peer pressure **(Student participant 12)**.

Student physical aggression is not very common at this school except for name-calling and gossip. It hurts. I have been a victim of name calling the first few days when I enrolled at this school. The other students were showing they had a higher position in the group **(Student participant 22)**.

When some of the new students arrived, they were subjected to hazing by form students. One student was hit for refusing to sing a silly song. The seniors want to show the new students their place in the hierarchy **(Student participant 35)**.

Form four students are aggressive against teachers especially when they have registered for examinations. They just want to prove that they have the power to challenge teachers **(Student participant 18)**.

Data from students' in-depth interviews and focus group discussions also indicated that students believed that the way some parents interacted with the school encouraged aggression by both students and teachers. The students mentioned parents who came to school to threaten teachers and prefects and those who made phone calls harassing teachers. The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

Some families are problematic e.g. coloured gentlemen we have in the neighbourhood encourage their children at this school to be aggressive. The parents come to school to harass students and teachers **(Student participant 27)**.

My parents phoned the form teacher condemning her for what they said was poor teaching at the school. As a result of this interaction, the teachers harass and humiliate me whenever I am in class **(Student participant 17)**

Some aggressive students are just like their parents. We had an incident where Sophia came to school adorning an S-curl hairstyle. But the prefects on duty would not allow her to attend lessons in that hairstyle. The next day, the mother came and started hurling abuse at the teachers and the prefects for forcibly removing her daughter's hairdo **(Student participant 1)**.

When parents met at a School Development Committee meeting, sentiments were expressed that the Science master was a poor teacher. Since then, this teacher harasses me as if it was my mother who was gossiping against him **(Student participant 5)**.

Data from students' interviews and focus group discussions further indicated that students experienced verbal and physical aggression from teachers in the classrooms. The students reported that teachers used corporal punishment for minor offences, victimised them if they were in love with the same girl and sexually abused girls they taught. The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

The teachers hurl abuse at us. The other students regard us as dull students because of the streaming and the labels teachers give. When students call us dull, this leads to fighting or name calling **(Student participant 4)**.

If you ask the teacher a question, she will humiliate you verbally. She will ensure next time you will not raise your hand **(Student participant 10)**.

Students are beaten by teachers for small infringements such as making noise in class or coming to school late. This makes students angry. Some might think of retaliating **(Student participant 16)**.

Some of the teachers victimise students if they fall in love with the same girl in the school **(Student participant 8)**.

#### **4.3.2 Responses from teachers**

Data from in-depth interviews showed that teachers concurred with students as they also believed that classroom aggression was caused by biological and social factors. Specifically, they said that boys who matured sexually before their peers, characterised by pubertal changes such as the growth spurt and increased strength,

hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle in girls and medical disorders such as diabetes predisposed them to engage in aggressive behaviour. The following extracts illustrate these points:

I have noted that some of the boys who fight and bully others have experienced voice changes and a growth spurt earlier than others. They suddenly have enhanced strength that the boys they fight are no match **(Teacher participant 6)**.

Puberty is a critical period and the hormones may, for example, predispose the girl child to be aggressive during the menstruation cycle **(Teacher participant 5)**.

When girls experience their first day menstruation (menarche) at school they may stain their skirts. This may result in a lot of stress for them as boys may tease them. They may, in turn, be aggressive because of the provocative teasing **(Teacher participant 3)**.

Students who mature sexually often become targets of peer bullying. They may be teased by others if their genital organs or breasts deviate from the normal size. This may be a reflection of biological and environmental factors **(Teacher participant 6)**.

Some medical conditions such as diabetes may result in some students being aggressive **(Teacher participant 8)**.

The study established that teachers in in-depth interviews, similar to the students, attributed the cause of classroom aggression to social factors such as the dysfunctional family. In particular, they noted the following circumstances were associated with classroom aggression: parental absence from home for purposes of work in distant countries; marital discord and violence; sibling violence; poverty; family structure such as single mother families; or family consisting of cohabiting couple; students who lived alone without parents; and orphans. The extracts below illustrate this finding:

There are some parents who fail in their socialisation role. Aggressive behaviour by some students is caused by lack of parental control as they live in the city alone. Parents are in the United Kingdom, South Africa or in rural areas **(Teacher participant 11)**.

The child's repeated witnessing of domestic violence left him angry. This would predispose the child to aggression at school **(Teacher participant 8)**.

Teachers in in-depth interviews similarly supported the student observations about aggressive behaviour associated with sports activities. They mentioned unfairness in referees' decisions, grudges between rival teams and provocation by some students as causes of fights between groups of students. The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

The violence that broke out at the end of the game resulted from the perception that the outcome of the game was biased because referees had suspended some players before the match started **(Teacher participant 10)**.

Sports games also result in fights between groups of students especially when our school plays against High school A. The players treat us in a hostile manner as they feel they are superior **(Teacher participant 17)**.

There is a lot of tension. For example, I witnessed a basketball match involving High school A in which a group of students took a tie which was part of the uniform for the opposing team and started burning it. The provocation resulted in a fight between opposing groups of boys **(Teacher participant 12)**.

Fighting occurs in changing rooms when students dress for sports while the teacher stands outside waiting for students **(Teacher participant 16)**.

Similarly, data from in-depth interviews with teachers suggested that conflicts over romantic relationships were the cause of some of the physical aggressive behaviour within the peer group. They mentioned fights over dates and jealousy over boys who were popular with girls. The following extracts demonstrate this finding:

The girls were dating the same guy who had come to attend the disco at the school. These girls were in form four. The fight was stopped by bystanders. The students were counselled **(Teacher participant 16)**.

A boy who was a good athlete and had won valuable marks for his sports house was asked to transfer to another house. A fight resulted between him and another boy because he did not want to change house. Athletes are also popular with girls. Two girls fought over an athlete **(Teacher participant 9)**

Conflicts centre on boy/girl relationships, for example, the case of a form four

boy who was popular with girls. He was good at performing 'break' dance. He was beaten just outside the gate by boys from this school. He had a good hairstyle which his assailants wanted to destroy by rolling his head in the soil **(Teacher participant 6)**.

Data from in-depth interviews with teachers indicated that they concurred with the students by observing that in some schools, they did not have prefects. In those that did have prefects, a few instances of bullying by prefects were reported. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpts:

We do not have prefects at this school. We have a leadership system using lower and upper six students. These students are supposed to lead by example. The system is working well as none of the student leaders have been implicated in aggressive behaviour **(Teacher participant 18)**.

There have been prefects who have been demoted for aggressive behaviour against peers. These cases are a very small percentage of the overall prefect body **(Teacher participant 13)**.

Data from teacher in-depth interviews indicated that the teachers concurred with students by noting that new students were aggressive during their first term at school. They mentioned that this might be related to peer group dynamics and the nature of the primary school they attended before joining the secondary school. The new students were bullied during the orientation week. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpts:

Form ones in the first term are not well integrated; they do not have a common school culture yet. Boys from boys' only primary schools (Grade 7) get involved in dissing (disrespect). They are too physical and rough. They fight a lot **(Teacher participant 15)**.

But we have had a few instances of bullying by a few prefects who abuse their powers. This has occurred when they harassed new students during the orientation period **(Teacher participant 20)**.

Data from teacher in-depth interviews demonstrated that parents of aggressive students did not stop their child's aggressive behaviour and association with deviant friends. The teachers mentioned that some of the parents were overprotective of

their children while showing hostility to teachers. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

He has often threatened teachers: don't play around with me I will attack you with a catapult as soon as you leave the gate. The mother who is separated from the father exonerates her son's aggressive behaviour and abuse of drugs **(Teacher participant 9)**.

The mother who is single failed to monitor her daughter's aggressive habits. This has led to the daughter's aggressive behaviour just getting out of hand **(Teacher participant 20)**.

## 4.4 OTHER CAUSAL FACTORS

### 4.4.1 Responses from students

The study established that students' in-depth interviews also attributed the causes of student aggression to a shortage of learning resources. The students mentioned conflict over resources such as laboratory equipment, computer accessories and books which were in short supply in the school. The excerpts below reflect these views:

Immediately after assembly the students were fighting over a chair. One was big the other was small. The teacher had not yet arrived **(Student participant 32)**.

This term a form three boy came to my class in the morning started accusing me of having stolen his flash disk. He spread rumours that I was a thief. We ended up in a fight. People were cheering up **(Student participant 5)**.

Another guy stood up and shouted young man don't show off. I thought if I sat down he would attack me as he appeared to be about to attack me. I charged at the first boy who took the desk **(Student participant 36)**.

In the lab we do not have enough equipment and stools some students bully others so that they get stools. These big boys may also try to monopolise the equipment when we are asked to make observations **(Student participant 26)**.

The school does not have enough chairs and desks for all students especially when the form fours stay in the afternoon for study. I had my desk taken by a bigger boy who threatened to beat me up if I told the teacher **(Student participant 30)**.

Our science laboratory did not have enough equipment for our class of forty students. The bigger boys who have greater physical power threaten other students so that they dominate the use of equipment in the science laboratory **(Student participant 7)**.

Data from students' interviews and focus group discussions showed that aggressive behaviour which occurred in classroom related areas might be a result of other factors such as the abuse of alcohol and drugs. The students mentioned alcohol and marijuana. Some of the students were affiliated to violent gangs. The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

There is a group of boys who are well known for aggression that bully other students in lessons after break. It is suspected they take cannabis **(Student participant 9)**.

The students who are violent in the school do so because they will have consumed beer **(Student participant 22)**.

The aggressive girl does not stay with her parents and is notorious for antisocial activities. This girl drinks beer and smokes marijuana. She clubs as well **(Student participant 12)**.

A student in form four who threatened teachers was reported to have smoked marijuana during break time **(Student participant 16)**.

There are students who are violent and use drugs. They usually are members of gangs. For example, we have one called G unit. Last year, the predominant gang was called "Russians". There are usually some groups here who create grudges with gangs from other schools. They get involved in fights **(Student participant 32)**.

A group of students who are part of a gang assaulted me on school grounds **(Student participant 19)**

#### 4.4.2 Response from teachers

Data from teacher in-depth interviews also indicated that teachers believed that aggressive behaviour by students was caused by economic factors such as the shortage of school resources. The teachers mentioned a shortage of furniture such as desks and chairs leading to aggressive behaviour in the classroom. The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

We have two sessions, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Therefore desks might not be enough in the classroom leading to a scramble for them. The senior students are known to bully juniors so that they continue using furniture when they are no longer entitled to it **(Teacher participant 8)**.

We had furniture problem. Boys would forcibly take a girl's chair and desk. They would take advantage of the weaker sex. Bigger boys would also fight for furniture taking furniture from smaller boys **(Teacher participant 10)**.

Data from in-depth interviews with teachers suggested that they are aware that some of the aggressive students used drugs. They mentioned that both boys and girls used marijuana, among other drugs. When students were intoxicated by the drug, they exhibited abnormal behaviour. Some of these violent students and their siblings were gang members. The extracts below demonstrate this finding:

These girls were taking alcohol. So when their parents were called in, that's when they were suspended **(Teacher participant 3)**.

There are some 'O' level students belonging to some violent gang who have been expelled for selling drugs to other students. The police also arrested some family members, i.e., brothers who were gang members **(Teacher participant 13)**.

Boys with a reputation for physical aggression use drugs –marijuana is commonly used by boys although some girls also use drugs, for example, Girl R, a girl in form four, regularly brought marijuana to school and used it. Abnormal, violent behaviour was perpetrated by these students during mid-year examinations **(Teacher participant 16)**.

Those who aggress don't attend lessons regularly. They disobey rules of the



school, smoke, drink and take drugs (**Teacher participant 11**).

A group of three violent students was recently expelled from school when it was discovered [that they were] selling drugs to students at the school (**Teacher participant 12**).

There is a violent student from a broken family presently enrolled at this school that we took to the local police station after an incident of violence. The student admitted to using and selling drugs when in the company of his brother. But the mother thought this was caused by a curse (**Teacher participant 6**).

We have a problem of gangs that fuel aggression in the school. A student who was affiliated to a gang was booked by a prefect for an offence. He informed the gang about this incident. Consequently, the prefect sought refuge in the school because gang members threatened to kill him (**Teacher participant 8**).

A student slapped a female teacher while attending an outdoor agriculture lesson. This happened after the student refused to take the teacher's orders on procedure to follow when transplanting tomatoes. The aggressive behaviour might have been caused by drugs he was abusing (**Teacher participant 15**).

## **4.5 MANIFESTATION OF CLASSROOM AGGRESSION**

### **4.5.1 Physical Aggression**

#### ***4.5.1.1 Responses from students***

Students in in depth interviews and focus groups discussions reported that physical aggression was a common form of classroom aggression. Students stated that they engaged in or witnessed peers engaged in fighting. Teachers were also targets of aggression. The following extracts reveal this finding:

He pushed a chair against my friend (**Student participant 11**).

He struck me with a chair while standing on a desk resulting in head injuries

**(Student participant 37).**

He hit me at the back of the head. I hit back in self-defence **(Student participant 26).**

If other girls gossip about you, you should defend yourself in a fight. Sometimes we can fight when teachers were out of sight **(Student participant 29).**

There are physical fights when teachers leave the classroom unattended **(Student participant 16).**

Fights arise if you are seen as threat **(Student participant 13).**

Some teachers sexually abuse female students they teach **(Student participant 18).**

There is a girl in our class who intentionally pushed me in the corridor on Wednesday. She accused me of spreading a rumour that she is pregnant **(Student participant 1).**

Students fought during break time. They had a long grievance over a girl which they wanted to settle **(Student participant 8).**

A fight broke out during study time in the afternoon following a verbal exchange between student D and E in the physical science lesson earlier in the day **(Student participant 7).**

A player from a certain sports house kicked another male student playing for an opposing sports after alleging he had used a four-letter word against him **(Student participant 5).**

#### ***4.5.1.2 Responses from teachers***

The study established that teachers, like students, acknowledged that physical aggression occurred in the school classrooms and related areas. They revealed that they witnessed fighting among students and between students and teachers. Fighting also occurred just outside the school gates. In addition, they reported that some teachers sexually abused students. The excerpts below illustrate these sentiments:

I do recall however that, about three weeks ago, a fight broke out between two girls in the school **(Teacher participant 4)**.

A male student tried to attack the deputy head by throwing a brick at him **(Teacher participant 17)**.

I have witnessed several fights between form four girls **(Teacher participant 19)**.

This week a guard employed by the school raped a 14-year-old female student during school hours on the school premises **(Teacher participant 10)**.

Allegations have been made anonymously that teachers sexually abused underage female students in the school **(Teacher participant 13)**.

Student I was involved in physical fight with a female student **(Teacher participant 8)**.

A senior administrator was dismissed from service and imprisoned for a sexual attack on a female student at this school **(Teacher participant 20)**.

A girl in form one complained that student J made obscene (verbal sexually offensive) comments about her **(Teacher participant 15)**.

I noticed three students who were assaulting the student J **(Teacher participant 17)**.

The form four girls were fighting over petty issues. On this occasion, one was rude to a girl she had borrowed money from and was not willing to reimburse it. It was like extortion **(Teacher participant 20)**.

Two form girls fought outside the gates after they exchanged words on Facebook over a boyfriend **(Teacher participant 10)**.

There is regular fighting, for example, boys in forms two, five and six **(Teacher participant 8)**.

## 4.5.2 Relational Aggression

### 4.5.2.1 Responses from students

The study established that students in depth interviews and focus groups discussions reported that relational aggression was experienced within the school. The students noted that dissing, gossiping, spreading of rumours and social exclusion were widespread. The following excerpts illustrate these findings:

They can also spread rumours and gossip and you feel ashamed (**Student participant 32**).

My former friends in our class deliberately ignored me. I really felt rejected. They would spread scandalous gossip about my private life (**Student participant 11**).

Some students began to spread rumours about me. My former friends deliberately excluded me from their group in class activities (**Student participant 14**).

A female student spread a dirty gossip against some members of the class (**Student participant 18**).

Students spread negative rumours about other students (**Student participant 12**).

Some students spread gossip and malicious rumours about others so as to tarnish your name, as in my case (**Student participant 5**).

When I realised student B stole my boyfriend, I stopped being a friend of hers. Each time I encounter her in class, I stare at her contemptuously (to indicate she was not welcome). I no longer talk to her at all (**Student participant 15**).

When student C spread a malicious rumour against me, I decided not to talk to her anymore. Whenever she wanted to engage me in class, I ignored her by pretending she was not there (**Student participant 20**).

We were having a maths lesson. When we were about to get into discussion groups, I requested to join group six. John whispered to members that I could not join because my maths was bad. When I realised he had excluded me from the group, I felt angry (**Student participant 27**).

There is cruel gossip among students. For example, in our class, a rumour was circulating that student F's boyfriend was also having an affair with a boy at high school A **(Student participant 3)**.

Some of these girls will stare at you as if you have not had a bath for days if they do not want you in their group **(Student participant 6)**.

A person who does not like you can ignore you. For example, student G and I are no longer friends. Each time we are in the classroom, she intentionally ignores me **(Student participant 1)**.

There are some students who say nasty things about you behind your back **(Student participant 7)**.

#### ***4.5.2.2 Responses from teachers***

Data from teachers' in-depth interviews supported the view expressed by students that relational aggression occurs within the classrooms. Teachers stated that spreading of malicious gossip or rumours, stealing each other's boyfriends and social seclusion were the relational aggressive behaviours that were reported by students. The extracts below illuminate these points:

Then common malicious gossip about issues also leads to fights **(Teacher participant 19)**.

The girls spread nasty gossip about their peer's boyfriends and they also steal each other's boyfriends **(Teacher participant 8)**.

Some prefects are socially excluded by their peers **(Teacher participant 19)**.

#### **4.5.3 Cyber Aggression**

##### ***4.5.3.1 Responses from students***

The study established that student participants experienced cyber aggression. The

students mentioned dissing (disrespect). The students mentioned spreading rumours, making negative comments on photos and sharing other people's secrets on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. The following extracts show this finding:

Someone can disrespect you by posting malicious rumours on Facebook. A rumour was posted that I had sexual relationship with a boy who is notorious in the school. This resulted in my reputation being ruined. I was ridiculed by friends **(Student participant 35)**.

At the beginning of the term, I posted a picture of myself on a social platform site, Instagram. But I did not set my account to private. Some people, probably students from my school, posted offensive comments under my photo. I really felt humiliated until I had the photo removed **(Student participant 33)**.

Somebody circulated a malicious rumour about me on Facebook. The person claimed I was promiscuous **(Student participant 1)**.

My female friend uploaded her photo on Facebook but felt quite hurt when somebody posted negative comments about her appearance **(Student participant 2)**.

Somebody shared my secrets on Facebook and I really got upset about it. It is painful to be betrayed by a friend **(Student participant 7)**.

#### ***4.5.3.2 Responses from teachers***

Data from in-depth interviews showed that teachers concurred with students' observations that cyber aggression was common in classrooms in most secondary schools. The students used social network sites to perpetrate aggressive behaviour. The following extracts demonstrate this finding:

Some students sent distasteful message son Facebook that cause harm to other students **(Teacher participant 12)**.

Some prefects have reported that they received instant messages threatening physical harm on WhatsApp **(Teacher participant 2)**.

Peers gossip against the captain so that he gets demoted. They splash nasty

stories about girl friends on Facebook and hostile tweets on Twitter (**Teacher participant 18**).

## **4.5.4 Verbal Aggression**

### **4.5.4.1 Responses from students**

The study also established that students engaged in verbally aggressive behaviours. The students indicated that name calling, threats, teasing and making noise to disrupt lessons, was commonly experienced. These findings are reflected in the following extracts:

The students will give you a name that mimics a certain character or your physique (**Student participant 17**).

In sports, some students will remark that the dress you are putting on does not fit so that you feel bad (**Student participant 29**).

I sometimes call the teacher names so that I get respect of fellow students (**Student participant 34**).

Students do not fight teachers they only whistle (**Student participant 25**).

When a teacher gets to the classroom and announces that students should take a test, the students will make a noise until the teacher leaves the classroom without teaching (**Student participant 9**).

In addition, name-calling and teasing also occur occasionally. Students will give you a name that mimics your appearance (**Student participant 16**).

There are students in my class who bully others. In our current class, bigger students make derogatory remarks directed at me. This hurts (**Student participant 49**).

Timothy used vulgar words about my mother because he said I should have moved my chair forward. He would touch me inappropriately as well while pushing his desk towards me (**Student participant 35**).

He was provoking me saying that I was overzealous (**Student participant 15**).

There is name calling which is quite common. It consists of mocking somebody so that he gets hurt **(Student participant 8)**.

It consists of giving other students nasty names. The targeted student usually gets embarrassed and feels out of place in class interactions **(Student participant 9)**.

Name-calling happens in our science class **(Student participant 10)**.

Student H is often subjected to name calling because of her appearance **(Student participant 2)**.

My friend at an international school is bullied for her kinky hair, dark complexion and acne on her face. The students who bully her give her humiliating names **(Student participant 1)**.

#### ***4.5.4.2 Responses from teachers***

Data from in-depth interviews with teachers also supported the student observations that verbal aggression was pervasive in classrooms. Specifically, teachers mentioned, dissing, name calling and racial slurs. In addition, some students ridiculed their teachers. The following extract reflects this finding:

Students' use of abusive language to despise other students' complexion or their obese figure **(Teacher participant 16)**.

Some of the students will call your name in a derogatory fashion: 'Maruta, Maruta'. When you turn around they all face the other away pretending it wasn't them **(Teacher participant 11)**.

This aggressive student called coloured student names and they in turn would taunt him about his appearance. They were united. If you aggressed against one, the others would gang up against you **(Teacher participant 15)**.

Students verbally abuse others, for example, mocking their uniform **(Teacher participant 17)**.



## 4.6 IMPACT OF CLASSROOM AGGRESSION

### 4.6.1 Mental health

#### 4.6.1.1 Responses from students

The study established that students believed that the experience of classroom aggression had negatively affected students' physical health as some students got pregnant. Aggressive behaviour was seen as negatively affecting the mental health of victims. Participants mentioned being anxious, depressed, experiencing fear and insecurity. Participants also reported that aggressive behaviour negatively affected their academic performance. The excerpts below illustrate this finding:

When I was subjected to cyber aggression, I felt really depressed **(Student participant 1)**.

Aggressive behaviour results in one feeling distressed and anxious. I could not do well in your academic work as well **(Student participant 11)**.

When I was bullied I felt very insecure and was afraid to come to school **(Student participant 14)**.

Several female students got pregnant after being sexually abused and then withdrew from school **(Student participant 24)**.

Female students drop out of school when they get pregnant after being forced to have sex by teachers and some boys **(Student participant 20)**.

When I [was] the subject me of malicious gossip and being excluded from the group of friends, I felt anxious and worthless **(Student participant 23)**.

Engaging in aggression negatively affected my grades **(Student participant 7)**.

## 4.6.2 Physical Injuries

### 4.6.2.1 Responses from students

The study revealed that those students who engaged in physical fights incurred injuries requiring medical attention or, in some cases, intervention of the police and courts. The students specially mentioned injuries such as lacerations, broken teeth, human bites and cuts resulting in bleeding, eye injuries and abrasions as the following excerpts show:

I experienced a lot of pain from my head injuries that I got as a result of the assault I was subjected to by bullies at school. The nurse said I had lacerations **(Student participant 19)**.

Then I retaliated and hit him above the eye. I could not come to school while attending to the court case and this negatively affected my academic performance **(Student participant 36)**.

I sustained abrasions on my head when student K threw a chair at me while we were working out mathematics problems. I lost valuable learning time while recovering at home. As a result, my academic work for the year was poor **(Student participant 30)**.

The fights result in some students getting hurt. Last month when a fight broke out between soccer players at a school tournament, two of the boys punched each other. They bruised each other's faces and one had swollen eyes **(Student participant 16)**.

The girls who fought were pulling each other's hair, biting and scratching each other and rolling on the ground until they were separated. They ended up with such injuries as bites, facial bruises and bleeding **(Student participant 3)**.

### 4.6.2.2 Responses from teachers

The study established that teachers confirmed student reports on injuries received

by fighting students. Data from teachers' in-depth interviews demonstrated that teachers witnessed fighting between students which resulted in injuries. They reported injuries such as lacerations and eye injuries. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

I took student who had been attacked by students from the opposing soccer team on the school grounds to the police at a local police station and then to the hospital for treatment. He received lacerations on his forehead that required some sutures **(Teacher participant 17)**.

After stopping the fight, I took student M to the police and then to hospital for he had a bad eye injury. His right eye was swollen and bleeding. He received treatment but spent several days recuperating at home **(Teacher participant 13)**.

### **4.6.3 Academic performance**

#### ***4.6.3.1 Responses from students***

Students suggested that some victims of aggression did not perform well academically because they avoided coming to school because they feared being victimised. Aggressive behaviour interrupted learning so that they could not concentrate. Victims of aggression also disengaged from learning because of low self-esteem. In addition, some students were afraid to participate in class because of fear of being ridiculed. Aggressive behaviour also disrupted teaching. The extracts below illustrate this finding:

The name-calling makes it difficult to concentrate **(Student participant 12)**.

You might find that, in a week, you attend only a few lessons because you will try to avoid the aggressors. This means I miss on the tests and important information from the lessons. At the end of the term, I do not pass the examinations **(Student participant 34)**.

When I want to concentrate on my academic work, they will try to humiliate me

verbally (**Student participant 9**).

I was a victim of name calling the first few days when I enrolled at this school. The other students were taking advantage of that I was new at the school. I felt bad. I was afraid to come to school. I could not ask questions in class as I thought the other students would think it's silly. My performance in class deteriorated (**Student participant 12**).

The incidents involving gossip resulted in a lot of ill feeling between students in the class making it difficult to concentrate. Students affected generally are affected negatively academically (**Student participant 18**).

When you are a victim of verbal aggression you really feel humiliated to participate in classroom activity and you end up not passing the tests at the end of the term (**Student participant 35**).

Some of these aggressive students do badly in their tests because they do not care much about schoolwork. As a result of the aggressive behaviour, they do not devote time to revise the work set by their teachers. They also interfere with the teaching (**Student participant 8**).

#### **4.6.3.2 Responses from teachers**

Teachers suggested that some of the students who were perpetrators or victims of aggression disengaged from learning. They mentioned students who played truant and did not bother to do their homework and submit assignments on time. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

The student who was involved in a fight with student N and others has been affected negatively with regards to his performance in Management of Business and Accounts. He is currently not performing up to standard. He is reserved on the whole and does not participate in class much (**Teacher participant 16**).

I am the student's history teacher and I find that the student O in U6, who regularly fails to do his work on time due to his aggressive behaviour. He fails to present his assignments on time. His aggressive behaviour affects his academic achievement negatively (**Teacher participant 11**).

Student P, as a result of his aggressive behaviour, had a poor academic performance record. He did not pass his examinations at all (**Teacher participant 12**).

These students who fight a lot are poor academic performers. They don't do their homework and some of them bunk lessons (**Teacher participant 8**).

#### **4.6.4 School dropout**

##### **4.6.4.1 Response from students**

Students mentioned that aggressive students who got pregnant after being coerced into sexual relations by peers or teachers had to withdraw from school. Violence and physical aggression by students led to some students being expelled from school and committing suicide. The following excerpts illustrate this finding:

Our friend got impregnated after being forced to have sex by some boy in the school and gave birth to a baby. She withdrew from school (**Student participant 4**).

Fighting can indeed influence somebody badly. We had a friend who was popular with students because he was known for fighting. He was expelled from school for violence (**Student participant 38**).

Two weeks after being excluded from school for violence student L was so upset [he] committed suicide by swallowing some paraquat (a toxic herbicide – chemical name dipyridium) (**Student participant 16**).

Student alleged that teachers targeted them with verbal aggression for failing to pay fees. Teachers who aggressed against students forced such students to develop negative attitudes towards school and to have lower self-esteem. At the same time, such aggression distracted them from concentrating on their academic work and also demotivated them. The students also revealed that if a student was suspended for aggressive behaviour, his or her academic performance was negatively affected. But other students felt that streaming and lack of intelligence exacerbated the negative

impact of aggressive behaviour on academic performance. This finding is illustrated in the following extracts:

Some of the time I do not want to come to school at all because when if I come the teacher will yell at me about failure to pay fees. I cannot concentrate on my work. As a result, I do not do well in examinations (**Student participant 6**).

Two girls fought over a boyfriend who was also a student. As a result of that fight, the girl who was in form two got suspended and she had the lowest term mark in the class (**Student participant 2**).

I was the youngest in the form three class. The students would verbally abuse me. This would cause me a lot of emotional distress. My grades have taken a tumble as a result (**Student participant 4**).

Aggressive students don't do well academically as a result of their aggressive behaviour (**Student participant 22**).

A concentration of aggressive students in certain classes disrupts lessons. This aggressive behaviour results in poor performance by students in such classes (**Student participant 12**).

#### ***4.6.4.2 Responses from teachers***

Teachers in in-depth interviews indicated that teachers believed that aggression resulted in teenage pregnancy and poor academic achievement. The extract below illustrates the finding:

A temporary teacher at the school forced a female student into a sexual relationship resulting in the student getting pregnant (**Teacher participant 9**).

Some girls have been forced to have sex by some male students. When they get pregnant, the quality of their academic work declines (**Teacher participant 4**).

Aggression by students results in poor performance by students (**Teacher participant 7**).

Students who fight do not perform well in their schoolwork because they are often excluded or suspended from school (**Teacher participant 14**).

Students who are aggressive tend to adopt negative attitudes to school and perform badly in examinations **(Teacher participant 8)**.

## **4.7 STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND REDUCE CLASSROOM AGGRESSION**

### **4.7.1 Responses from students**

Students in in depth interviews and focus groups suggested that teachers should team up with parents, students and community members to both condemn and reduce classroom aggression and to support anti-bullying policy. Teachers should also find ways of engaging parents through community agencies to stop violence in families. Teachers need to and reinforce awareness of classroom aggression through anti –bullying programmes. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

The teachers should be trained to identify classroom bullying and work with our parents so that together we condemn bullying in the classrooms **(Student participant 2)**

The teachers should try to work with our parents so that together we stop fighting that occurs in the school **(student participant 37)**.

The school may partner with our parents so that they support anti-bullying measures and policies the school puts in place **(student participant 13)**

The teachers need to change attitudes in the local community where some of the gang members live so that they discourage violence in the school **(student participant 6)**

Teachers could invite church leaders for seminars to inculcate Christian values in students in order reduce classroom aggressive behaviour **(Student participant 8)**

#### 4.7.2 Responses from teachers

Responses from Teachers in in-depth interviews agreed with students' suggestions that the school initiate meetings and community programmes to reduce family violence and child abuse in homes. In addition they should get parents and the community involved in anti-bullying initiatives in school:

The school should engage parents who are prone to violence at home through workshops to learn nonviolent ways of solving problems in order that their children learn to behave well in school **(Teacher participant 1)**

The school may convene meetings with parents so that they work with teachers and the community to support an anti-aggression policy. **(Teacher participant 6)**

The school needs to initiate a community awareness programme to educate parents who are violent and abuse their children on good parenting **(Teacher participant 4)**

#### 4.7.3 Responses from students

Students in in depth interviews and focus groups proposed that teachers should show fairness in dealing with students and should not only explain the rules to students but they should also involve them in the creation of school rules. In addition students recommend teachers should not abuse students they view as of low ability. Teachers should also motivate students during lessons. The following quotations illuminate this finding:

Teachers should make rules clear to students and they should not show favouritism **(student participant 11)**

Teachers should involve the student body when formulating school rules **(student participant 19)**

Teachers should stop mistreating students whom they regard as "dull" **(Student participant 3).**



The school also needs to strengthen the lessons on Wednesday-Choose Freedom **(student participant 5)**.

Teachers should make lessons more interesting so that we improve in our examinations **(student participant 25)**

Teachers should improve counselling for students who perpetrate bullying and those who are victims of aggression **(student participant 13)**

#### **4.7.4 Responses from teachers**

The study revealed that teachers suggested that student leaders and teachers should be trained on how to identify and reduce subtle forms of classroom aggression and concurred with students that the student body should be invited to participate in creating school rules. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

Prefects should be trained so that they help reduce cyber bullying **(Teacher participant 2)**

Teachers need to be trained to identify and prevent some forms of classroom aggression such as cyber bullying and relational aggression **(Teacher participant 7)**

Teachers need training on effective ways of managing aggressive students **(Teacher participant 15)**

Teachers should involve the student body in the creation of school rules and improve classroom climate **(Teacher participant 5)**

Teachers like students proposed that school implement effective life skills and counselling programmes to reduce classroom aggression and its negative impact. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

The school should strengthen guidance and counselling programmes that address issues of classroom aggression **(Teacher participant 10)**

The school should put in place counselling practices to prevent and counter negative effects of classroom aggression such as suicidal behaviour and poor

academic performance **(Teacher participant 8)**

The school should improve on life skills sessions that are targeted at students  
**(Teacher participant 10)**

The following section discusses the findings of the study.

## **4.8 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to establish, firstly, the extent to which biological and social factors caused aggression in the classroom and related areas in Harare urban secondary schools. Secondly, the study sought to establish the extent to which various forms of aggressive behaviour manifested themselves in the same schools. Lastly, the study aimed to establish the relationship between aggressive behaviour, physical and mental health, as well as student academic performance and early school leaving. The discussion is arranged according to the research questions. Section 4.6.1 deals with the causes of aggression. The major findings are discussed and interpreted in relation to the extant literature. In addition the results will be related to the integrated theoretical model from Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2006) and Weiner (1986; 1995) that guides this study.

### **4.8.1 Factors that cause classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools**

#### **4.8.1.1 *Biological factors***

The current study found that participants in both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions attributed aggressive behaviour in adolescent girls and boys to biological processes that cause pubertal development. The pubertal change that participants attributed to aggressive behaviour was physical strength associated with the growth

spate in boys.

These findings are inconsistent with previous research indicating that male aggressive tendencies temporarily precede their physical formidability in Spanish adolescent boys. Physical strength is a secondary gender-based characteristic that has been shown to increase in boys between the ages of 11 and 17 and is associated with antisocial tendencies (Isen, McGue & Lacono, 2015:450). The results are inconsistent with a study which reported that pubertal timing and tempo was important in predicting psychological outcomes (internalising and externalising problems) in girls but only sparsely related to boys' psychological outcomes (Marceau et al, 2011:1389). The difference in the findings might be explained by the fact that biological processes, social context (i.e. family, deviant peers and poor school conditions) acting jointly may have led to the development of aggressive behaviour in both male and female adolescent participants in the current study. In addition, the differences might be a result of the use of dissimilar research instruments, for example, the present study relied on self-reports of perceived pubertal timing while the Tanner stages were used in the study by Marceau et al (2011:1396). The findings are consistent with the integrated attribution-bio ecological model that guides this study. The students and teachers endorsed causal attributions for microsystem factors (biological person characteristics) as causal factors for classroom aggression.

The current study established that participants attributed aggressive behaviour by adolescent girls to the experience of menarche or menstruation. This was consistent with findings of studies, for example, Vermeersch, T'Sjorn, Kaufman and Vincke (2008:905) and Mendes, Mari, Singer, Barros and Mello (2009:581) that established that there was an association between free estradiol and both non-aggressive forms of risk taking and aggressive forms of risk-taking.

The findings of the present study on aggressive behaviour during menarche were also consistent with previous studies, for example, Grady-Weliky (2003:433) and Firoonzi, Kafi and Shirmohammadi (2012:39) that found aggressive behaviour is linked to the premenstrual phase of the cycle in a condition called premenstrual dysphonic disorder. This is a psychiatric condition limited to a few adolescent girls

and women. Anger, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, irritability and aggressive behaviour are the most frequently reported symptoms of such a condition. This finding of the current study that revealed that teachers and students endorsed causal attributions about menarche to explain classroom aggressive behaviour is consistent with the integrated model that guides this study. The model recognizes the biological and genetic aspects of the person. Demand characteristics of a person such as physical appearance or in this case menarche may influence initial interaction because of expectations, attitudes and preconceptions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:812).

The current study also established that teachers believed that some medical conditions may induce adolescent students to be aggressive. This finding is supported by results of previous research, for example, Kim, Park and Yoo (2015:3) that revealed that adolescent diabetic patients displayed more aggressive behaviour and poorer academic performance than their healthy peers. They explained this in terms of the biological characteristics of diabetes. This finding is consistent with bioecological theory which suggested that environmental risks may interact with individual biological susceptibilities resulting in aggressive behaviour (differential sensitivity) (Wachs, 2015:15). The finding is also supported by attribution theory that explains this through stigma and fault attributions from peers when they feel that the diabetic student is responsible for his condition. The fault attribution may trigger reactive aggressive behaviour in the victim (Barnett, Wardian, Sonnentag & Nichols, 2015:118).

#### **4.8.1.2 Social factors**

The results of the current study indicated that male to male, female to female and male to female student physical and relational aggression occurred over romantic liaisons in the following situations: when relationships end and one partner is upset, when one partner is jealous of the former partner's new-found relationship or there is competition between suitors. The physical aggression occurred in the classroom and classroom related areas. These results were consistent with previous research

findings showing aggression between same sex secondary school students occurs due to mating and dating (Gallup, O'Brien & Wilson, 2011:264).

The current study also established that physical aggressive behaviour occurred mainly in the first two romantic stages as outlined by Connolly, Nguyen, Pepler, Craig and Jiang (2013:1021). More specifically, fighting occurred at the entry into romantic affiliations during early adolescence when puberty triggered romantic interest and also when casual dating emerged both in the form of group dating as well as short-lived dyads. This finding on student and teacher participants attributing aggressive students targeting same and other sex peers to gain status over romantic relationships is consistent with the integrated attribution-bioecological model (Espelage, 2014:258). It is a phenomenon that is explained by individual characteristics (microsystem) level peer relationships that characterize adolescence.

The study also established that teacher and students attributed some of the aggressive behaviour to sporting experiences in classroom-related areas. The aggressive behaviour manifested itself in verbal and physical forms. Students were assaulted by groups of students from opposing teams because of perceived unfairness in the outcomes of games. In addition, students fought because of long held grudges against another school. Provocations from spectators of the opposing team might also lead to violence. This finding was consistent with results from previous studies, for example, Kimble et al (2010:453) and Sukys et al (2011:74) that revealed that an ego-orientation (i.e. a desire to demonstrate mastery relative to the performance of other athletes) and stress were associated with on-field instrumental aggression in the context of competition.

The current study also revealed that, in team sports, the losing athletes were using attributions which were self-serving (i.e. blaming the referee and the winning team) for their team's loss. This finding is consistent with results of a previous study (Allen, Jones & Sheffield, 2009:466) who found that, when athletes lost, they experienced anger and aggression if they attributed the cause of their failure to others. This anger lasted for a while after the competition (Allen et al, 2009:466). According to Weiner (2014:359), anger is a negative emotion directed at an external target, be it a person, group or culture. Angry states motivated aggressive behaviour (Reisenzein, 201

4:334).The current study finding on aggression associated with sporting activities in classroom related areas is therefore consistent with the integrated attribution- biological theoretical model guiding the study which explains the aggressive behaviour through interactions in the peer microsystem.

It emerged from this study that outstanding students such as prefects and athletes were targeted as victims of aggression. The perpetrators of such aggression were peers who were not so successful. This was supported by previous research that revealed that all female participants reported that they were sidelined and bullied at school and that this behaviour had harmed them (O'Neill & Calder, 2014:218). When specific aggressive actions target high achieving individuals, it is called "tall poppy syndrome". It can be explained by the causal attribution of responsibility and comparison emotions such as envy (Feather, 1989:264). The less successful students might believe that the student who was successful did not deserve to be successful and maybe envious of his success (Feather, 1992:131). In their desire to bring the tall poppy down to their level, the low achieving students would aggress against the high achieving student (Feather, 1992:131).

The conclusion in the above paragraph is at variance with research findings based on attribution theory which revealed that students who succeed through effort alone are rewarded and admired more than those who succeed through ability alone or a fusion of ability and effort (Weiner, 1985:549). Therefore success attributed to the successful, even if it is perceived as relatively less deserved and thus less rewarded than success through effort alone (Leach, 2008:108). The current study findings show that anger and aggression at successful prefects and athletes cannot be explained satisfactorily by Weiner's attribution theory. But the finding maybe consistent with other findings related to bioecological theory that showed that lack of connectedness due to competitiveness in school sports may lead to victimization by peers (Berkbigler, 2015:40).

The current study also established there are a few prefects who perpetuated aggression against other students. This contradicts a study on student leadership in schools (Kirui et al, 2011:232). The aforementioned study established that school heads believed that prefects assisted the school administration in ensuring safety

and security in the school (Kirui et al, 2011:232). This could be due to the measures used and the nature of the sample in this study which did not include students who were not student leaders. The study used a questionnaire and the sample included prefects, headmasters and community members such as board of governors and security guards. The findings of the current study that students and teachers attributed classroom aggressive behaviour to prefects are supported by the bio ecological theory which argues that interactions in the peer microsystem, due to lack of supervision and monitoring by teachers may result in developmental outcomes such as aggression.

The present study established that, in schools where some students came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, aggression was perpetrated by gang members. The nature of the aggression varied with relational aggression being predominant in girls' only schools but physical aggression and violence being more predominant among boys only and mixed sex schools. Gangs also peddled drugs besides being aggressive. The study established that participants attributed some of the aggressive behaviour to members who affiliated with gangs and who abused drugs. Some of the students found it easy to join gangs because their siblings were also members. This finding contradicted findings by other researchers who found that gang membership is not directly linked to aggression perpetration (Estrada et al, 2014:244; Estrada et al, 2013:630). The differences might be due to the cross sectional nature of the data used in the previous studies where causality cannot be inferred. It is possible also that the sample under-represented gang members in urban schools. The social context of the current study differed from the studies cited above. It may be therefore that the schools and families in the present study were poorly organised such that they failed to monitor truancy, substance abuse and risky peer associations. Community dynamics, poverty, family systems and type of school resulted in gangs causing aggressive behaviour in schools. These findings are consistent with attribution theory in that teachers do not accept responsibility for the cause of classroom aggression but take action to solve the problem which matches the Fiske and Taylor(1984) compensatory model. The findings are also consistent with the bio ecological model which asserts that the neighbourhood factors such as presence of gangs may give rise to undesirable adolescent outcomes (Forber-Pratt,

Aragon & Espelage, 2014:10; Espelage & De La Rue, 2011:4).

The current study established that some violent students lived with a gang member in a poor neighbourhood. Furthermore, the study established that gang violence and drug abuse nearly always led to alienation, arrests and expulsion from school. This was consistent with findings from previous studies, for example, Gilman, Hill, David, Howell and Kosterman (2014:215) that revealed that violent adolescents were at risk of joining a gang if they lived with a gang member in an antisocial neighbourhood and were influenced by antisocial peers.

In addition, student participants in the present study believed that classroom aggression was caused by peer pressure and the desire for power. This finding was consistent with previous studies, for example, Cho and Chung (2012:525), Thornberg (2010:318), Thornberg (2015:21) and Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck (2010:197). These studies established that student participants believed that aggression was due to students striving for dominance and status, as well as antisocial peer conformity.

The finding on students' beliefs that peer pressure and power caused classroom aggression contradicts the results of a sociological study that established that school bullying caused peer pressure (Hamarus & Kailkkonene, 2008:342). The aforesaid study found that bullying resulted from a pursuit of power, status or popularity. The bullying behaviour then created cultural norms and forced all pupils in the bullying community to follow them (Hamarus & Kaikkonene, 2008:342). The findings of the current study that students attributed peer pressure as a causal factor for classroom aggression is never the less consistent with Weiner (1985) attribution theory in that students make an external attribution for their aggression rather than take responsibility. This may reflect a self-serving bias that is designed – consciously or not – to enhance their self-esteem in their own eyes and in the eye of others (Augustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2014:159). The finding is also consistent with bioecological theory and research guided by such research. Bio ecological theory posits that negative and conflicted proximal process result in the erosion of social capital and can lead to greater incidence of aggression (Smokowski, et al., 2016:13).



It also emerged from the study that social factors such as religious and cultural beliefs were perceived as having a causal role in the development of aggressive behaviour in the classroom. This was consistent with previous research findings such as Hong and Espelage (2012:318) and Mpofu (2003:4) who established that religious and cultural beliefs were macro-system factors that caused aggressive behaviour in adolescent students in school. In addition, other studies found that while some religious beliefs (i.e. Christian) played a protective role, Muslim religiosity encouraged violent behaviour (Baier, 2014:121). The conclusion in the aforementioned study was that Muslim religiosity was one additional factor for the higher violent rates of Muslims in Germany besides poor social integration and parental upbringing. Among the Shona in Zimbabwe, it is believed that aggression may be caused by spirits from a family member or ancestors (Mpofu, 2003:4). The finding that teachers endorsed causal attributions explaining classroom aggressive behaviour through cultural and religious beliefs is consistent with the bio ecological theory as these macrosystem level factors have been shown to cause aggression in adolescents (Espelage, 2014:260; Hong & Espelage, 2012:318). The current study findings about cultural and religious beliefs as causes of classroom aggression are also consistent with attribution theory which argues that an individual's propensity to blame another person increases as the observer's perceived similarity to the other person decreases. Individuals tend to assign the cause of undesirable behaviour by an out-group member to a personality deficiency that they attribute to members of that group (Waytowich, Onwuegbuzie & Elbedour, 2011:3). This phenomenon is referred to as group-serving bias.

The current study established that both teachers and students attributed peer aggression and sexual abuse inside the school to external causes. Similarly, students blamed teachers and peers but not themselves for the aggression. These findings of an external attribution for aggressive behaviour are supported by previous research, for example, Lambert and Miller (2010:617), Kauppi and Porhola (2012:1062), Reddy, Espelage, McMahon, Kanrich, Anderman, Lane, Brown, Reynolds, Jones and Kanrich (2013:241), and Abuya, Onsomu, Moore and Sagwe (2012:332). These authors revealed that students' causal attributions that are external and beyond the control of the students significantly predicted discipline

problems and reflected the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias. But the attribution by teachers that some of them were responsible for sexually abusing students contradicted previous findings by Guttman (1982:19) in that this was an internal attribution. This suggested that teachers with an internal attribution felt shame for violating group norms and the social order (Sheikh & Jannoff-Bulman, 2010:221). The findings are consistent with attribution theory which asserts that people have a tendency to make external attributions for negative behaviour in order to protect self-esteem.

The study also revealed that some of the adolescent male students were both victims and aggressors. These students generally had a poor family environment, were rejected by peers and were possibly victims of sexual abuse. The male students displayed aggressive behaviour in the classroom as a result of their experiences. This finding was consistent with previous research, for example, Echols (2014:272) who revealed that, while victims feel stigmatised and shameful, girls experienced depression but boys may experience rage as well against those they feel were responsible for their problems. These findings are consistent with both attribution and bio ecological theories. Attribution theory suggests that people who are stigmatized and perceived to be responsible for the sexual abuse would likely receive a negative treatment. The current study finding is also consistent with ecological theory which has demonstrated that students who are victims of peer aggression are likely to come from families associated with abuse or inconsistent parenting (Espelage, Low & De La Rue, 2012:313; Georgiou & Fanti, 2010:296).

The present research implicated teachers' coercive and unfair treatment of students as a cause of aggressive behaviour. Both teachers and students believed that aggressive behaviour by the teacher in the classroom led to student aggression against peers through management strategies that included corporal punishment combined with yelling in anger as well as using sarcasm to belittle students. This finding was consistent with results from previous research, for example, Shields, Nadasen and Hanneke (2015:56), Oldenburg, Duijn, Sentse and Huitsing (2014:1), Weiner (1980b:186) and Reizenzein (2014:332) which revealed that aggressive classroom interactions escalated due to teachers' use of corporal punishment and violence against students. Consequently, these teachers were likely to be less

motivated and committed to counteracting student peer aggression than teachers who attributed aggression less strongly to external causes. The results of the study showed that there were higher rates of aggression (i.e. victimisation) in classrooms of teachers who attributed peer aggression to external factors outside their control.

The findings from the present study on teachers' use of aggression against students in the classroom differed from previous research, for example, Roache and Lewis (2011:137); Romi, Lewis, Roache and Riley (2011:237); Romi, Salkovsky, and Lewis (2016:178), that teachers used only verbal aggression and consequences in response to student misbehaviour. The difference might be due to the cultural values in the Zimbabwean teaching community and the parents who readily accept the use of corporal punishment (Shumba, Mpofo, Chireshe & Mapfumo, 2010:2). The findings from the present study showing that teachers used corporal punishment are consistent with attribution- bioecological framework where teachers are more likely to attribute difficulties with students' aggressive behaviour to students' themselves. They are likely to believe that their aggression is a product of stable and permanent student characteristics (Weiner, 2000:12). These attributions tend to be shaped by cultural beliefs in the society( i.e. a macrosystem factors)..

Evidence from the present investigation suggested that the family structure is believed to play a causal role in the development of classroom aggression. Some of the aggressive students lived with one biological parent and a stepparent, or lived with a grandparent, or single mother. These unstable family types were common in a large urban area. Some students were orphans living alone. Yet other students were living in rented accommodation and boarding schools as parents were working outside the country. The findings were largely supported by previous studies. For example, Krohn, Hall and Lizotte (2009:466), Hong and Espelage (2012:315), Guterman, Lee, Taylor and Rathouz (2009:904), Saint-Jacques, Robitaille, Godbout, Parent, Drapeau, and Gagne (2011:557) revealed that students may develop aggressive behaviour and abuse substances if the family structure changed or if they stayed in a step family. This finding that teachers endorsed casual attributions explaining changes in the family structure due to divorce or separation is consistent with the bio ecological theory which guides this study which posits that changes in the life course (chronosystem) may lead to peer aggression (Espelage, 2014:261;

Hong & Espelage, 2012:318).

The findings of the present study suggested that some students who were aggressive came from families in which there was violence between family members. This was consistent with findings of other studies, for example, Choe and Zimmerman (2014:595) who found a reciprocal process of parent-child hostility involving interpersonal conflict in families and adolescent perpetrating peer violence. The results of the current study also differed from the findings of Black (2014:42) who found no association between parental influence and student aggression at school. She concluded that findings of her study did not support Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The current study finding that participants attributed classroom aggression to family violence is consistent with the integrated attribution-bioecological theoretical model which asserts that processes in the family microsystem can result in adolescent aggressive behaviour against peers (Espelage, Low, Rao, Hong & Little, 2014:345).

The present investigation provided evidence that aggressive students came from both poor and affluent families. Some of the parents in the current study did not stay with their children. This may be explained by Coleman's social capital concept (Coleman, 1990:302). Family social capital refers to the bonds between parents and children reflected in the time and attention spent interacting with children and monitoring their activities. There was therefore less family social capital in those circumstances. There was evidence from the literature, for example, Wu (2014:25), indicating that parental warmth, supervision or monitoring had a protective effect on adolescent behavioural outcomes. It is only when adolescents felt that supervision was excessive that parental monitoring may result in increased externalising problems (Camp, 2012:76).

One of the disturbing findings of the present study was that aggression by form one students was attributed to their primary school culture. In addition, the aggressive behaviour during the transition to secondary school was associated with such institutionally sanctioned orientation programs where hazing inadvertently occurs. The process of hazing results in new students being humiliated and physically abused by senior students. The study established that, in addition to the above

transition, another transition occurs when students have written their “O” level examinations and were facing the challenges of the future. This is also associated with a flare up of aggression and defiance of teachers by senior students. These findings were supported by previous studies, for example, Lester, Cross, Shaw and Dooley (2012:225), Frey, Ruchkin, Martin and Schwab-Stone (2009:9), Grandeau, Ahn and Rodkin (2011:1701), Topping (2011:271), Huysamer and Lemmer (2013:18) and De Wet (2014:159) that found that social factors such as group dynamics played a causal role in these aggressive interactions between new students and senior students. Students who were aggressive in the last year of primary school may continue being aggressive. But other students would be seeking to join a new peer group where they sought popularity and dominance.

The results of the current study on the association between school transition and aggressive behaviour were, however, inconsistent with findings showing that a higher level of class aggression in primary school was associated with better school and peer transition (West, 2010:36). The results of the present study showed that an increase in aggressive behaviour during the transition to secondary school may possibly be explained by students experiencing stress due to the school environment, the effect of classroom composition, socialising with older but deviant peers, lack of parental supervision as well as personal characteristics (Hanewald, 2013:65; Müller, Hofmann, Fleischli & Studer, 2015:10). The finding that students and teachers attributed the cause of aggressive behaviour to processes and social factors during the educational transition is consistent with the bioecological theory that guides this study which recognizes chronosystem level factors that may render children at risk during such crucial times in their lives (O’Toole, Hayes, Mhathuna, 2014:125; Pietarinen, Pyhalto & Soini, 2010:240).

The current study established that teachers and students attributed the cause of aggressive behaviour to other factors such as shortages of learning resources such as chairs, desks, books, computer accessories and laboratory equipment. The situation in science laboratories where equipment was inadequate and there were large classes meant that only a few of the students could directly take part in experiments because of laboratory safety rules. This situation therefore fomented disaffection and aggressive behaviour among students. This was consistent with

previous studies, for example, Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009:184), Suldo, McMahan, Chappel and Loker (2012:77), and Sullivan, Johnson, Owens and Conway (2014:53) which revealed that physical resources were a crucial aspect of the school climate. A negative school climate might result in classroom aggression in secondary schools. This finding of the current study is consistent with the integrated attribution-bio ecological theoretical model which asserts that the physical and economic environment may result in adolescent aggressive behaviour (Evans, 2006:430; Aeillo, Nicosia & Thompson, 1979:201). The aggressive behaviour maybe stress induced because adolescents are motivated to reduce the salience of space constraints (Stokol, 1972:276).

#### **4.8.2 Manifestation of classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools**

This section discusses the manifestation of aggressive behaviour as experienced by participants of this study.

##### ***4.8.2.1 Physical aggression***

The current study established that physical aggression was perpetrated by male and female students on school grounds usually in the absence of teachers. Teachers were also reported to use physical violence against students as a form of punishment. Furthermore, some students alleged that some teachers and staff members perpetrated sexual abuse against girls. The study also established that some students perpetrated violence and threats against teachers after a misunderstanding. This finding is consistent with the attribution-bioecological theoretical framework where such outcomes are viewed as products of interactions within multi-layered contexts.

Adolescent physical aggression was common with the bigger boys particularly form

ones and form fours. Some students used chairs as weapons when they attacked others.

It emerged from this study that physical aggression took the following forms: pushing, striking, hitting, throwing things, rape or sexual abuse, kicking, biting, pulling of hair and administering corporal punishment. The results of the study further indicated that aggressive behaviour by peers tended to decrease when students are in “A” level classes. Both teachers and students claimed that physical aggression was quite common among both sexes. There were fewer reports of fights between boys and girls. The current study findings on the occurrence of physical aggression and unauthorised corporal punishment in urban secondary school classrooms in Harare were consistent with previous studies, for example, Bradshaw, Waasdorp and Johnson (2014:10), Dunne, Sabates, Bosumtwi-Sam and Owusu (2013:292), Letendre and Smith (2011:54), and Shumba, Ndofirepi and Musengi (2012:279) which revealed that physical aggression occurred in classrooms and was perpetrated by students and teachers.

The results of a lack of gender differences in physical aggression reported above contradicted the literature reviewed where boys are known to engage in physical aggression more than girls, for example, Wang, Iannotti and Nansel (2009:368). A tentative explanation for this variance was that girls would engage in non-normative aggressive behaviours if they had problems in anger dysregulation, impulsivity, thrill and adventure seeking or positive expectancies for aggression (Crapanzano, Frick & Terranova, 2010:442). But it was more likely that, in the present study, like in other studies reporting no gender differences in physical fighting by adolescent students, for instance, Acquah, Lloyd, Davis and Wilson (2014:235), physical aggression behaviour rates for adolescent boys were underreported intentionally or due to inability to remember. These findings showing that participants have witnessed manifestation of physical aggression in the classroom are consistent with the integrated attribution- bioecological theoretical model that guides this study that argues that such manifestation should be viewed in the context of developmentally disruptive person force characteristics, family, school and community factors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:811; Ramos, 2013:445).

#### **4.8.2.2 Relational aggression**

The current study results indicated that students used relational aggression such as spreading of malicious gossip, rumours and social exclusion. These relational aggression strategies were meant to manipulate friendships and inflict pain. Malicious gossip was used to destroy an opponent's reputation without disclosing the identity of the perpetrator. The study also established that girls used nonverbal expressions of relational aggression. These involved the use of body language particularly hostile facial expressions and ignoring to show dislike.

These findings from the current study showed that girls who used relational aggressive behaviours found support from previous studies, for example, Blake, Kim and Lease (2011:295), and Wang et al (2009:7) who reported that gossiping and other nonverbal forms of relational aggression occurred in classrooms. The current study findings that students experienced relational aggression in the classroom are also consistent with the integrated theoretical model that guides this study that asserts that the child's characteristics and the social context such as the classroom may influence the children's behaviour, such as relational aggression (Vourgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015:5; Herrenkohl, McMorris, Catalino Abbot, Hemphill & Toumbourou, 2007:386).

#### **4.8.2.3 Cyber aggression**

It emerged from this study that both teachers and students experienced cyber aggression. The following types of cyber aggression behaviours were experienced by participants: denigration of female victims, spreading of secrets or receiving threatening and offensive messages. The study also established that the cyber-aggressive behaviours were perpetrated through cell phones, computers and on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. This finding was consistent with previous research, for example, Gradinger, Strohmeir and Spiel (2010:5), Allen (2014:14), Cuervo, Martinez, Quintana and Amezaga (2014:108),



and Bryce and Fraser (2013:785) which revealed that cyber aggression occurred in classrooms. The findings of the current study that teacher and student participants experienced cyber-aggression is consistent with research associated with the integrated attribution-bioecological theoretical model that posits that individual, family, peer and community factors may manifest in cyber aggressive behaviours in classrooms and beyond (Cross, Barnes, Papageorgiou, Hardwen, Hearn & Lester, 2015:7; Kowalski, Giumette, Schroede & Lattanner, 2014:1126).

The current study also established that there were students who experienced multiple forms of aggression as perpetrators and victims. It was reported by teachers that some female participants began their aggressive behaviour on cyberspace where they threatened each other. The students came to school where they exchanged bad words with others and finally fought on the school grounds. There was therefore an overlap of traditional and cyber aggression. The existence of multiple forms of aggression was supported by Bradshaw, Waasdorp and Johnson (2014:8) who established that the overlap in multiple forms of aggression was linked to school contextual factors such as supervision, school physical disorder and behavioural expectations. The findings of the present study are consistent with the attribution-bioecological theoretical framework which recognizes that proximal processes in varied contexts can result in multiple manifestations of aggressive behaviour,

#### **4.8.2.4 Verbal aggression**

The current study established that name-calling was the most common verbal aggression in the schools. Other verbal aggressive behaviours that were experienced by students were yelling and humiliating comments from teachers. Teachers, in turn, were the targets of noise and whistling from students who disrupted teaching. The main personal attributes targeted by aggressors were the victim's appearance and clothes (especially girls). These findings were consistent with the results of previous studies, for example, Al-Bita, Al-Omari, Sonbol, Al-Ahmad and Cunningham (2013:875), Seehra, Newton and DiBiase (2011:414), and

Aboud and Miller (2007:809) who found that victims were the targets of name calling if their weight, facial and dento-facial features departed from the normal or they belonged to a minority race.

In addition, the current study found that students in elite multiracial secondary schools who felt disrespected reacted with physical aggression. This finding was consistent with previous research, for example, DeBono and Muraven (2014:43) which indicated that people who felt disrespected responded with greater aggression. But this finding from the present research that dissing, a verbal form of aggressive behaviour, differed from previous studies, for example, Brezina, Agnew, Cullen and Wright (2004:303), and Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010:61) that revealed that the behaviour of many low status inner city adolescents was influenced by a street culture that prescribed violent reactions to interpersonal attacks and shows of disrespect. In the current study, the students were from middle class families and were generally not poor. This might suggest that, at some international secondary schools with a multiracial composition, there may have been racial prejudice and slurs among the students that fuelled the aggressive behaviours. This finding is consistent with the integrated attribution-bioecological theoretical framework guiding this study where issues of community embeddedness mean that the least predominant group in the school is at great risk of victimization manifesting as verbal aggression (Hawley & Williford, 2014:7).

### **4.8.3 The impact of classroom aggression on physical and mental health, academic performance and school dropout**

#### ***4.8.3.1 Physical injuries***

The current study established that physical aggression resulted in injuries among both boys and girls. These injuries included bruises, lacerations, head injuries, human bites and swollen eyes. But there were gender differences in the severity of injuries. Boys tended to receive more serious injuries that needed medical attention

compared to girls. The current study findings were consistent with findings from previous studies, for example, Duker, Stein and Zane (2010:525) which revealed that adolescent boys received greater injuries than adolescent girls. The head injuries that were reported in the current study had serious mental health implications for adolescents. Schwartz and Beaver (2013:523) established that a single serious fight-related injury might lead to a significant lowering of verbal intelligence over time. Deary, Strand, Smith and Fernandes (2007:19) demonstrated that general mental ability in general and verbal ability in particular, made a significant contribution to educational achievement. Therefore, any decrease in IQ during adolescence would impact negatively on academic performance in school. The findings of the current study that students incurred injuries due to aggression are consistent with the attribution ecological theoretical framework. This asserts that multiple levels of the adolescent students' ecology influence each other and subsequently the adolescents' development. With regards to the impact of aggressive behaviour cultural values about gender, violence within the community, the family and the peer group together contribute to physical injuries.

#### **4.8.3.2 Mental health and suicide**

The current study established that aggression had a negative impact on student mental health. Students who had been victimised reported experiencing symptoms of depression. The finding indicated that peer victimisation might play a causal role in the development of depressive symptoms and anxiety. This finding was consistent with previous studies, for example, Perren, Dooley, Shaw and Cross (2010:8), and Stapinski, Araya, Heron, Montgomery and Stallard (2015:115) which established that students who were victimised through traditional methods and cyber victimised in school and cyberspace developed depressive symptoms and anxiety.

The current study further established that some aggressive students who also abused drugs and who had been expelled from school subsequently committed suicide by drinking toxic pesticides. The adolescent students involved in the suicides were also experiencing a family transition. This was consistent with the literature. For

example, Klomek, Kleinman, Altschuler, Marrocco, Amakawa and Gould (2013:540), Gvion and Apter (2011:93), Shilubane, Ruiters, Van den Borne, Sewpaul, James and Reddy (2014:4), Dunn, Gjelsvik, Pearlman and Clark (2014:570), Espelage and Holt (2013:531), Maimon, Browning and Brook-Gunn (2010:11), and Karaman and Durukan (2013:34) established that physically aggressive bullies had higher suicide related behaviours and psychological disturbances than those who were not bullies. In addition, misuse of drugs, transmission of cluster B traits in families, poor parent communication, divorce, physical abuse and biological reasons contributed to suicides by aggressive students. Families have poor bonds with their adolescent children, there is lack of family support and the neighbourhood is poorly integrated adolescents affiliate with deviant peers erodes normative expectations. The end result is poor mental health such as suicidal behaviour. These findings are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979:362) theory which posits that human behaviour is embedded within particular environments and is a product of both direct and bidirectional social effects.

In the current study, the similarity of suicide methods and outcomes for male and female victims contradicted previous findings on gender differences (Schrijvers, Bollen & Sabbe, 2012:20). The tentative explanation for this result in the present study might be that this was the only method available to the victims and might also have depended on the cultural values of this urban sample. It might have been that the reactively aggressive girls may have been depressed if they exhibited overt aggression and were at as much risk for suicide as the boys (Greening, Stoppelbein, Luebke & Fite, 2010:343). These findings are inconsistent with the bioecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1989:187) in which gender is a cardinal factor that interacts, directly with culture, successively, influencing the effect of every risk factor for depression, anxiety and suicidality.

The current study also revealed that teachers responded to aggressive adolescent students by employing aggressive strategies. Students who are aggressive victims who experienced both child abuse at home and teacher aggression might experience depression and suicidal ideation. The above finding was supported by previous research, for example, Yen, Ko, Liu and Hu (2014:7) which established that adolescents who experienced teacher harassment were more likely to be bully-

victims. These bully-victims showed signs of severe depression and insomnia. From an ecological framework, therefore, teacher aggression was an adverse context for aggression. These bully-victims were therefore at a greater risk for suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour.

#### **4.8.3.3 Academic performance**

The results of the current study demonstrated that aggressive behaviour in the classroom had a negative influence on academic achievement. Firstly physical aggression resulted in victims being injured. The perpetrators might also be detained by the police. As a result of these consequences, the students might absent themselves from school and miss lessons. Ultimately, such students tended to do badly in school.

The current study established that aggression that was driven by biological factors such as menstruation could impact academic performance of girls negatively. The menstrual hygiene management may be difficult for poor students. Some students might absent themselves from school because they were teased by boys. This finding was consistent with previous research, for example, Tegegene and Sisay (2014:8-13) who established that more than fifty percent of the girls who were absent from school were hurt by taunting from male students. Fifty eight percent of the girls reported that their academic achievements had decreased after their menarche. Besides this, the study indicated that early maturing girls may leave high school early without completing their education because they would have been teased and embarrassed. Some of the students even missed examinations if they coincided with their periods.

The present study established that perpetrators of aggression and their victims tended to underperform in their academic work. Victims of physical, verbal, relational and cyber aggression failed to perform well academically because they could not concentrate and feared future victimisation. This was consistent with previous studies, for example, Totura, Karver and Gesten (2014:41), Nakamoto and Schwartz

(2010:235), Boulton, Woodmansey, Williams, Spells, Nicholas, Laxton, Holman and Duke (2012:277), Boulton, Trueman and Murray (2008:483), and Juvonen et al (2011:152) who reported that students failed to concentrate because they feared being called names. Some victims of aggression would also experience disrupted concentration because of fear of future aggression. This fear of future victimisation manifested as anxiety.

The findings of the current study were also consistent with the results of a study by Hisham and Jamal (2014:173) which established that some adolescent students were subjected to high levels of physical and psychological violence from their teachers as a form of punishment. The students who were exposed to higher degrees of violence reported higher anxiety levels, negative attitudes to learning and lower academic achievements than those who were exposed to lower degrees of violence (Hisham & Jamal, 2014:180). When anxiety levels were high, students showed poor concentration and attention levels which explains their low academic performance.

The study further established that the impact of aggressive behaviour on the academic performance of student victims was often augmented by a conflictual teacher-student relationship. The above finding was consistent with previous research, for example, Troop-Gordon and Kuntz (2013:1198-1199) and Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010:235) showing that the impact of aggressive behaviour on the academic performance of victims might be reduced or amplified by the teacher-student relationship.

The current findings contradicted those of previous work, for example, Woods and Wolke (2004:135) which did not find any association between the experiences of physical aggression and academic performance in pre-adolescent and early adolescent students. The current study results might be explained by the fact that, in Harare urban secondary school classrooms, aggressive behaviour influenced academic performance directly and indirectly through contextual factors such as truancy, relationship with aggressive friends, poor parental support, attributions about being a victim, emotional stress and academic motivation. This was in line with several other studies carried out elsewhere, for example, Shetigri, Espelage and

Caroll (2015:5), Jenkins and Demaray (2015:243), and Juvonen and Graham (2014:169). The study finding that revealed that aggressive behaviour influenced student academic performance is consistent with the attribution-bio ecological theoretical framework.

The current study established that practices of streaming students according to perceived ability resulted in large numbers of aggressive students in classes labelled as “dull” by their peers. This resulted in both perpetrators and victims of aggression being stigmatised. In this study, students attributed the cause of aggression to school settings. They blamed streaming and tracking for aggressive behaviour. Teachers did not teach these classes regularly because they perceived them as “dull” and therefore students were bored. The victims of aggression in these classes felt stigmatised and rejected. Student victims of aggression in such classes therefore experienced shame and anger. Stigmatism made such students resentful towards the teachers. In the current study, the students resented teachers who wanted to administer tests. They did not believe they could pass such tests. This finding was consistent with results from previous studies, for example, James (2009:2), Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher and Gramzow (1992:673), and Echols (2014:272), showing that aggressive students faced problems of stigma and were stereotyped as social rejects and intellectually deficient. Stigmatised groups such as the victimised students in classes labelled as “dull” could use self-protective mechanisms in “attributing negative feedback as prejudice against the group” in order to protect self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989:612). The stigmatised groups had a continuously inaccurate self-perception through the negative feedback. Taylor and Brown (1988:202), and Hillman, Wood and Sawilowsky (1994:173) pointed out that this led to a circular process of mutual reinforcement by peer group members of an attribution style that was counterproductive to academic achievement, which was further maintained by resistance to outside feedback. This finding is consistent with the attribution-ecological framework adopted in the study. Weiner (2014:358) posited that there are indirect attributional cues such as emotional displays and behavioural displays which teachers and peers make from which students infer the teachers and their own ascription of failure.

The current study established that some students were ostracised and excluded by

their peers. This pernicious type of non-verbal aggression has been found to impact negatively on academic performance of students in previous studies, for example, Morrow, Hubbard and Swift (2014:318) found that social exclusion and affective reactivity to it were associated with poor academic achievement. As a result of this, student victims of this type of aggression are likely to spend time ruminating, worrying and feeling helpless about these experiences, wondering who was behind them and fretting that they would happen again. They might believe the situation was beyond their control. Together, these cognitive and emotional reactions might prevent students from attending school, participating in classroom activities, completing work, and ultimately learning.

The present study also showed that some students who were aggressive and those who were targets of aggression tended to resist writing tests and their academic performance was poor. This finding was also consistent with the literature, for example, Caputo (2014:87) and Estevez, Emler, Cava and Ingles (2014:64) who revealed that, for rejected aggressive students and victims of aggression, academic performance was poor due to lower academic self-esteem, lack of commitment to study and rebellion against teachers. The student victims would study in order to get approval from parents, teachers or classmates.

#### ***4.8.3.4 Pregnancy***

The aggressive students who got pregnant withdrew from school to get married or to give birth. Firstly, such students kept their aggressive and delinquent friends who did not value academic habits. Teachers believed that such students were not really academically endowed. Secondly, they had problems with their health since they did not openly consult a doctor. They often absented themselves from school. They therefore failed to cope with the pressure of academic work. Their aggression made their interaction with peers difficult.

Peers were not supportive when they suspected that a girl was pregnant. The pregnant girls were stigmatised and became targets of relational aggression. The



staff members were also not supportive of pregnant learners. When the students delivered their babies, it was really difficult to look after the baby and do academic work. They would need supportive parents to look after the baby for them to be able to continue with school. As a result of all these odds against them, the teenage mothers became school dropouts. Neither the peers, the teachers nor the parents took some responsibility for the origin of the problem of the girls getting pregnant nor sought a solution for the problem, thus aligning themselves to Fiske and Taylor's medical model.

The current study finding that aggressive students got pregnant at school supported previous studies. For example, Gaudie, Mitrou, Lawrence, Stanley, Silburn and Zubrick (2010:8) found that aggressive behaviour was associated with teenage pregnancy. The current study finding that aggressive students got pregnant is consistent with the attribution-bio ecological theoretical framework, which posits that teen pregnancy like other developmental outcomes may result from interactions between individual, peer, family, community and cultural factors.

#### ***4.8.3.5 Dropping out of school***

The current study established that male students dropped out of school either because they were expelled for violence, drug abuse or drug peddling. Some of these aggressive students showed little motivation for academic work. These aggressive students were often absent from school without authority.

The findings from the current study indicating that aggressive and pregnant students (as reported in section 4.9.3.4) left school early were supported by previous studies. For example, Cabus and De Witte (2015:266) observed that truancy may be a signal of an ongoing process of student attrition that eventually leads to early school leaving. Cabus and De Witte (2015:270) also revealed that the risk of leaving school early before the end of the compulsory education age increased by as much as 37% for these students.

The current study found that some students, irrespective of gender, left school early

because they were expelled for violence and drug peddling. This was inconsistent with previous findings, for instance, Robst and Weinberg (2010:523) who established that boys exhibiting externalising behaviours were more likely to drop out of school. Robst and Weinberg found no relationship between externalising behaviours and early school leaving for girls. The results of the current study differ from Robst and Weinberg (2010:523) possibly due to the fact that the latter used a measure that included aggressive and other behaviours whereas the former focused only on aggressive behaviours. Furthermore, protective factors that were gender specific might explain why there was no relationship between externalising behaviours and school dropout numbers for girls in the latter study.

The study also established that there were female students who dropped out of school because they had been raped. Their peers stigmatised these rape victims. They verbally ridiculed them by, for example, suggesting that they had HIV. The trauma of this kind of aggression forced the victims to drop out of school.

The foregoing findings of the current study about pregnant students dropping out of school confirmed results of a previous study by Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin and Royer (2008:36) and Lall (2007:224) which revealed that poor academic performance at secondary school, pregnancy and association with aggressive and delinquent friends, led to students dropping out.

The findings from the current study on students dropping out of school due to unplanned pregnancy contradicted the results of two previous studies (Cholan & Langa, 2011:87; Matlala, Nolte & Temane, 2014:5). In the first of the aforementioned studies, the authors established that pregnant girls were highly motivated, had good academic grades and were determined to continue with their schooling after the end of their pregnancy. In the second study, teachers taught pregnant students so that they could graduate although the teachers felt they were not trained for such a task.

The explanation for the contradiction might be related to differences in contexts. In the present study, the students who dropped out due to pregnancy may have been from poor socioeconomic circumstances where family support for continuing in school maybe absent. The process of early school leaving was affected by the

interaction of student, family and community factors rather one isolated variable (De Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot & Van den Brink, 2013:18). The findings of the current study that students dropout out of school due to unplanned pregnancies are nevertheless consistent with the attribution-bioecological theoretical framework. This asserts that the choice of childbearing for aggressive adolescents is influenced by multiple forces within the individual, in the community and culture in which the individual is situated (Merrick, 1995:290). Such adolescents drop out because they make childbearing their career “choice”.

The subsequent section discusses strategies to prevent and reduce aggressive behaviour in urban secondary schools in Harare.

#### **4.9 WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BE IMPLEMENTED TO PREVENT AND REDUCE CLASSROOM AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HARARE?**

The current subsection discusses strategies to prevent and reduce classroom aggressive in urban secondary schools as shown by the findings of the study. In the discussion the researcher makes reference to the extant literature on strategies to prevent and reduce classroom aggression in urban secondary school. The discussion in the present section relates to the sub-research question 1.3 stated as: What strategies can be implemented to prevent and reduce classroom aggressive behaviour in urban secondary schools in Harare?

Participants in the current study suggested that schools implement an anti-aggression policy. The finding of the present study is consistent with an attribution-ecological theoretical framework. A whole school policy may be an effective strategy to reduce and prevent classroom aggressive behaviour as advocated by Bronfenbrenner (1979:iv), Walker, Shenker and Hoover-Dempsey (2010:596), Pollard, Walker and Kwan (2014:53), Wurf (2012:145), and Wong, Cheng, Ngan and Ma (2011:850). The teachers and students should collaborate to develop clear guidelines on what aggression is and what action should be taken when they are

aware that it has occurred. Participants recommended that as part of the aggression prevention policy teachers should teach life skills. They should also incorporate cyber aggression into their curriculum. The findings of the present study are consistent with Troop-Gordon, and Ladd (2015:50) and Espelage and Colbert (2016:407) who demonstrated that student aggressive behaviour can be reduced through the use of classroom curriculum and separating students in response to aggression. Finally aggressive students would then be able to make better behavioural choices if they were exposed to an attribution retraining curriculum. The attribution retraining curriculum could be implemented through seminars for students as advocated by Miller (2009:173).

In the current study, it was also proposed that teachers be trained to identify aggressive behaviours. This is consistent with suggestions by Osher, Kidron, Decaidia, Kedziora and Weissberg (2016:390) to reduce classroom aggression teachers training is required to create teacher awareness and capacity to identify aggressive behaviour. In addition to this training teachers should maximise structure and predictability in their classrooms to promote academic and pro-social behaviour prescribed by Fairbanks, Simonsen and Sugai (2008:47), and Simonsen, et al (2008:357). Participants suggested that teachers and students should collaborate to establish rules. This is consistent with suggestions by Oliver, Wehby and Reschly (2011:23) that those who display aggressive behaviour know that this is not acceptable. These rules might be displayed on notice-boards and be regularly reviewed. Teachers should supervise and monitor classroom related activities such as sports, games and private study as these are the times and places where aggressive behaviour mostly happens as the present study revealed. This is consistent with bio ecological theory and research guided by Farmer, Davies, Alexander and Brooks (2016:429) and Espelage, Anderman, Brown, Jones, Lane, McMahon, Reddy, and Reynolds (2013:79) showing that rules are important for classroom management and providing positive experiences that foster procial behaviour. The participants also called for teacher fairness as classroom disciplinary measure to reduce aggressive behaviours is supported by research showing that teacher support and avoidance of conflicted relationships is an effective strategy supported by attribution- bioecological theoretical framework that reduces aggressive

behaviour as advocated by Hendrickx, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, Cillessen and Brekelmans (2016:38), and Gest and Rodkin (2011:294).

In the current study it was further suggested that parents and community members such as church leaders should be part of the school strategy to prevent and reduce aggressive behaviour. The school acts both as a microsystem and mesosystem (Coatsworth, Pantin, McBride, Briones, Kurtines and Szapocznik, 2002:137). The school functions as a microsystem in which learners participate directly and interact with peers and teachers. At the mesosystem level the school joins together microsystems such as peer groups, families and neighbours. An effective strategy there to prevent and reduce classroom aggression that is derived from bioecological theory would integrate multiple systems in the adolescent learners' lives. A parent – teacher conference would be such a disciplinary strategy that uses a functional mesosystem linkage. This is consistent with findings from Ayers, Wagaman, Geiger, Bermudez-Parsai and Hedberg, 2012:547). Religious beliefs are part of the macrosystem. The findings of the study that schools should strengthen Christian values to prevent and reduce aggressive behaviour is supported by Hong and Espelage (2012:318) who demonstrated that students whose parents were involved in religious participation were less likely to experience aggression.

In the present study it was suggested that to address the negative impact of aggressive behaviour such as poor academic achievement, disengagement and early school leaving, teachers need to have an understanding of student engagement within a social context. This was consistent with the attribution-bioecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and findings in motivation and instructional strategies (Lam, Wong, Yang & Liu, 2012:407; Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 2012:381; Bemperchat & Shernoff, 2012:336; Hipkins, 2012:441; Nichols & Dawson, 2012:458; Dweck, 2012; Weiner, 2012:18). Student engagement may increase if teachers develop engaging teaching and assessment practices and they should select curriculum content so that students experience both academic success and emotional engagement. Personal factors such as mind-sets and attributions contribute to academic performance and persistence in school. Teachers should encourage

attributions so that they expend more effort in academic tasks.

In the present study it was further suggested that teachers could reduce aggressive behaviour through counselling. This consistent with findings of studies guided by bioecological theory such as Swearer et al (2009:48). It was further suggested in the present study that the school needs to engage clinicians to carry out suicide assessment for those students who are at risk for depression, anxiety, suicide or other suicidal behaviour.

Schools should motivate students so that they graduate from high school rather than dropout from school as a way of preventing adolescent pregnancies. Families, romantic partners/fathers of the babies and community leaders should be incorporated in intervention programmes aimed at preventing the occurrence of pregnancy and promoting positive developmental paths when pregnancy occurs (Pedrosa, Pires, Carvalho, Canavarro & Dattilio, 2011:122; Leelooijer, Bos, Ruiter, Van Reeuwijk, Rijdsdijk, Nshakira & Kok, 2013:828).

#### **4.10 SUMMARY**

The most important findings of the current study were that both teacher and student participants endorsed a multiplicity of causes for classroom behaviour that included biological factors such as pubertal changes and diabetes, and social factors such as the family, school, peer neighbourhood, religious and cultural contexts. The participants reported experiencing the following forms of aggressive behaviour: physical, relational, cyber and verbal. Teachers perpetrated physical and verbal aggression against students. The participants believed that aggressive behaviour in the classroom had negative consequences such as physical injuries, pregnancies, as well as mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour and poor academic performance leading to school dropout.

# **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the current study was to establish the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression on students' physical and mental health, academic performance and dropout in urban secondary schools in Harare. In this chapter, a review of the problem presented in Chapter 1 is made. A summary of the related literature review and research methodology as presented in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively is then presented after which a summary of the findings of the study is given. The chapter also presents the conclusions, recommendations of the study, as contained in a proposed model, as well as suggestions for future research.

The following section presents a summary of Chapter 1.

## **5.2 REVIEW OF RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Section 1.2, the background to the study highlighted has emphasised the high prevalence of aggression in schools internationally (Kaya et al, 2012:56; O'Brien, 2011:258; Minton, 2010:131; Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010:329; Santinello et al, 2011:236; Vieno et al, 2011:542; Scheithauer et al, 2006:271; Mishna et al, 2010:312; Del Rey, Casas, Ortega-Ruiz, Schultze-Krumbholz, Scheithauer, Smith, Thompson, Barkoukis, Tsorbatzoudis, Brighi, & Guarini, 2015: 145; Burton & Leoschut, 2013:76; Bhatta,Shakya & Jefferis, 2014:731; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014:607; Athanasiades, Kamariotis, Psalti, Baldry & Sorrentino, 2015:31; Festl, Scharkow & Quandt, 2015:13). The background to the study also highlighted the fact that bullying, as a form of aggressive behaviour, is prevalent in Zimbabwe secondary schools (Due & Holstein, 2008:213;

Gudyanga, Mudihlwa, and Wadesango, 2014:70; Shoko, 2012:80; Chitiyo, Chitiyo, Chitiyo, Oyedele, Makoni, Fonnah & Chipangure, 2014:1100; Zindi, 1994:23; Mudhovozi, 2015:118). It was also observed that, to the knowledge of the researcher, there are no Zimbabwean studies specifically focused on classroom aggression in urban secondary schools although there were related studies that have been carried out. The purpose of this study was to provide an answer to the following main research question: What are the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression in urban Harare Secondary Schools?

This study was guided by the following sub-research questions:

- To what extent do biological and social factors cause classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools?
- To what extent does classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools manifest in physical, relational, cyber and verbal forms?
- How does classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools relate to student mental health, teenage pregnancy, academic performance and school dropout?
- What strategies and a model can be implemented to prevent and reduce classroom aggressive behaviour in urban secondary schools in Harare?

### **5.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

In line with the research questions outlined in the above section, the specific research objectives of this study were, firstly, to determine the extent to which biological and social factors caused classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in Harare. Secondly, the study sought to investigate how classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools manifested in relation to the physical, relational, cyber and verbal forms. Further, it was the objective of the study to examine the extent to which classroom aggression amongst Harare urban secondary school students related to student mental health, teenage pregnancy, academic performance and school dropout. These objectives were related to the researcher's



endeavour to develop a model for use in the prevention and reduction of classroom aggressive behaviour in urban secondary schools in Harare.

## **5.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was informed by the Bio-ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:373; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:793) and Attribution theory (Weiner, 1980a:327; Weiner, 1992:329).

### **5.4.1 The bio-ecological model**

The major tenet of the bio-ecological model is that developmental outcomes such as aggression are a result of the interaction between the adolescent student and his/her environment, which is viewed as a hierarchy of systems. This model was relevant to this study as it facilitated the assimilation of the findings from the empirical study within the person, process, context and time factors necessary for answering the research question posed in the study. Causal attributions are part of the cognitive attributes of the student, peers, teachers and community members that may impact on classroom aggression. Attribution theory will be discussed in relation to the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression.

### **5.4.2 Attribution theory**

On the other hand, the attribution theory, formulated by Weiner (1980a) posits that causes of social behaviour such as aggression, as well as causes of success and failure in achievement contexts, can be located in three causal dimensions: stability, locus and control. Locus has to do with causes being looked at in relation to being either internal or external while control means causes are perceived as more or less

under personal control. Further, stability implies that causes are perceived as either relatively fixed or fluctuating. Fiske and Taylor (1984) extended the attribution model by presenting judgements about the responsibility for affecting a solution to a problem as well as its original cause. Attribution theory informs the study in that attributions explain the cause of aggression and any intervention program needs to alter the maladaptive cognitions. Attribution theory complements bio ecological theory by examining lay explanations of student and teacher participants of the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression. The present study therefore blends these two theories so that it investigates the extent to which student and teacher participants make causal ecological attributions about classroom aggression and its impact.

## **5.5 BIOLOGICAL FACTORS**

The highlights of biological factors are early pubertal timing, hormones, personality traits and brain impairments which were the causative factors for aggressive behaviour.

## **5.6 SOCIAL FACTORS**

In section 2.7.1 the following social factors were highlighted:

School factors, family factors such as marital conflict, associating with deviant peers, and conflict over romantic partners were all associated with student aggression in the classroom

Section 2.9 reviewed the impact of aggression and each of the subsections is summarised as follows:

### **5.6.1 Aggression and mental and physical health**

The literature reviewed indicated that those who were subjected to traditional and cyber aggressive behaviours in school settings by teachers and peers were likely to suffer from personality disorders, show symptoms of post traumatic disorder, experience distressing mental and physical states, depression, anxiety, anger and wanting to retaliate. Aggressive behaviour by adolescent students resulted in teen pregnancy.

#### ***5.6.1.1 Aggression and suicidal behaviour***

Students who were victims of aggression experience social hopelessness, poor body esteem and were prone to suicidal behaviour. Suicidal behaviour included suicidal ideation, attempting to commit suicide and completed suicide.

#### ***5.6.1.2 Aggression and academic performance***

Previous research findings indicated that physical aggression may result in lower academic achievement (i.e. lower grade point average). Involvement in bullying negatively predicted academic competence. Students who were targets of aggression often absented themselves from school and often did poorly in school. High levels of reactive aggression were associated with low levels of academic performance due to peer rejection. Aggressive students performed poorly in school because they experienced sleep disturbances.

### **5.6.2 Aggression and student dropout**

The literature reviewed indicated that students involved in aggressive behaviours left school early. Students' dropout of school because of aggressive behaviour was associated with poor academic achievement, absenteeism and suspension from school. These processes and lack of support from teachers jointly resulted in the student disengaging from school.

Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology for the study. The study was guided by a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm holds that there are multiple realities to human experience that are exposed by intense reflection.

## **5.7 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study used a qualitative design methodology.

### **5.7.1 Population and sample size**

A purposive sample of 40 students and 15 teachers was selected in ten urban secondary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province.

### **5.7.2 Instrumentation**

The study used focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews in this multi-method qualitative research design. The data was collected using focus group discussion guides and in-depth interview guides. The study adopted criteria for validity identified by Whitemore et al (2001:539).

### **5.7.3 Pilot study**

The protocol was piloted with the population that reflected the researcher's criteria for participation in order for the researcher to determine the flaws, limitations or weakness of the interview guides and focus group discussion topic guides.

### **5.7.4 Data analysis procedure**

The present study used a narrative analysis of interview and focus group texts to induce themes from the data.

### **5.7.5 Ethical issues**

The study addressed ethical issues related to permission, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent/assent and non-maleficence.

The following subsection presents the findings of the current study.

## **5.8 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

### **5.8.1 Factors that cause classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools**

#### **5.8.1.1 Biological factors**

The current study revealed that participants attributed aggressive behaviour in

adolescent girls and boys to biological processes that caused pubertal developmental complexities. The pubertal changes that participants attributed to aggressive behaviour were physical strength associated with the growth spate in boys and the experience of menarche or menstruation by adolescent girls. The study also established that teachers believed that some medical conditions such as diabetes might induce adolescent students to be aggressive.

#### **5.8.1.2 Social factors**

The study also found out that aggression occurred due to conflict related to romantic liaisons, for example, when relationships ended and one partner was upset and jealous of former partner's new relationship or there was competition between suitors. The study also established that teachers and students attributed some of the aggressive behaviour to their sports experiences in classroom related areas. The current study also revealed that, in team sports, the losing athletes used attributions, which were self-serving (i.e. blaming the referee and the winning team), for their team's loss.

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, it emerged from this study that outstanding students such as prefects and athletes were targeted as victims of aggression. It could be explained by causal attribution of responsibility and comparison emotions such as envy. However, as the study indicated in Chapter 4, there were a few prefects who perpetrated aggression against other students.

The present study established that, in schools, classroom aggression was perpetrated by poor students' aggression affiliated to gangs. In addition, student participants in the present study believed that classroom aggression was caused by peer pressure and the desire for power. It also emerged from the study that social factors in the macro-system such as religious and cultural beliefs were perceived as having a causal role in the development of aggressive behaviour in the classroom.

The current study established that both teachers and students attributed peer aggression and sexual abuse inside the school to external causes. These findings of

an external attribution for aggressive behaviour reflected the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias. The present research revealed that teachers used aggressive strategies in the classroom against students. These aggressive classroom interactions led to an escalation in aggression.

Evidence from the present investigation suggested family structure and violence within the family were believed to play a causal role in the development of classroom aggression. Some of the aggressive students were reared in step or single parent families. These unstable family types were common in Harare.

It was also established by this study that aggression by form one students was attributed to their primary school culture of violence. In addition, the aggressive behaviour during the transition to secondary school was associated with orientation programmes where hazing inadvertently occurred. The study established that, in addition to the above transition, another transition occurred when students had written their "O" level examinations and were facing the challenges of the future. This was also associated with a flare up of aggression and defiance of teachers by senior students. These aggressive interactions might be due to such social factors as group dynamics.

Very significantly, the current study established that teachers and students attributed the cause of aggressive behaviour to other factors such as shortage of learning resources such as chairs, desks, books, computer accessories and laboratory equipment. Physical resources were a crucial aspect of the school climate. A negative school climate might result in classroom aggression in secondary schools.

### **5.8.2 Manifestation of classroom aggression in Harare urban secondary schools**

This section revealed the following highlights of the manifestation of aggressive behaviour as experienced by participants of the study.

### ***5.8.2.1 Physical aggression***

The current study established that physical aggression was perpetrated by male and female students in classrooms and classroom related areas usually in the absence of teachers. Teachers were also reported to use physical violence against students as a form of punishment. Furthermore, some students alleged that some teachers and staff members perpetrated sexual abuse against girls.

### ***5.8.2.2 Relational aggression***

The current study results indicated that students used relational aggression such as spreading of malicious gossip and rumours, social exclusion and nonverbal expressions of relational aggression.

### ***5.8.2.3 Cyber aggression***

It emerged from this study that both teachers and students believed that students experienced cyber aggression. The following types of cyber aggressive behaviours were experienced by participants: denigration of female victims, spreading of secrets, receiving threatening and offensive messages.

### ***5.8.2.4 Verbal aggression***

The current study established that name-calling was the most common verbal aggression in the schools that participated in the study. Other verbal aggressive behaviours that were experienced by students were yelling and humiliating comments from teachers.



### **5.8.3 The impact of classroom aggression on physical and mental health, academic performance and school dropout**

The following were the highlights of the findings on impact of aggression:

#### ***5.8.3.1 Physical injuries***

The current study revealed that physical aggression resulted in injuries among both boys and girls. The current study findings were consistent with findings from previous studies, for example, Dukes et al (2010:525).

#### ***5.8.3.2 Mental health and suicide***

This study established that aggression had a negative impact on student mental health. Students who had been victimised reported experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. The current study further established that aggressive students who also abused drugs and who had been expelled from school subsequently committed suicide by drinking toxic pesticides. This was consistent with previous studies, for example, Klomek et al (2013:540), and Gvion and Apter (2011:93). The findings were consistent with the attribution-ecological framework.

#### ***5.8.3.3 Academic performance***

The results of the current study demonstrated that aggressive behaviour in the classroom had a negative influence on academic achievement. Firstly, physical aggression resulted in victims being injured. As a result of these injuries, the students might absent themselves from school and miss lessons. The study

established that perpetrators of aggression and their victims tended to underperform in their academic work. Victims of physical, verbal, relational and cyber aggression failed to perform well academically because they could not concentrate and feared future victimisation. This finding was consistent with the attribution-bio ecological theoretical framework.

#### ***5.8.3.4 Pregnancy***

The present study found that some aggressive female students got pregnant.

#### ***5.8.3.5 Dropping out of school***

The current study established that male students dropped out of school either because they were expelled for violence, drug abuse or drug peddling. Some of these aggressive students showed little motivation for academic work and were often absent from school without authority. The findings from the current study indicated that aggressive students got pregnant (as reported in section 5.9.3.5). Some of these pregnant students left school early. This result was supported by previous studies and were consistent with the attribution- bio ecological framework.

### **5.9 CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to establish the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggression in urban secondary schools in Harare. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that participants attributed the causes of classroom aggression to multiple factors within the students' ecology. These factors include biological factors such as pubertal changes, social factors such as family structure and violence, peer pressure, neighbourhood influences, cultural and religious

factors, as well as economic factors. It can be concluded that aggression manifests in physical, verbal, relational and cyber forms. It is also a conclusion of this study that classroom aggression has a negative impact on student physical and mental health, pregnancy, poor academic performance as well as school dropout.

In the subsequent section, the contribution of the study is presented.

## **5.10 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

The current study has contributed to the existing research base through understanding the causes, manifestation and impact of aggression in urban secondary school classrooms in Harare. The use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions allowed an in-depth look at the experiences and causal attributions of participants about classrooms aggression. The role of biological and social causal factors such as family, peers, teachers and religious beliefs was highlighted. These factors were consistent with an attribution - bio ecological framework. The study established new insights into the negative impact of aggressive behaviour on adolescent students. A proposed model derived from the current study findings and the literature is presented to manage classroom aggressive behaviour and reduce its negative impact on students. The knowledge from the study can assist policy makers, teachers and counsellors tackle the problem of aggressive behaviour and its consequences in Zimbabwean urban secondary schools.

In the next section, recommendations of the present study are presented.

## **5.11 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.11.1 Policy**

Based upon the findings of the current research, all secondary schools should implement and follow a clearly stated and mandatory national policy that prevents the development of all forms of aggressive behaviours and ameliorates their negative impact. This policy should be supported by an Act of Parliament. A proposed model to prevent and reduce aggressive behaviour in the classroom and its negative impact would be needed for the policy to influence practice.

### **5.11.2 Practice**

Although a single study may not provide a good basis for sweeping changes in teacher education and professional practice, this study offers the following suggestions for trainee teachers, teachers, parents and community leaders to address the problem of aggressive behaviour in secondary school classrooms:

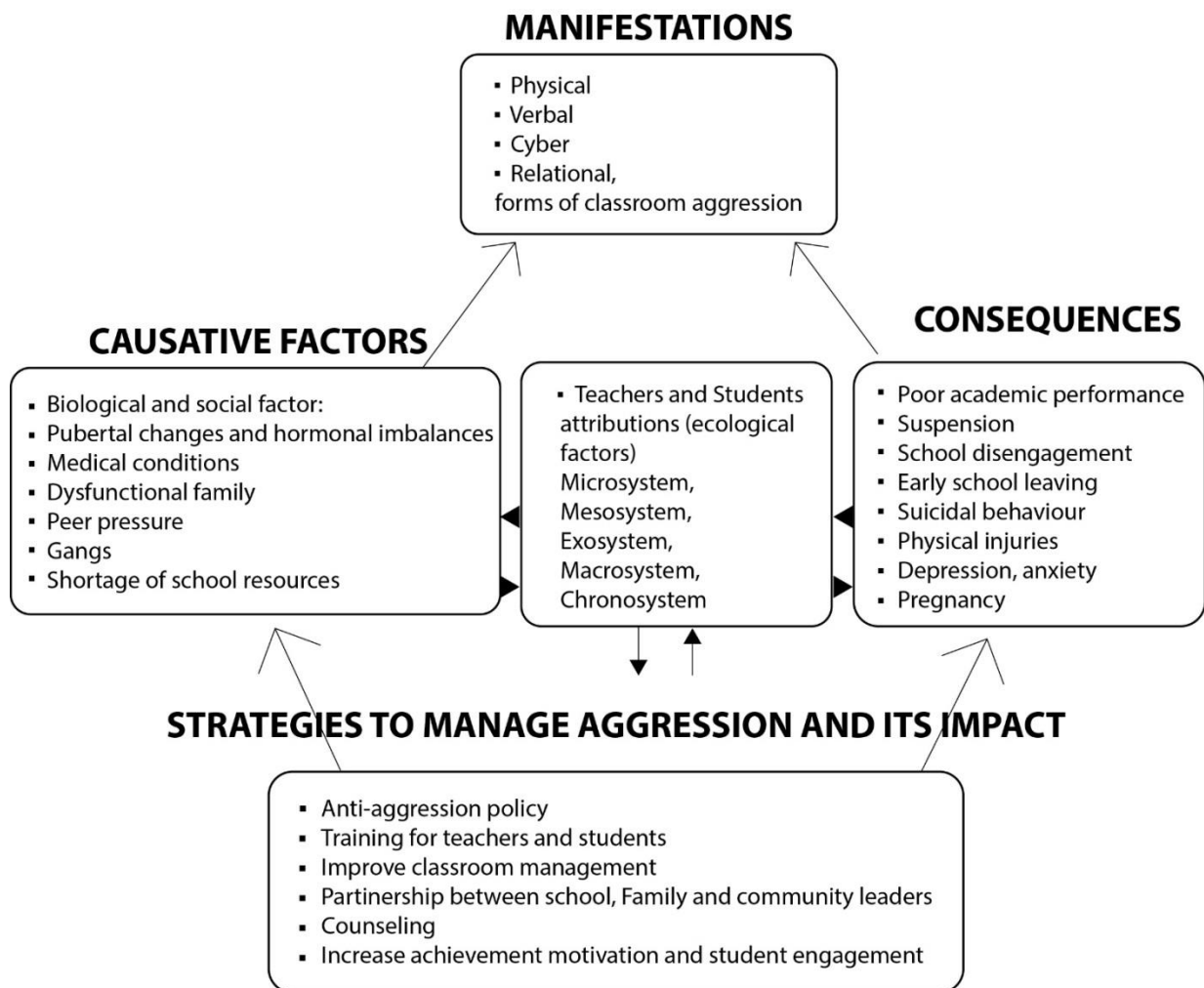
Trainee teachers and practicing teachers need professional training in handling aggressive behaviour in the classroom. In order to reduce aggressive behaviour and increase achievement motivation and engagement as well as academic performance, teachers could benefit from in-service training on pedagogy, classroom management and curriculum review.

Resources might be needed for the implementation of the anti-aggression policy and proposed model in secondary schools in the country. The sourcing of resources should be a community effort. Teachers might need to engage parents and leaders of the community to prevent aggressive behaviour in the classroom and increase student motivation and engagement.

The following section presents a proposed model to prevent and reduce classroom

aggression and its negative consequences. The proposed model emanates from the suggestions made by teacher and student participants, the literature and the theoretical framework relating to strategies to prevent and reduce classroom aggressive behaviour and its impact.

### 5.11.3 Proposed model to manage classroom aggression and its impact



**Figure 5.1: A proposed model to manage classroom aggression and its impact**

The proposed model summarises the causal attributions of classroom aggression as suggested by participants in the present study and the literature. These causative factors included biological as well as social factors. The casual factors included

those from the micro-system as well as the meso,exo, macro and chrono-systems. The following guidelines are proposed to reduce and prevent aggression and its negative consequences:

#### **5.11.4 Aggression prevention policy**

The study revealed that participants attributed causes of classroom aggressive behaviour to ecological factors in the proximal and distal settings. The study recommends the implementation of an anti-aggression policy in urban schools in Harare. Consistent with attribution-ecological systems theory all secondary schools in Harare should develop, implement and follow a mandatory whole school policy to prevent all forms of aggressive behaviour identified in this study. The teachers and students should collaborate to develop clear guidelines on what aggression is and what action should be taken when they are aware that it has occurred.

#### **5.11.5 Training of teachers and students**

The study recommends that teachers and students be trained. Teachers need to be trained to identify and effectively manage classroom aggression. For practicing teachers, a paradigm shift might be required to implement the guidelines as some teachers have been using corporal punishment to manage aggressive behaviour.

Based on bio ecological –attribution model this training programme could include the use and implementation of whole school policies for the reduction and prevention of aggressive behaviour in the classroom. Additionally, the attribution retraining would empower the teacher to assist students to change maladaptive attributions with a view to improve student motivation and academic performance. Students need to be trained in life skills as well as adaptive attribution styles.

Furthermore, teachers should develop skills-training programmes for at risk students to manage depression, anger and aggression in order to improve their competencies

such as decision making, social and problem solving skills. Aggressive students would then be able to make better behavioural choices if they were exposed to an attribution retraining curriculum.

#### **5.11.6 Improve classroom management**

The study recommends that teachers adopt good classroom practices. These practices would include collaborating with students in the creation of rules. Teachers should supervise classroom activities effectively to discourage aggressive behaviours. In addition teachers should provide student support and maintain positive teacher-student relationships.

#### **5.11.7 School-parent-community leaders partnerships**

The model includes the creation of partnerships between the school, the parents and community leaders to reduce and prevent aggressive behaviours. Teacher-parent conferences could be implemented, as part of this strategy to incorporate parents in the school's effort to stem classroom aggression. The school should also bring in community leaders to assist in the fight to prevent aggressive behaviour. Religious leaders might act as mentors and create awareness in the community that aggressive behaviour that is perpetrated by gangs for example is not acceptable. This strategy involves tackling the problem of aggressive behaviour by integrating multiple settings that impact on the adolescent learner.

#### **5.11.8 Counselling**

The study recommends that schools incorporate counselling services in their strategy to prevent and reduce classroom aggressive behaviour and to assist victims

of aggression cope with the negative psychological impact. School counsellors should identify and counsel both perpetrators and victims of aggressive behaviour. Counsellors should work jointly with teachers, students and parents to reframe causal attributions about aggressive behaviour by the different participants. As a follow up to the counselling the school should establish regular communication between the students, teachers and parents that focuses on the students' progress and success in achieving important academic and behavioural goals at school.

The school needs to engage counsellors and clinicians to carry out suicide assessment for those students who are at risk for depression, anxiety, suicide or other suicidal behaviour. Such assessment should identify the multiple environments that contribute to the students' decision to attempt suicide. Teacher counsellors should be trained to use Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to assist students at risk.

#### **5.11.9 Increase academic motivation and student engagement to tackle poor academic performance school dropout through attribution retraining and better practice**

In order to address the negative impact of aggressive behaviour such as poor academic achievement, disengagement and early school leaving as revealed by this study, teachers need to have an understanding of student engagement within a social context. Consistent with attribution- bio-ecological theoretical framework student engagement may increase if teachers develop engaging teaching and evaluation practices and they should select curriculum content so that students experience both academic success and emotional engagement.

Good relationships are important for student emotional engagement. Teachers should create support systems that include teachers, peers and parents and implement a structured mentoring intervention. The school should provide teachers with feedback so that they can improve teacher-student interactions. Attribution retraining can be implemented so that students would most likely persist if they adopt a bias in which they attribute success to ability and failure to lack of effort, task



difficulty or bad luck. The attribution retraining is based on the causal dimensions. The locus dimension of causality is linked to self-esteem and related emotions. Students tend to blame others for failure in academic domain to minimize personal pain for failure. Expectancy is linked to the stability of causes. For example, those students who attribute failure to low ability tend to lower their expectations of future success. Students could undergo attribution retraining so that maladaptive attribution dimensions can be changed to adaptive ones. Teachers who communicate controllability attributions and make inferences about students' responsibility for academic failure should also undergo attribution retraining. This is necessary because it is through feedback from teachers that students get information that their poor performance is due to low ability.

Schools should motivate students so that they graduate from high school rather than dropout from school as a way of preventing adolescent pregnancies. The school should implement health education programmes that incorporate the attribution-ecological principles. For example family planning counsellors could be engaged to assist students with motivation to delay child bearing and prevent pregnancies. The health promotion programme should target peer, family and community influence. The family is an important microsystem for the adolescent student. Parents should play an important role in monitoring students' activities outside school. Peers should also should also be targeted for skills training e.g. to embrace use of contraceptives and adoption of abstinence norms.

## **5.12 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

It is recommended that the proposed model be piloted and implemented in a sample of schools to establish its effectiveness in reducing and preventing classroom aggressive behaviour. A larger national study could be carried out to get the attributions of other stakeholders such as parents, educational psychologists and community leaders and these views should be incorporated into a national policy to reduce classroom aggression in schools. A mixed method approach could be used in future studies, as it could improve research due to its eclecticism.

## 5.13 FINAL COMMENTS

The current study established the causes, manifestation and impact of classroom aggressive behaviour on students' physical and mental health, and academic performance in Harare urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The qualitative research design methodology was used in this study. The participants in the study were 40 students and 15 teachers from 10 urban schools in Harare Metropolitan Province. In-depth interview schedules and focus groups topic guides were used to collect data. The findings of the study revealed that participants believed that aggressive behaviour was caused by biological, social and economic factors. Biological factors included temperament, hormonal imbalances during the menstrual cycle, secondary changes during puberty such as physical strength and certain medical conditions. Social factors included jealousy between romantic suitors, group dynamics during sports competitions and school transitions, gangs, peer pressure, sexual abuse, family factors, and religious and cultural beliefs. Aggressive behaviour was manifested in the form of physical, relational, cyber and verbal forms. The study also revealed that aggressive behaviour resulted in negative effects that included students incurring physical injuries, committing suicide, experiencing depressive symptoms, anxiety, poor academic performance and early school leaving. The current study findings were consistent with the attribution-bioecological framework.

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## APPENDIX A: DRAFT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. In the last few months we have often heard **The Herald** report on student aggression. When you hear this term, what comes to mind?
2. What is your experience of student aggression at this school?
3. Has aggression against the teacher(s) occurred in the school?
4. You earlier referred to Student aggression targeted at teachers, would you elaborate on this phenomenon.
5. Are there specific places in and around the school and times where you do not feel safe because you are likely to experience student aggression.
6. What causes student aggression in the school?
7. What influences students to fight etc.?(Probe)
8. Please elaborate on the students who aggress (i.e. their characteristics and give examples)
9. Why are some students/teachers the victims or targets of student aggression in the school?
10. Describe your feelings during and after the incident of aggression you have described above.
11. How has your involvement in aggression in aggression made a difference to you physically, mentally, emotionally, health wise? (Probe)
12. Some students are aggressive towards other students. What can students do to help those who initiate aggression?
13. What can others do to stop student aggression in the classroom?

### Follow up

- a) Parents b) School personnel c) Police and law enforcement d) Others

14. If you were in charge (i.e. head of school, teacher) what kind of changes would you make to reduce or prevent student aggression in the school and what are the main reasons for making the changes.(probe)

## **CHANGES TO INTERVIEW GUIDE/ AGENDA**

Project Title: I am carrying out research for my doctoral studies with the University of South Africa on the topic: Classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools: Causes, manifestations and, impact.

### **1.5 PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The study seeks to establish the causes of adolescent aggression in Harare schools, the forms of aggression that are experienced by students, to establish how aggression impacts students' wellbeing and school experiences.

## **Ethical issues**

### **Consent form**

1. I have brought a consent form, can you read it and if it's agreeable with you can sign it and give it to me. The details about the study's aims are all detailed in the document.

2. I need to emphasize that the conversation we have will be kept confidential, nobody will listen to the recording except me. After the interview I will remove all identifying information so that the data is anonymous. You free to withdraw from participating in the interview at any time.

### **Background**

You could give a little background about yourself, for example how old you are and your family. You could also tell me where you stay and with whom?

### **Understanding**

1 What do you understand by aggression / (hostile or *violent behaviour*)?.

### **Causes**

2. What could have contributed to your getting involved in the aggression incidences you have described above?

3. What are the *causes of the various forms of student aggression* in the school which you experienced and witnessed? *Probe*

4. What was the influence / if any of aggression on your school experience?

### **Manifestations**

5. What is your *personal* experience of aggression at this school?

6. What forms of aggression did this involve?

7. Are there any other forms of aggression you have *witnessed* in the school? Please give some detail.

### **Impact**

8 You could *elaborate the consequences/impact* on you with regards to the following aspects (a) mentally, (b) physically, (c) emotionally d) academic performance and school attendance? (Probe)

9. What effect has aggression had *on the students or teachers* you have described above, if at all??

### **Conclusion**

#### **Strategies**

10. How should the problem of student aggression be reduced or prevented/ managed?

11. *I have no further questions. Do you have any questions before we finish the interview?*

12. Thank you for your valuable time in participating in the interview. I assure you that the contents of the interview will remain confidential.

## APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE

Date:...

Start Time:

Venue:

Moderator:

Participants:

1. What do you understand by aggression?
2. What is your experience of aggression in the school?
3. Do you think other students/teachers in your situation would have the same experience as you?
4. What do you think may make your experience different from other students/teachers?
5. How did you get involved in the incidences of aggression? What motivated you?
5. What are the causes of aggressive behaviour in the school?
6. What are the forms of aggression you got involved in /witnessed?
7. What is the effect of aggression if at all on your academic work or that of students you have discussed above?
9. Has aggressive behaviour influenced your physical health or those students/teachers you have discussed above?
10. What is the impact of aggressive behaviour on students/teachers school experience?
11. Is there anything else that anyone feels that we should have talked about but did not?
12. Suggest ways that can be used to prevent and reduce classroom aggression in your school. How would teachers reduce the effects of aggressive behaviour?

I want to end by thanking all of you for your valuable contribution to my research.

1. Time:
2. Date:
3. Interviewee:



## **APPENDIX C: FINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE/AGENDA**

Dear Participant/ parent/Guardian

Project Title: I am carrying out research for my doctoral studies with the University of South Africa on the topic: Classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools: Causes, manifestation, and, impact.

Supervisor: Professor R. Chireshe and Professor N. Naidu University of South Africa

P.O. Box 1020 Bindura

Student Researcher Name: Alfred Zengeya

Purpose of Study

The study seeks to establish the causes forms and impact of aggression on students' welfare and school experiences.

Ethical issues

Consent form

1. I have brought a consent form, can you read it and if it is agreeable with you can sign it and give it to me. The details about the study's aims are all detailed in the document.
2. I need to emphasize that the conversation we have will be kept confidential, nobody will listen to the recording except me. After the interview I will remove all identifying information so that the data is anonymous. You are free to withdraw from participating in the interview at any time.
3. The interview will take about forty minutes to one hour.
4. I have brought a tape recorder, do you agree to our interview being recorded?
5. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Background

You could give a little background about yourself, for example how old you are and your family. You could also tell me where you stay and with whom?

#### Understanding/Clarifying meaning of phenomenon

1 In the light of your own experience tell me what do you understand by aggression / (Aggressive Behaviour)?

#### Causes

5. What could have contributed to your getting involved in the aggression incidences you have described above?

6. What are the causes of the various forms of student aggression in the school which you experienced and witnessed? I need more detail. Probe

#### Manifestation

2. What is your personal experience of aggression at this school? Talk to me about it.

3. What forms of aggression/(hostile or violent behaviour) did this involve? Provide a detailed response.

4. Are there any other forms of aggression you have witnessed in the school? Please give some detail.

#### Impact

7. Did aggressive behaviour have any on influence on your school experience, if at all? Give a detailed response.

8 How has your experience of aggression affected you physically, if at all?

9. What effect has aggression had on the students or teachers you have described above?

10. Tell me about the feelings and emotions you felt after incidence of aggression you have just narrated.

11. Since the incidences of aggression you have described are there any kinds of things in your life that have changed because of that?

12. Since the incidences of aggressive behaviour you have narrated has there been any change in your school work if at all? You need to be as detailed as possible.

13. Do you see any connection between the incidences of aggression you have reported and your current academic experience at school? Give me a detailed response.

#### Conclusion

14. How should the problem of student aggression in this school be reduced or prevented/ managed in future and how would teachers reduce the effects of aggressive behaviour?

15. I have no further questions. Do you have any questions before we finish the interview?

16. Thank you for your valuable time in participating in the interview. I assure you that the contents of the interview will remain confidential and will be anonymised.

1. Time:
2. Date:
3. Interviewee:

# APPENDIX D: PERMISSION LETTER FROM MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

*all communications should be addressed to  
"The Secretary for Primary & Secondary Education  
Telephone: 732006  
Telegraphic address : "EDUCATION"  
Fax:794505*



**REFERENCE:** C/426/3

Ministry of Primary and  
Secondary Education  
P.O Box CY 121  
Causeway  
**HARARE**

13 January 2013

Mr A. Zengeya  
Bindura University of Science Education  
P. Bag 1020  
**BINDURA**

Re: **PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH: HARARE  
METROPOLITAN PROVINCE**

Reference is made to your application to carry out research in Harare  
Metropolitan Province on the title:

### **STUDENT AGGRESSION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HARARE**

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the  
Provincial Education Director Harare who is responsible for the schools which  
you want to involve in your research.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary  
for Primary and Secondary Education.

  
Z.M. Chitiga  
Acting Director: Policy, Planning, Research and Development  
For: **SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**APPENDIX E: PERMISSION LETTER FOR RESEARCH FROM HARARE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORATE**

All communications should be addressed to  
**"THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR"**

Telephone : 792671-9  
Fax : 796125/792548  
E-mail :  
[moeschre@yahoo.com](mailto:moeschre@yahoo.com)



ZIMBABWE

REF: G/42/1  
Ministry of Education,  
Sport and Culture  
Harare Provincial Education Office  
P. O. Box CY 1343  
Causeway  
Zimbabwe

24.01.2014

A Zengweya  
of Bindura  
University of Science  
Education

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN SOME SELECTED SCHOOLS

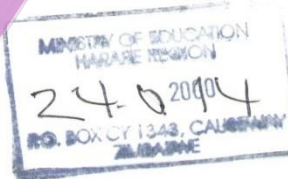
To carry out research on the title:  
"Student aggression in secondary  
schools in Harare"

Reference is made to your letter dated 13.01.14

Please be advised that the Provincial Education Director grants you authority to carry out your research on the above topic. You are required to supply Provincial Office with a copy of your research findings.

*M. M. M. M.*

For Provincial Education Director  
Harare Metropolitan Province



## **APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS**

Title: Classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools: Causes, manifestation and impact

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The study seeks to establish the causes of adolescent aggression in Harare schools, the forms of aggression that are experienced by students, to establish how aggression impacts students' wellbeing and school experiences.

### **WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS STUDY?**

I Zengeya Alfred student number 41822927 am conducting this study as a requirement towards a Doctor of education Degree with the University of South Africa.

**WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO IN THE STUDY:** You were selected to participate in this study because you spent most of your time interacting with students and observing behaviour changes among them. You will be required to respond to questions to elicit information on classroom aggression by adolescent students, its causes, manifestations and impact.

### **TIME REQUIRED**

You will spend at least forty minutes in an in-depth interview and at least one and half hours to participate in the focus group discussion on another day.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

No risk or harm is anticipated. Knowledge on how to manage aggressive behaviour in classrooms

In Harare secondary schools will be generated from the findings of the study. Therefore, you will be expected to disclose information on aggression by adolescent students, its cause and impact.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** No individual will be identified or traced from this investigation. Data collected will be used for the purpose of the study only.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any of the questions asked.

**Recording: If you agree to participate in this study please sign on the next page. Thank you.**

**AGREEMENT:**

**I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that this focus group will be recorded.**

---

**NAME**

**(Printed)** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**AGREEMENT:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that this focus group will be recorded.

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX G: PARENTS/GUARDIANS INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Dear Parent/Guardian of student under 18 years

I, Zengeya Alfred have registered with the University of South Africa for a Doctor of Education Degree in educational psychology. My student number is 42822927 and Professor Regis Chireshe who can be contacted on 00263 777308244 is my supervisor. I wish to conduct a research study on "*Classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools: Causes, manifestation and impact*". I will hold in-depth interviews, use focus group discussions to collect data from students and class teachers. A total of 100 purposefully selected students from ten secondary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province are expected to participate in the study. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts emanating from the research participants' involvement in this research study.

Your child's knowledge and experiences are very important in this study hence I am kindly requesting you to give consent so that they can give an accurate account of classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools, its causes and impact, on areas covered by interview questions relating to them. This will enable me understand how the classroom aggression relates to their mental health and physical wellbeing, academic performance. Such an understanding will form the basis for informing intervention strategies aimed at managing aggression among students and promoting their well-being in school.

Participation in this study by your child is completely voluntary and they can terminate involvement at any time, notwithstanding the fact that he/she would have consented to participate. Please feel free to grant them permission. They will remain anonymous and all the information they will provide will be held in strict confidence and with utmost privacy.

To acknowledge that you are allowing your child to participate in the interview process, kindly sign below.

Thank you in anticipation.



Yours Faithfully

Kind regards

Signature:-



Zengeya Alfred:

Cell number:0775055019

**AGREEMENT:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that this focus group will be recorded.

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX H: ASSENT FORMS FOR LEARNERS**

TITLE: Classroom aggression in Harare secondary schools: Causes, manifestation and impact.

**Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.**

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The purpose of this study is to generate knowledge that would enable teachers to come up with strategies to manage classroom aggression in secondary schools in Harare and promote student well being in school.

### **WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS STUDY?**

I Zengeya Alfred, student number: 41822927, am conducting this study as a requirement towards a Doctor of Education Degree with the University of South Africa.

### **WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO IN THE STUDY:**

You were selected to participate in this study because, as an adolescent, you have experienced aggression in secondary school as you interact with other students and teachers. You will be required to respond to questions to elicit information on classroom aggression, its causes and impact.

**TIME REQUIRED:** You will spend at least at least forty minutes taking part in an in depth interviews and one and half hours participating in a focus group discussion on a separate day.


**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** No risk or harm is anticipated. Knowledge on how to minimize adverse influence of celebrities on adolescents' behavior can be generated from the findings of the study. Therefore, you will be expected to reveal information on classroom aggression, its causes and impact...

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** You do not need to write your name and no individuals will be identified or traced from this investigation. The data collected will be used for purpose of the study only.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any of the questions we ask you.

**If you agree to participate in this study please sign on the next page. Thank you.**



Kind regards Signature:-

Zengeya Alfred:

Cell number: 0775055019

**AGREEMENT:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that this focus group will be recorded.

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I: EDITING CERTIFICATE

*Barbara Shaw*  
*Editing/proofreading services*  
*18 Balvicar Road, Blairgowrie, 2194*  
*Tel: 011 888 4788 Cell: 072 1233 881*  
*Email: [bmslaw@telkomsa.net](mailto:bmslaw@telkomsa.net)*  
*Full member of The Professional Editors' Group*

### **To whom it may concern**

This letter serves to inform you that I have done language editing and formatting on the thesis **CLASSROOM AGGRESSION IN HARARE URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: CAUSES, MANIFESTATION AND IMPACT** by **ALFRED ZENGEYA**.



Barbara Shaw

23 October 2016