

**RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN ADOLESCENTS AT  
SCHOOL IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA URBAN**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the work submitted in this dissertation is the result of my own independent investigations except where reference is made to published literature and where assistance is acknowledged. This work has not been presented before, either wholly or in part for any other academic research work and has been submitted as part of the requirements for the award of my Masters Degree certificate in Child and Adolescent Psychology.

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## **Abstract**

School bullying and aggression among children and adolescents have been a source of concern for many researchers globally in the past few decades. Limited research exists regarding relational aggression, largely because research has focused historically on direct verbal and physical aggression, which is more commonly perpetrated by boys.

**General and Specific Objectives:** The main objective was to explore relational aggression in selected schools of Lusaka. Specific objectives included; to explore the prevalence and assess gender differences in relational aggression and assess the relation between relational aggression and the psychological well-being of perpetrators.

**Methodology:** This was a cross-sectional exploratory study. A sample of 170 boys and girls in grades 6 and 8 was recruited from private and government schools. Measures used were a revised Peer Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ) to assess the prevalence of relational aggression. The PEQ subscales were previously tested and found to have high internal consistency, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's Victimisation of Self .85 and Victimization of Others.78 (Vernberg et al., 1999). To measure the psychological well-being, the self-report Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Youth version was used. The SDQ has demonstrated both good reliability and validity in the Zambian context (Menon, 2014). Chronbach's alphas for the total score approached good internal consistency ( $d = 0.66$ ).

**Data Analysis:** Software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data. Descriptive statistics to measure prevalence rates included mean, frequencies and chi square. Comparison between gender difference was done using the Mann Whitney U-test and Pearson's correlation analysis to explore the relationship of relational aggression and psychological well-being scores of perpetrators.

**Results:** Findings indicated that relational aggression was prevalent in the selected schools with boys reporting 34.9 percent to 67.5 percent involvement and girls reporting from 45.3 percent to 64.3 percent involvement in relational aggression. There was no gender difference in relational aggression. Correlations analyses indicated significant positive relationship between relational aggression and psychological well-being. Relationally aggressive pupils reported difficulties in the peer relationships, conduct and hyperactivity.

**Conclusion:** This study revealed that relational aggression is prevalent in the selected schools despite there being no significant differences between boys and girls. The study also revealed significant relationships between relational aggression and psychological well-being. This statement addresses the current knowledge and recommendations that intervention measures should be put in place to address relational aggression problems in schools.

## **Dedication**

*To Wonani, Mtendere and Kondwani.*

*Always stand on this confidence that*

*You can do ALL things through Christ who gives you strength.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Finishing my dissertation has been a journey that I will cherish all my life. What was more important about this journey are the lessons that I learnt throughout such that today, I know more than I knew when I first started. The learning process has been more about the people that walked alongside me on this journey and those who provided guidance when I missed steps. For this reason, I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr. Anitha J. Menon, for her unwavering guidance and understanding throughout this journey. She gave me insights on how to proceed and overcome roadblocks throughout the report writing process.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CSBS-P	Children's Social Behaviour Scale- Peer form
PEQ	Peer Experiences Questionnaire
RA	Relational Aggression
SDQ-Y	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire- Youth Version
SIP	Social Information Processing

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background**

School bullying and aggression among children and adolescents has been a source of concern for many researchers globally in the past few decades. Unfortunately, research on bullying in an African context, is scarce as most studies have been done in the West (Nabuzoka, 2003). In his comparative study of bullying-related behaviours of English and Zambian students, Nabuzoka, (2003) asserted that bullying can take many forms, including nasty forms of name-calling, social exclusion, intimidation and ridicule, and extortion as well as physical violence. "Bullying is a long standing violence, physical or mental, conducted by an individual or group and directed at an individual who is not able to defend himself in the actual situation", (Roland, 1989: 143). In this regard, bullying is defined in literature as a repeated behaviour - including both verbal and physical behaviours - that occurs over time in a relationship characterised by an imbalance of strength and power (Olweus, 1994). Bullying is a subset of aggression (Olweus, 1993) and to distinguish bullying from other forms of aggression, the typology "direct versus indirect" (Olweus, 1993) or "overt versus covert" (Crick, 1995) has been used.

According to Coie and Dodge, (1998), aggression is defined as any act intended to hurt another person. Harm may take many forms and serve distinct functions such as being made fun of; being called names, being insulted; being the subject of rumours; being threatened with harm; being pushed, shoved, tripped, spat on; being pressured to do things against one's will; being purposely excluded from activities; and having property intentionally destroyed. Physical or overt aggression is defined as the intent to harm another person through physical force or dominance, and has been studied extensively (Dodge, et. al. 2006). Physical aggression involves peers being harmed through physical damage or by the threat of such damage (Underwood et al., 2001). Typical examples of physical aggression during the school years include pushing, biting, kicking, hitting, or threatening physical harm.

In the past two decades, relational aggression has emerged in literature as another form of bullying. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) coined the term *relational aggression* to describe aggression that is directed at damaging relationships. Relational aggression is defined as nonphysical aggression in which one manipulates or harms another's social standing or reputation. Examples of relationally aggressive behaviours include threatening to stop talking to a friend (the silent treatment), isolating a peer from his or her group of friends (social exclusion) or spreading gossip or rumours within the peer group. Identifying relational aggression in school environments is not a straightforward process because relational aggression may not be observed by adults or identified as aggression by both adults and pupils (Simmons, 2002). Simmons asserted that girls often work behind the scenes by excluding others, glaring, whispering and spreading hurtful rumours. This can make it difficult for school personnel to track the sources of these harmful remarks.

In addition Dellasega and Nixon (2003) purported that another reason why relational aggression is not yet in the forefront of educational intervention is the tendency for adults to accept relational aggression as "just the way students are," especially during early adolescence. While school administrators may occasionally note the relationally malicious and spiteful behaviour of some pupils, they may perceive such behaviour as a "stage" that pupils will eventually outgrow. This perspective is remarkably similar to the old adage "Boys will be boys and girls will be girls."

Just like elsewhere in the world, relational aggression is real in the Zambian context, too in particular, Lusaka as anecdotal evidence indicates. The researcher of this study had several encounters with pupils who experienced relational aggression when she worked as a guidance teacher. One student walked to her and said that she was tired of the mean comments some members of her class made on her. She said they called her "black Maria" and that hurt so bad. The researcher's own son also complained of the mean jokes that his classmates made over his height whenever he was working out a problem on the white board. He felt they were unkind and hurt his feelings.

It is vitally important to note that although relational aggression can be used in many contexts (e.g. schools, work places, families) and among different age groups (e.g. pre schoolers, adolescence, adulthood), many researchers have been particularly interested in relational aggression among adolescents (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). Adolescence is a period of significant cognitive, social and behavioural transitions. Socially peer relationships become increasingly significant during adolescence (Collins and Repinsky, 1994). Peer relationships are especially important for adolescents' healthy psychological development as peers provide many new behavioural models and feedback essential for successful identity formation and development of one's sense of self (Brown, 2004). In school peer relationships also contribute to how much adolescents value school including class performance (Ryan, 2001; Epstein, 1983b). In addition, peer interactions promote a positive sense of autonomy and independent decision-making skills (Hill and Holmbeck, 1986), as well as healthy sexual development including the development of the capacity for intimate friendships and learning appropriate sexual behaviour (Sullivan, 1953a).

However, studies have also shown that adolescents take part in peer relationships that are harmful for their psychological development and well-being (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995; Brown and Mounts, 1989; Crick and Nelson, 2002). Adolescents form various cliques and belong to different groups based on their activity interests, music and clothing preferences. Studies have also shown cultural and ethnic backgrounds to be determinants of the formation of these cliques (Brown and Mounts, 1989). Such groups differ in their sociometric or popularity status, which often create unhealthy, aggression-victimization based dynamics between groups (Simmons, 2002).

A number of reviewers have shown that research does not yield consistent gender difference patterns on the topic of gender differences and aggression (Gini, et. al., 2007; Young, et. al., 2006; Mullin-Rindler, 2003), while other studies have concluded that girls engage in relational aggression more often than boys (e.g. Arora and Thompson, 1987 Archer, 2004; Crick, 1997; Crick and Nelson, 2002; Herrenkohl et al., 2007). Smith, Rose, and Schwartz-Mette (2009) also observed that it is likely that boys who are physically and verbally aggressive are relationally aggressive as well but, the more salient nature of overt

aggression draws observers' attention away from more covert relationally aggressive behaviours, resulting in the misleading belief that boys do not engage as often in relational aggression.

Recently, research in this area has shifted focus toward the impact of relational aggression on perpetrators and victims, particularly with regard to their psychosocial adjustment (Storch et. al., 2004; Loudin et. al., 2003). As observed by Herrenkhol et. al. (2009) both physical aggression and relational aggression increase the risk of future problem behaviours and other research studies have found that perpetrators and victims of relational aggression tend to experience more depression, social isolation and lower self esteem than their peers. Aggressors in particular, tend to be rejected by peers and experience more antisocial personality features than non aggressors and victims of aggression (Crick et. al., 2006; Crick 1996; Werner and Crick, 1999). This suggests that exposure to relational aggression may be associated with negative effects on an individual's mental health and well being.

Similarly, when physically aggressive individuals are compared to their relationally aggressive counterparts, physically aggressive individuals also score high on a variety of risk factors which include negative peer influences, positive attitudes to antisocial behaviours, sensation-seeking, rebelliousness, and family history of antisocial behaviour (Herrenkohl et al., 2007). However, relational aggression has been found to be more strongly associated with internalizing problems, whereas physical aggression is believed to be more strongly associated with long-term externalizing problems (Mathieson and Crick, 2010).

In spite of research evidence, relational aggression has often not been recognized for what it is: hurtful, inappropriate aggression that warrants a targeted response and intervention from adults. Rather, it has been seen as a rite of passage, a part of growing up and a way of learning social games (Simmons, 2002). In a baseline assessment conducted by CAMFED (2008) in some parts of Tanzania and Zambia on factors that impede African women from achieving their academic and professional potential, CAMFED found that 41 percent of the pupils and 33 percent of the teachers did not consider bullying and name calling as abusive.

CAMFED also found that violence as a way to solve problems in relationships was considered normal. Unfortunately such type of violence is widespread and go mostly unaddressed by school authorities. It is for this reason that the researcher wants to explore the nature and existence of relational aggression in adolescents and its' impact on psychological well-being of perpetrators.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The majority of empirical work on primary and secondary school children's aggressive behavior has focused primarily on physical aggression, such as hitting and pushing or verbal aggression that is more typical of boys and their peer interaction styles. Focus on physical aggression has led to limited exploration of relational aggression, a method of bullying which uses social relationships as weapons. Relational aggression has usually been considered as part of growing up and yet its effects can be devastating on the psychological well-being of adolescents. In Zambia, there is scarce information on bullying in schools, in particular on relational aggression as most studies on aggression have been conducted in the West. This study sought to determine whether relational aggression existed in Zambia, its occurrence among boys and girls and its relationship with the psychological well-being of perpetrators.

## **1.3 Rationale**

Despite its seriousness to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical research done in Zambia on relational aggression which makes it difficult to make recommendations. This study was significant in that it provided information on Relational Aggression as there was scarce information on this topic in Zambia. It would also direct needed attention to the study of other alternative forms of aggressive behaviour rather than physical aggression only. In addition, the study would inform educators and policy makers on the nature and impacts of relational aggression in adolescents in schools.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

### **1.4.1 Main Objective**

The main objective of this study was to explore relational aggression amongst pupils in selected schools in Lusaka Urban.

### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study were:

- 1) To explore the prevalence of relational aggression amongst pupils in selected schools in Lusaka Urban.
- 2) To assess gender differences in relational aggression amongst pupils in selected schools in Lusaka urban.
- 3) To explore the relationship between relational aggression and the psychological well-being of perpetrators in the selected schools in Lusaka urban.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How prevalent is relational aggression amongst pupils in the selected schools in Lusaka urban?
- 2) Are there gender differences in relational aggression amongst pupils?
- 3) What is the relationship between relational aggression and psychological well-being of perpetrators?

### **1.6 Hypotheses**

The study tested the following hypotheses:

- 1) Relational aggression will be prevalent amongst pupils in the selected schools in Lusaka urban.
- 2) Girls will be more relationally aggressive than boys.
- 3) Perpetrators of relational aggression will report poor psychological well-being.

### **1.7 Variables**

#### **1.7.1 Independent Variable:**

- Gender
- Psychological well-being

#### **1.7.2 Dependent Variables:**

- Relational Aggression
- Psychological well-being

Relational aggression and psychological well-being can influence each other. The research focused on determining whether participants with total difficulties (in psychological well-being) would also be perpetrators of relational aggression.

## **1.8 Operational Definitions of Variables**

### **Relational aggression**

Relational aggression refers to behaviours that harm others through damage or threat of damage to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship or group inclusion (e.g., intentional manipulation of friendships that excludes particular peers from activities, gossips, threatens or intimidates a target person) and will be measured using the peer nomination form.

### **Prevalence of relational aggression**

How wide spread relational aggression is among school adolescents.

### **Gender**

The state of being female or male.

### **Psychological Well-being**

Psychological well-being as measured by Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire - Youth version.

Questionnaire –Youth version Psychological well-being will be measured by Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire –Youth version

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Ecological Theory**

Swearer and Doll (2001) drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) pioneering work on ecological systems theory, asserted that bullying and peer victimization has been conceptualized from a social-ecological perspective. The ecological systems theory posits that humans develop in context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Bronfenbrenner defined contexts of development as nested structures, like Russian dolls, each inside the next. The

developing individual is embedded within four of these spheres, ranging from the immediate setting to the broad culture. For most infants, the innermost context, the microsystem, is the family, that is father, mother and siblings. Other contexts within the microsystem include the school, neighbourhood or daycare centre. According to Bronfenbrenner, the development of the individual within the microsystem is influenced by the cultural practices embedded in those contexts or environments. The mesosystem consists of the interactions between the various microsystems while the exosystem refers to more distant contexts influencing the meso- and microsystem like the parental economic situation, for example, employment practices for parents that generate resources that may be directed to the child's well-being and everyday living. The remotest layer of the ecological system, the macro system consists of the cultural norms, socialisation goals and values. These layers in the ecological system are continually interacting with each other and influence the development of the child.

Allen-Meares et. al. (2000) argues that this theory is best described as the interaction and transaction between students and their environment. Similarly Clancy (1995) asserted that the ecological theory encompasses all the environmental systems that interact and affect the student and the environmental conditions consist of a combination of external conditions from the micro, meso and macro systems such as the family, peers, school, community and the mass media. A major issue in the schools is that the pupils' interactions and reactions in the school environment can sometimes turn aggressive or violent

From this theoretical framework, bullying is an ecological event that is established and perpetrated over time as a result of the complex interaction between inter- and intra individual variables. Individual characteristics are considered jointly influenced by a variety of ecological contexts including peers, families, schools and community factors (Swearer and Doll, 2001).

Empirical research has revealed that gender, family, peer and community factors predict aggression and violence in children and adolescents (Herrenkohl, et al., 2000). Herrenkohl, et al., (2000) have conducted research to explore ecological risk factors for youth violence.

Herrenkohl et. al. (2000) conducted a longitudinal study to explore ecological risk factors for youth violence, and to explore the effects of constructs that have been found to increase risk for other problem behaviors. In the school context, intra - and inter personal variables that contribute to overt and relational aggression include gender and peer factors. Various studies (Crick and Grotpeeter, 1995; Werner and Crick, 2004; Crick and Ladd, 1993) suggest that boys are more likely to exhibit physical aggression while girls are more likely to exhibit relational aggression. Studies on gender specifics have also suggested that relational and overt aggression begin in early childhood and become more prominent during adolescence (Crick, Ostrov, and Werner, 2006). These behaviors are embedded through reinforcement of gender specific roles throughout teen and adult life (Crick and Ladd, 1993; Herrenkohl, et al., 2007). The interactions between the micro systems such as the home and school will affect the development of the adolescent. It is vitally important to note that in this regard family functioning is another ecological context that contributes to relational and overt aggression among adolescents in school. Family experiences, such as parent and sibling relationships, are influential to the development of relational aggression in adolescents (Solomon et. al., 2008). After Casas and colleagues (2006) evaluated parental effects on relational and physical aggression in a preschool population, they found mothers' and fathers' authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were positively correlated to relationally aggressive behaviors in their children. Elsewhere in another study, Brown et. al. (2007) examined parenting styles as predictors of relational aggression in Puerto Rican and European American preschoolers.

In addition, the emotional and physical responses of parents are potential sources of influence on children's aggression according to Werner et. al., (2006). Weiner and colleagues examined the influence of mothers' affective and behavioral responses to hypothetical displays of relational and physical aggression in their preschool children. The results of this study revealed that mothers' reported lower levels of negative affect and a smaller likelihood of intervening when asked to imagine their child engaging in relational aggression, in comparison to their child engaging in physical aggression. In summary, the interactions and modeling that occur in parenting can predict relational aggression.

Similarly, the interactions that occur in sibling relationships can also influence the display of relational aggression. Sibling research (Crick et. al., 1999) with older children has demonstrated that relational aggression is the most frequent form of aggression exhibited by siblings towards each other, a situation that may provide for the imitation of these behaviours within the family context. Ostrov et. al (2006) also conducted an assessment of relational aggression in sibling and peer relationships during early childhood and suggested that older sibling's relational aggression predicted younger sibling's use of relational aggression towards peers.

The ecological factor of peer group is another important influence on adolescents. In recent research, Gorman-Smith, Henry and Tolan (2004) suggested that in addition to family functioning, peer relationships are influential in the display of relational aggression in children and adolescents. Werner and Crick (2004) found that school-age nonaggressive children who befriended relationally aggressive peers were relatively more likely to become relationally aggressive themselves in future. This is in line with a study conducted by Mouttapa et. al., (2004), which found that friends' participation in aggressive behaviors was positively associated with being a bully or an aggressive victim (a victim that retaliates with aggressive behavior).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provided a review of literature on relational aggression and its relationship with gender and psychological well-being of perpetrators. The study reviewed the available research findings on relational and overt aggression, differences in gender and psychological well-being of perpetrators mostly done in developed countries. The key words for the search of literature included: adolescence, relational aggression, overt aggression, gender, and psychological well-being.

#### **2.2 Relational Aggression and Prevalence**

Relational Aggression (RA) is defined as behaviors that harm others by damaging, or threatening to damage, one's relationship with his or her peers. Relational aggression often includes: "exclusion, withholding friendships, ignoring others, spreading rumors, gossiping, and eliciting peer rejection of another child" (Conway, p.334, 2005). "It is where, beneath a chorus of voices, one girl glares at another, then smiles silently at her friend. The next day a ringleader passes around a secret petition asking girls to outline the reasons they hate the targeted girl. The day after that, the outcast sits silently next to the boys in class, head lowered, shoulders slumped forward; the damage is neat and quiet, the perpetrator and victim invisible." (Simmons, 2002)

Crick and Grotpeier (1995) were among the first researchers to study the concept of relational aggression. The researchers assessed the differences between relational aggression and overt aggression among boys and girls and the potential effects that both forms may have on social and psychological adjustment. The findings indicated that girls are more relationally aggressive than boys and that boys were significantly more overtly aggressive than girls. In addition they found that their subjects tended to exhibit either relational aggression or overt aggression, not both, suggesting that the type of aggression may be related to an individual's gender. It was evident that relational aggression was significantly associated with social and psychological maladjustment. For example, relationally aggressive children tended to be more rejected and disliked by peers, and

reported more loneliness and depression than peers who were not relationally aggressive. Recent statistics demonstrate that many adolescents experience aggression. Quoting from Dutton, 2003, “In a recent national survey conducted by the Families and Work Institute of 1000 fifth to twelfth graders, two-thirds of the students reported that in the past month they had experienced some form of “emotional violence”, defined as “being teased or gossiped about in a mean way” (p. 58). Bosworth (1999) reported that 81% of the respondents reported at least one act of bullying behavior in the last month (in Kenny, McEachern, and Alude, 2005). Similarly, Mooney and Smith (1995) (in Kenny, McEachern, and Alude, 2005) found that 82% of the respondents had been bullied at some point in their school years, with 59% reporting being bullied at least once a week. Though adolescent aggression and bullying has been a significant part of children’s lives throughout history, academic interest and research emerged only in the 1970s.

Several researchers (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995; Coie, Dodge, and Kupersmidt, 1990) have found significant differences in the behaviours associated with relational and overt aggression. Crick and Grotpeter, (1995) asserted that specifically, relational aggression is characterised by interpersonally manipulative behaviours such as social alienation, rejection, social exclusion and direct control. Crick (1996) also found that relational aggression is more subtle and calculated than overt aggression and is typically directed at within group peers, that is, individuals with whom one associates. These behaviours can be confrontational or non confrontational and include gossip, ignoring, withdrawing and threatening to end a friendship. The confrontational aspects of relational aggression involve revealing oneself to victims and others, while the non-confrontational aspects of relational aggression involve concealing or obscuring one's identity from victims. In addition, relational aggression is generally thought to be more of a responding behaviour to a particular situation rather than an instigating behaviour (Xie et al., 2002). However, overt aggression is always confrontational and for this reason is much more directly noticeable by others than relational aggression (Yoon, Burton and Taiariol, 2004). In addition overt aggression is generally considered to be more of an instigating behaviour (Xie et al., 2002).

Researchers have used several different means to identify children with aggressive behaviours. Using the perspectives of both peers and adults creates overlapping perceptions

of the behaviours, but also can contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the behaviour (Coie, et. al., 1990). Using a multi-informant approach, with data merged from both of these sources, creates a complete picture of student behaviour. Pupils who use relational aggression are often quite clever, ensuring adults are not aware. Similarly, even more overt behaviours, such as physical aggression, are most likely to occur in unsupervised peer environments. For example, Olweus (1993) reported that the number of teachers present during recess was negatively correlated with the number of bully/victim problems that occurred.

One way of identifying relational aggression is through a peer-nomination instrument, such as the Children's Social Behaviour Scale-Peer Form (CSBS-P; Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). This CSBS-P instrument allows children to name peers who commonly initiate relational aggression (e.g., "when mad at a person, ignores them or stops talking to them"), physical aggression (e.g., "hits or pushes others"), or prosocial behaviour (e.g., "does nice things for others"). Children are given a class register and typically asked to nominate up to three peers who fit each of the descriptions. According to Crick et. al. (1999) the CSBS-P has evidence of positive psychometric properties including high test-retest reliability, satisfactory internal consistency for all scales, and statistical distinctiveness of the three factors—relational aggression, physical aggression, and prosocial behaviour.

### **2.3     Gender Differences in Relational Aggression among School Children**

Harmful effects of conduct problems on children's development (Parker and Asher, 1987), have led to a great deal of research being conducted on aggression in the past decade (e.g. Dodge and Crick, 1990; Parke and Slaby, 1983). Although significant advances have been made in our understanding of childhood aggression, one limitation of this research has been the lack of attention to gender differences in the expression of aggression (Robins, 1986).

In the early 1990's, researchers began looking at the way in which studies on aggression were carried out. Bjorkquist and Niemela (1992) drew focus to the fact that a great majority of studies on aggression were conducted by males with male participants and that females were rarely included. Moreover, only overt, observable aggression was included in the studies and there was inconsistency in how aggression was defined among the studies.

In several of the studies, aggression was defined as a physical, observable act by one child toward another child, while other studies defined aggression as simply a physical, observable act by a child with no target child involved (e.g. throwing a chair) leaving out the unobservable patterns of aggression, altogether. However, in a few cases, researchers included verbal assaults as part of their definition of aggression while others did not, creating additional discrepancies in definitions of aggression. According to Pepler and Craig (1999), the under-representation of research literature on girls with aggression problems is as a result of the higher incidence of physical and observable aggression in males and the nature of observational studies, where only directly observable, physical and verbal behaviours were recorded.

Similarly, Bjorkquist (1994) saw the omission of non-observable aggression as a missing piece in the study of aggression. Bjorkquist examined research on sex differences in aggressive styles and concluded that in addition to overt, directly observable aggressive behaviours, covert, indirect aggression should be examined. Everett and Price (1995) asserted that when aggression is defined as physical, overt and observable, females appear to have lower rates of aggression when compared to males. However, when aggression is defined by verbal threats and intimidation, girls are proportionally more likely to appear as significantly aggressive.

Furthermore, earlier studies demonstrate that, as a group, boys exhibit significantly higher levels of aggression than do girls (Parke and Slaby, 1983; Block, 1983), a discrepancy that persists throughout the life span (Kenrick, 1987). Naturally, these findings have been interpreted as an overall lack of aggressiveness in girls' peer interactions. However, an alternative explanation is that the forms of aggression assessed in past research are more characteristic for males than for females meaning young girls may exhibit unique forms of aggression, forms that have been overlooked in past research.

Researchers have almost always found that males are more aggressive than females (Weiler, 1999; Hudley, 1993). Boys tend to harm others through physical and verbal aggression such as hitting or pushing others, threatening to beat up others. According to Block (1983), these behaviors are consistent with the types of goals that past research has shown to be important to boys within the peer-group context such as themes of

instrumentality and physical dominance. However, these types of concerns are not as important for most girls. Various factors such as biological differences (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974); learned differences (Hyde and Schuck, 1977); reaction differences of boys and girls to school; and differences in reactions of teachers to boys in comparison to girls (Harmon, et al., 1992), have been hypothesized and explored by researchers as the reasons why boys were observed to be more aggressive than girls. In contrast to boys, girls are more likely to pay attention to relational issues during social interaction such as establishing close, intimate connections with others (Block, 1983). In some of these earlier studies, girls were identified as being not significantly aggressive, if at all, and deemed not necessary to include in future studies on aggression (Frodi, Macaulay and Thome 1977; Buss, 1961).

In the late 1970's and the 1980's, researchers began looking at the impact of age on aggression. Lagerspetz, et. al. (1988) found that younger children who had not yet developed verbal skills displayed more overt and physical aggression than older children with developed verbal skills. It was observed that as children learned to communicate their wants and needs verbally, the need to express themselves in an overtly and physically aggressive manner reduced. It was noted however, that boys, significantly more than girls, continued to exhibit overt, physical aggression even after verbal communication was developed.

While reviewing over 28 observational studies on aggression in children, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) found that boys were much more aggressive than girls, consistently obtaining higher scores in physical aggression than girls. It was however, interestingly observed that girls displayed more verbally aggressive behaviours than physically aggressive behaviours when compared to boys.

During the 1990's, Crick and Grotpeier (1995) examined a different type of covert and indirect aggression, relational aggression. They began studying relational aggression, and its relationships to gender and psychological adjustment. They found that girls were more likely to be relationally aggressive than boys and relational aggression was a stronger predictor of social maladjustment for girls than for boys. Their research in the regular education context has changed the way aggression is defined; how the relationship between

aggression and gender is viewed and they have provided a very specific definition for a type of indirect aggression that is more prevalent among girls. In his comparative study on bullying between Zambian and English pupils, Nabuzoka (2003) found that gender differences were reflected at primary school level and not at secondary school level for both English and Zambian students. According to Nabuzoka, boys scored higher on behaviours that reflected physical aggression which is synonymous to boy's bullying than on other behaviours that were more psychological in nature.

Similarly, over the past few decades there has been a growing recognition that girls and boys express their anger differently, with boys tending to exhibit aggression in a physical and more direct manner related to dominance, while girls tend to use relationally manipulative behaviours (Bjorkvist et. al., 1992). With research findings showing that girls place more importance on close dyadic peer relationships than boys (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995), it is not surprising that girls convey aggression in a form that involves damage to peer relationships. Consequently, girls are more distressed by relational conflicts than are boys (Crick, et. al., 2002) and experience a substantially higher physiological response to relational situations as compared to boys (Murray-Close et. al., 2007).

While recognizing the significance and meaning of relationally aggressive behaviors among girls, research findings have also shown clear that relational aggression also affects boys and the broader context in which it occurs. Card, et. al. (2008) observed that relational aggression occurs quite frequently among boys. In addition, boys who display relational aggression as opposed to physical aggression experience greater psychosocial maladjustment than boys who display gender-normative expressions of aggression (Crick, 1997). Because of the effect of relational aggression on the broader context, such as schools, research has found that students feel less safe in schools in which relational aggression is frequent (Kuppens, et. al., 2009). There is therefore need for schools to develop school-based programming for relational aggression for both girls and boys.

Taken together, the research focusing on relational aggression underscores the importance of targeting this form of aggression when designing programs for aggressive individuals (Leff, et. al., 2007) The scientific literature has been relatively slow to inform relational

aggression interventions; however, several researchers have begun to use this growing literature base to update ongoing interventions that did not include relational aggression in prior trials, as well as to develop new programs with a concentrated focus on relational aggression.

## **2.4 Relational Aggression and Psychological Wellbeing of Perpetrators**

Although relational aggression appears to have consistent negative effects for targets, the research about adolescents who use relational aggression continues to evolve. Early relational aggression research tied it to a host of negative psychosocial outcomes, especially outcomes relevant to female development (Crick et al., 1999). Both internalizing and externalizing difficulties, along with peer rejection, have emerged as consistent correlates, beginning in the preschool years (e.g., Crick, Casas, and Mosher, 1997; McNeilly-Choque et al., 1996). However, relational aggression in preschool boys also was associated with greater peer acceptance in an early study (Crick et al., 1997). Correlations such as this suggest that the consequences of relational aggression may vary according to social contexts and the general reputation of the child or adolescent. Similarly, Prinstein et. al. (2001) asserted that relationally aggressive girls are more likely to experience externalizing symptoms associated with oppositional defiant and conduct disorders. Relationally aggressive children are more likely to be disliked and lack prosocial behaviour compared to nonaggressive children (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995).

Card, et. al (2008) conducted a meta-analytic review of about 150 studies examining the psychosocial correlates of indirect aggression (i.e., social/ relational) and direct aggression (i.e., physical and verbal) in children and adolescents. They found that internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression were found to be strongly and uniquely correlated with indirect aggression, whereas emotional dysregulation and ADHD symptoms were strongly and uniquely associated with direct aggression. In addition, delinquency, conduct problems, and peer rejection were significantly associated with both forms of aggression. Generally, however, direct aggression was more strongly related to these difficulties than indirect aggression (Card, et. al., 2008).

Perpetrators of relational aggression are thought, to be disliked and rejected by peers (Crick and GrotPeter, 1996). Crick and GrotPeter (1995) assert that they can also be socially maladjusted, and suffer from depression, loneliness, and social isolation. Additionally, because of the flexibility of the roles, relationally aggressive girls feel socially insecure, constantly having to protect her position of social leader, which can lead to feelings of insecurity and unstable self-esteem. This constant struggle for their position in and control of their social group may lead them to be rejected by the very peer group they are trying to control (Archer and Coyne, 2005).

Contrary to this, other studies have found that relationally aggressive acts are positively correlated with perceived popularity (Rose, Swenson, and Waller, 2004). Crothers, et al., (2007), reported, "Students who are relationally aggressive are seen as more popular and seem to use that popularity to be more relationally aggressive toward their peers" (p.7). These conflicting findings may be based on age and sophistication of aggression, as young children tend to use more overt and verbal aggression, causing them to be rejected by their peers, while older children utilize more subtle and less easily traced forms of aggression to get to top of their social network. Either way, neither the victim nor the perpetrator of social aggression go unhurt.

GrotPeter and Crick (1996) determined that "relationally aggressive children did not report high levels of self-disclosure to their friends, but rather preferred that their friends self-disclose to them" (p. 2337). These individuals use power and status over others by telling their secrets, sharing confidential information or intimidating or threatening to share the inside information to humiliate the victim, a sign of poor psychological adjustment. Aggressive pupils often willingly acknowledge the impact of their cruelty, but they will justify their behaviour because of something someone else did to them first.

Crick, GrotPeter, and Bigbee (2002) also found that relationally and physically aggressive children exhibited negative or hostile attribution to social cues. Moreover, relationally aggressive children reported more distress to relational provocation while physically aggressive children reported more distress to instrumental provocations. This is consistent with their findings that relationally and physically aggressive children that show hostile attribution biases and deficiencies in the Social Information Processing (SIP) model are

likely to engage in aggressive acts. Werner and Crick (1999) studied response decision processes in relationally and overtly aggressive children. The participants were presented with conflictual situations and results showed that overtly aggressive girls and boys evaluated overtly aggressive responses to conflictual situations as positive. Similarly, relationally aggressive girls and boys evaluated relationally aggressive responses to conflictual situations as positive.

### **Summary**

The goal of the literature review was to look at the research that has been conducted by various scholars pertaining to relational aggression. Relational aggression has been defined as behaviours that harm others by damaging, or threatening to damage, one's relationship with his or her peers. Relational aggression often includes: "exclusion, withholding friendships, ignoring others, spreading rumours, gossiping, and eliciting peer rejection of another child. Studies have been inconsistent in documenting gender differences in relational aggression with some saying girls are more likely to exhibit relational aggression while boys are likely to exhibit overt aggression. However, some studies show that both boys and girls exhibit relational aggression. Taken together, research findings indicate that relationally aggressive behaviours are linked to a number of concurrent and future adjustment problems for both victims and perpetrators and that the association is strong (Crick et al., 1999). Special attention is needed to address and prevent negative outcomes associated with perpetrators and victims of relational aggression.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section focuses on the methods utilised in the study. These include study design, the target population, i.e. participants, recruitment, data collection procedure, measures used for data collection, inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants, ethical consideration, and data analysis process.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The study was conducted using the cross sectional exploratory study design using quantitative methods. This design was selected because of the limited time within which the study had to be conducted and it only sought to measure relational aggression as it existed in schools at that particular time of the study.

#### **3.3 Study Population**

The study's target population comprised grades 6 and 8 pupils from both private and government schools from Rhodes Park, Lake Road and Kabulonga Basic. This population was chosen because most pupils in these grades were in their early adolescence years, a stage when friendships and relationships become very important.

***Table 1: Distribution of Study Population***

		Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Boys	86	50.6
	Girls	84	49.4
	Total	170	100
<b>Age</b>	10 to 12	117	68.8
	13 to 15	50	29.4
	Above 15	3	1.8
	Total	170	100
<b>Grade Level</b>	Grade 6	86	50.6
	Grade 8	84	49.4
	Total	170	100
<b>Type of School</b>	Government	73	42.9
	Private	97	57.1
	Total	170	100

### **3.4 Sample Size**

The researcher recruited 170 pupils from grades 6 and 8. There were 86 boys and 84 girls. Pupils from both private and government schools were targeted in this study. It was recognized that the specific number varied across schools. There was no specific attempt to include equal number of boys and girls, but it was hoped that both gender would be represented in the study sample.

### **3.5 Sampling Procedure**

The study utilised purposive sampling procedure. The study targeted grades 6 and 8 pupils only because these students are adolescents. Adolescence is a stage in pupils' development when relationships with peers become very important. 170 participants were recruited from both government and private schools in Lusaka urban of Zambia. Informed consent forms were given out to the school administrators who in turn gave the pupils to be signed by parents. Fourteen pupils out of the 184 who got consent forms did not consent to participate in the study and these were excluded from the study. Brief presentations describing the study was given in each classroom. Student verbal assent and parental consents were obtained from the 170 pupils who participated in the study. It was stressed that participation in the study was on voluntary basis and that pupils were free to withdraw if they so wished. It was also stressed that no incentive would be given for participating in the study.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

Pupils whose parents consented to their children participating in the study were met later in their respective classes and they completed questionnaires meant to collect data for the study. Because of the sensitive nature of the study, questionnaires were completed during guidance classes so that the activity appeared to be part of the guidance lesson. In each case, the researcher and the research assistant were present. The pupils completed the questionnaires starting with the Demographic Information questionnaire, Peer Experiences Questionnaire and finished off with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which took approximately 90 minutes. During each session, the researcher explained to the students why they were completing those questionnaires. The pupils were told that some researchers wanted to know what types of aggression or bullying took place in school and

whether there was a connection between gender, psychological wellbeing of students and aggression. Children were trained in the use of the response scales prior to the administration of the instruments. Each item of every instrument was read aloud and explained by the administrator. The researcher and research assistant were available to answer questions throughout the entire session. Additionally, because of the sensitivity of the study, teachers were not allowed to be present while questionnaires were being completed. It was emphasized that the research was anonymous and that the pupils were not required to use their names at all.

### **3.7 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

#### **3.7.1 Inclusion**

- Grades 6 and 8 pupils within the age range of 10 to 16 years old.
- If consent was given by the caregiver.

#### **3.7.2 Exclusion**

- No verbal assent from participant.
- No consent from caregiver.

### **3.8 Measures**

The measures used in this study were administered in each participating class. To address the study objectives, a Peer Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ) and a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Youth (SDQ-Y) version were used. A demographic questionnaire was also used to collect participants' data.

#### **3.8.1. Peer Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ).**

Vernberg, Jacobs and Herschberger (1999) developed the self-report PEQ to measure frequency of aggressive behaviors both from the victim and aggressor point of view. The measure includes 9 questions in each of the three sections asking about the frequency of various physically or relationally aggressive behaviors. The questionnaire uses a five-point response scale to indicate the frequency of experiencing any of 10 types of victimisation and perpetration of aggressive behaviours during the past 30 days (6 months in the case of this study): 1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = a few times, 4 = about once a week, 5 = a few

times a week. Statements for the victimisation scale include; *How often have you been bullied at school in the past six months? A pupil teased me in a mean way, called me bad names or said rude things to me; A pupil said he/she was going to hurt me or beat me up; A pupil scared me so that I gave up money or other things; A pupil told put-downs or rumours about me; A pupil hit, kicked or pushed me in a way; A pupil grabbed, held or touched me in a way I didn't like; Some pupils left me out of an activity or conversation that I really wanted to be included in; A pupil chased me like he or she was really trying to hurt me and A pupil played a mean trick to scare or to hurt me.* For the aggressor scale, the items were worded differently using pronouns that depicted an aggressive manner such as "*I teased another pupil in a mean way, called him or her bad names or said rude things to him/her.*" Medium to high frequency included once a month, once a week, and a few times a week (see Appendix IV).

This study utilised only one subscales namely: Victimization of Others (VO). The VS and VO scales were previously tested and found to have high internal consistency, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's VS= .85 and VO=.78; (Vernberg et al., 1999). Total relational aggression items scores were computed, such that higher scores indicate more severe relational aggressive. In this sample, the relational aggression subscales demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  .68). It is important to state that in this study, the item "*I teased another pupil in a mean way, called him or her bad names or said rude things to him/her*" was treated as a relational aggression behaviour.

### **3.8.2 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**

To measure the psychological well-being of students, particularly the perpetrators, the self-report Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Youth version was used. This instrument was developed by Goodman (1997) and is used to measure the mental health status and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. The SDQ score instrument asks 25 items rated on a three-point likert scale. The instrument is classified into five (5) subscale scores. The 25 items are divided into five questions which if summed up by the represented numbers, the total gives the indication of that score in behavioural and psychological terms. The five subscales include emotional subscale (*many worries or often seems*

worried"); conduct problems (*often fights with others*), hyperactivity (*restless, over active, cannot stay still for a long time*); peer relationship problems (*rather solitary, prefers to play alone*) and prosocial behaviours (*considerate of other people's feelings*). For each subscale, the total score ranged from 0 to 10 after adding all the completed items on that scale. The sum of the first four subscales gave the total psychological difficulties per adolescent (psychological well-being). Lower scores on these four subscales indicated better well-being or strength while the lower scores on the pro social scale indicated difficulties (see Appendix V).

The SDQ has demonstrated both good reliability and validity for use in this study because it has been used before in 40 countries with similar settings to Zambia including Ghana to assess children's psychological outcomes. In Zambia for example, Menon (2014) used the SDQ-Y to determine the emotional well-being of HIV positive adolescents. The findings of these studies confirmed that the instrument could be effectively used to screen for psychological well-being of adolescents. In her study to explore the feasibility of using the self-report SDQ-Y to assess the emotional and behavioural well being of adolescents in Zambia, Menon (2014) calculated Cronbach alpha coefficients for the total scores and for the five subscales to determine internal consistency of the items. Chronbach's alphas for the total score approached good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.66$ ).

### 3.9 Data Analysis

A variety of methods were used to analyse data.

- Cross tabulation of frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to analyse prevalence of relational aggression
- A Mann Whitney U-test was used to compare the mean ranks of the peer experiences questionnaire scores on boys and girls to determine gender differences in relational aggression.
- Bivariate Correlations were used to analyse the relationship between relational aggression and psychological well-being of perpetrators.

### **3.10 Ethical Consideration**

#### **3.10.1 Informed Consent**

The researcher obtained permission from the school management for collection of preliminary information and data collection for the study. Because of the nature of the study, data collection was done as part of guidance activities. A detailed description of the study was given to the pupils who were encouraged to ask questions and seek clarifications before completing the questionnaires (refer to Appendix II)

#### **3.10.2 Confidentiality and Storage of Data**

The researcher assured the participants of confidentiality, and that names of pupils were not recorded but an identification number was used. Similarly, all identifiers were removed from the questionnaires thereby making them anonymous and thus encouraging the participants to feel free to participate.

#### **3.10.3 Voluntary Participation**

Free and voluntary participation was encouraged and participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study if they so wished at anytime. The researcher got approval for the study from the Research and Ethics Committee at the University of Zambia as well as from the Ministry of Health for use of human participants.

#### **3.10.4 Awareness Classes on Relational Aggression**

The findings of this study indicated the existence of RA in the selected schools. The findings also showed that relationally aggressive pupils were more likely than non aggressive pupils to present peer, conduct and hyperactivity problems. It is the intention of the researcher to go back and provide guidance classes on RA to both teachers and pupils as this is a relatively new topic in Zambian schools.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

#### **4.1. Overview**

The primary goal of the current study was to explore the prevalence of relational aggression and to determine whether relational aggression was related to the psychological well-being of perpetrators. The study utilized quantitative methodology to explore relational aggression in selected schools in Lusaka urban. To address the stated objectives, participants completed a self-report questionnaires to determine their specific experiences of relational aggression. Gender differences in perpetrating relational aggression was also explored. In addition, participants completed another self-report measure to assess the relationship between relational aggression and psychological well-being of aggressors. Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information (age, gender, grade level and type of school they attended).

#### **4.2. Characteristics of Participants**

Table 2 shows the demographic details of the participants in the study. Out of the 170 participants, 84 were girls accounting for 49.4% and 86 were boys accounting for 50.6%. There were 117 respondents aged between 10 and 12, 50 respondents aged between 13 to 15 and 3 respondents were above 15. The minimum age was 10 while age 16 was the maximum.

Table 2 also shows the educational level attained by the participants. There were more respondents from Grade 6 (50.6%) than from Grade 8 (49.4%). It is evident that all participants were in school and could either hear, read or write in English language. Pupils from Government (73; 42.9%) and Private (97; 57.1%) schools took part in this study.

Chi-square Tests were run to determine if there were significant differences in the number of males and females; age of participants; type of school attended and between grade levels.

**Table 2**

*Gender, Age, Type of School, Grade levels and Results for Chi-square Tests to determine variable differences*

		Number	Percentage	$\chi^2$	P value
<b>Gender</b>	Boys	86	50.6	0.24	.88
	Girls	84	49.4		
	Total	170	100		
<b>Age</b>	10 to 12	117	68.8	115.8	.000*
	13 to 15	50	29.4		
	16	3	1.8		
	Total	170	100		
<b>Grade Level</b>	Grade 6	86	50.6	.02	.88
	Grade 8	84	49.4		
	Total	170	100		
<b>Type of School</b>	Government	73	42.9	3.4	.07
	Private	97	57.1		
	Total	170	100		

\*Significant at 0.05 level

The Chi-square tests revealed that there were no statistically significant difference between the genders of participants ( $\chi^2 = 0.24$ ,  $p = .88$ ); Grade level of participants ( $\chi^2 = 0.02$ ,  $p = .88$ ) and Type of School ( $\chi^2 = 3.4$ ,  $p = .07$ ). However, the Chi-square tests revealed a highly statistically significant difference between age groups of participants ( $\chi^2 = 115.8$ ,  $p = .000^*$ ). There were more pupils from the age group 10 to 12 compared to the age groups 12 to 14 and 16 respectively.

#### 4.3. Prevalence of Relational Aggression

The relational aggression scale used a five-point response scale and asked students to indicate how frequently they perpetrated aggression during the past six months. In order to determine the amount of participants who had reported perpetrating a specific relational aggression behaviour during the past six (6) months, the frequencies of each relationally aggressive behaviour were examined. Figure 1 and Table 3 present the detailed distribution of the responses on the various response categories of relational aggression.

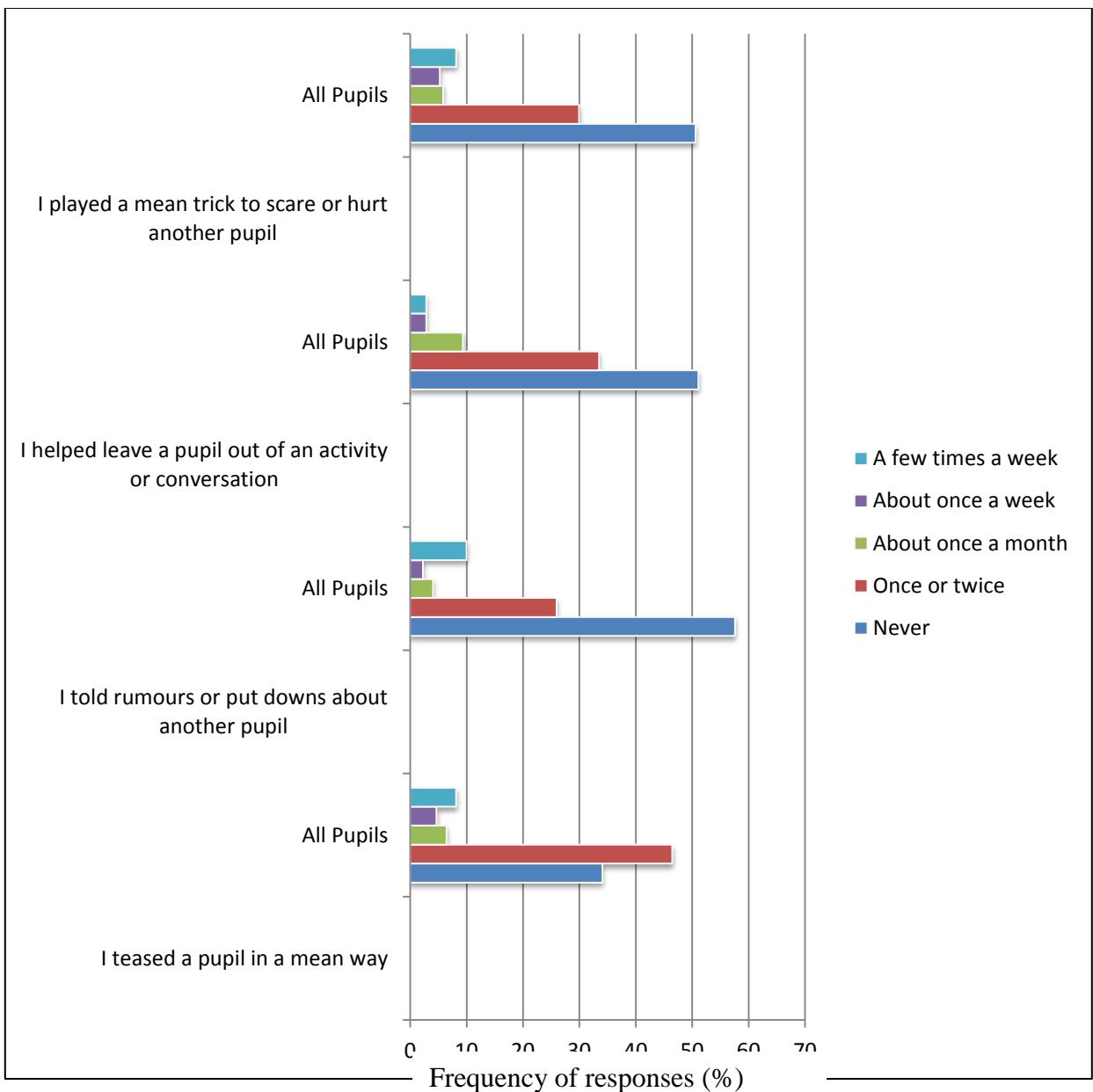
Figure 1 shows that from 34.1 percent to 57 percent pupils reported to have never engaged in any of the relational aggressive behaviours in the past six months. Meanwhile from 26.0 percent to 46.5 percent participants reported to have engaged in the behaviours in the last

six months and 2.3 to 5.3 percent engaged in the behaviours about once a week. A further 2.9 to 10.0 percent reported to have engaged in the behaviours a few times a week. Figure 1 also shows that generally, most pupils do not engage in the behaviours very frequently as their responses were clustered on the lower end (never) of the response scale.

The results in Table 3 show that from 32.5 to 65.1 percent boys and from 35.7 to 54.8 percent girls never perpetrated aggressive behaviours in the past six months. Meanwhile 17.4 to 44.2 percent boys and from 28.6 to 48.8 percent girls reported having engaged in the relational aggressive behaviours once or twice in the same period of time. However, more boys (from 4.7 to 14.0 percent) than girls (from 1.2 to 7.1 percent) reported to have engaged in the behaviours at least a few times a week.

Kruskal-Wallis  $\chi^2$  tests were conducted to determine if there were any significant gender differences in the responses given by boys and girls. Results from Table 3 show no significant differences in the responses by boys and girls: *I teased a pupil in a mean way* ( $\chi^2 = .97$ ,  $p = .33$ ); *I told rumours or put downs about another pupil* ( $\chi^2 = 1.89$ ,  $p = .17$ ); *I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation* ( $\chi^2 = .83$ ,  $p = .36$ ) and *I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil* ( $\chi^2 = 1.29$ ,  $p = .26$ ). These results show that boys and girls responses were the same.

The distribution of scores was positively skewed as can be seen from Table 3 and Figure 1. The limited range of scores on the PEQ may have contributed to the skewness due to few pupils exhibiting a number of aggressive behaviours very frequently. The responses for relational aggression were clustered around the low end of the scale because most pupils answered either never or once or twice as can be seen from the frequency distribution.



**Figure 1:**  
*Frequencies (in percentages) of All Response Categories on the Relational Aggression subscale over a period of 6 months reported on the Peer Experiences Questionnaire by gender.*

**Table 3**

*Kruskal-Wallis tests and Frequencies (in percentages) of All Response Categories on the Relational Aggression subscale over a period of 6 months reported on the Peer Experiences Questionnaire by gender.*

	<i>n</i>	Never	Once or twice	About once a month	About once a week	A few times a week	$\chi^2$	P value
<b>I teased a pupil in a mean way</b>								
All Pupils	170	34.1	46.5	6.5	4.7	8.2		
Boys	86	32.5	44.2	9.3	1.2	12.8	.97	.33
Girls	84	35.7	48.8	3.6	8.3	3.6		
<b>I told rumours or put downs about another pupil</b>								
All Pupils	170	57.6	26.0	4.1	2.3	10.0		
Boys	86	65.1	17.4	3.5	0	14.0	1.89	.17
Girls	84	50.0	34.5	4.8	4.8	6.0		
<b>I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation</b>								
All Pupils	170	51.1	33.5	9.4	2.9	2.9		
Boys	86	48.8	32.5	11.6	2.3	4.7	.83	.36
Girls	84	53.6	34.5	7.1	3.6	1.2		
<b>I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil</b>								
All Pupils	170	50.6	30.0	5.9	5.3	8.2		
Boys	86	46.5	31.4	7.0	5.8	9.3	1.29	.26
Girls	84	54.8	28.6	4.8	4.8	7.1		

A summary of the pupils' responses to survey items asking about their perpetration of relational aggression during the last six months is reported in Table 4 and the visual of it is shown in Figure 2. For the four types of relational aggression, from 45.3 percent to 64.3 percent girls and 34.9 percent to 67.5 percent boys reported engaging in the behaviour one or more times in the past six months and 4.8 percent to 11.9 percent girls and 7.0 percent to 15.1 percent boys reported engaging in the behaviour one or more times a week.

Mean teasing (*e.g. calling others bad names, saying rude things*) was the most prevalent form of relational aggression reported by both girls and boys, with 64.3 percent of girls and 67.5 percent of boys reporting they had participated in such teasing one or more times during the last 6 months. The second most prevalent relational aggression behaviour reported was pupils playing a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil with boys reporting

53.5 percent while girls reported 45.3 percent giving a total mean of 1.9 (see Table 5). Behaviours such as spreading rumours or put downs was third with a mean of 1.8 and leaving other pupils out of a conversation or activity followed in fourth position each with a mean of 1.7 for the whole group.

**Table 4**

*Frequencies of All Response Categories on the Relational Aggression over a period of 6 months reported on the Peer Experiences Questionnaire by gender.*

	<i>n</i>	<b>One or more times a month<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>One or more times a week<sup>b</sup></b>
<b>I teased a pupil in a mean way</b>			
Boys	86	67.5	14.0
Girls	84	64.3	11.9
<b>I told rumours or put downs about another pupil</b>			
Boys	86	34.9	14
Girls	84	50.1	10.8
<b>I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation</b>			
Boys	86	51.1	7.0
Girls	84	46.4	4.8
<b>I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil</b>			
Boys	86	53.5	15.1
Girls	84	45.3	11.9

Note: Pupils were asked to indicate how frequently they perpetrated each type of relational aggression during the past 6 months, using a five-point response scale: 1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = a few times, 4 = about once a week, 5 = a few times a week. a. Cumulative percentage of boys or girls who recorded 2–5 for the scale item.

b. Cumulative percentage of boys or girls who recorded 4 or 5 for the scale item.

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for the total relational aggression ( $M = 7.5$ ) and for the individual items of the relational aggression subscales of the PEQ by for boys and girls. With a mean of 7.5, 35.9% pupils engaged in high level relational aggression (1 SD above mean) while 64.1% engaged in average relational aggression. For the item "*I teased another pupil in a mean way, called him or her bad names or said rude things to him/her*" boys scored a higher mean ( $M = 2.2$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) than girls ( $M = 2.0$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ). Similarly, on

the two items namely "*I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation that he or she really wanted to be included in*" and "*I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil*," boys scored higher means ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ;  $M = 2.0$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) than girls ( $M = 1.6$ ,  $SD = 0.9$ ;  $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ) respectively. Meanwhile on the item "*I told rumours or put downs about another pupil*" both boys ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ) and girls ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) scored the same means. On average, boys appeared to score higher on almost all the items.

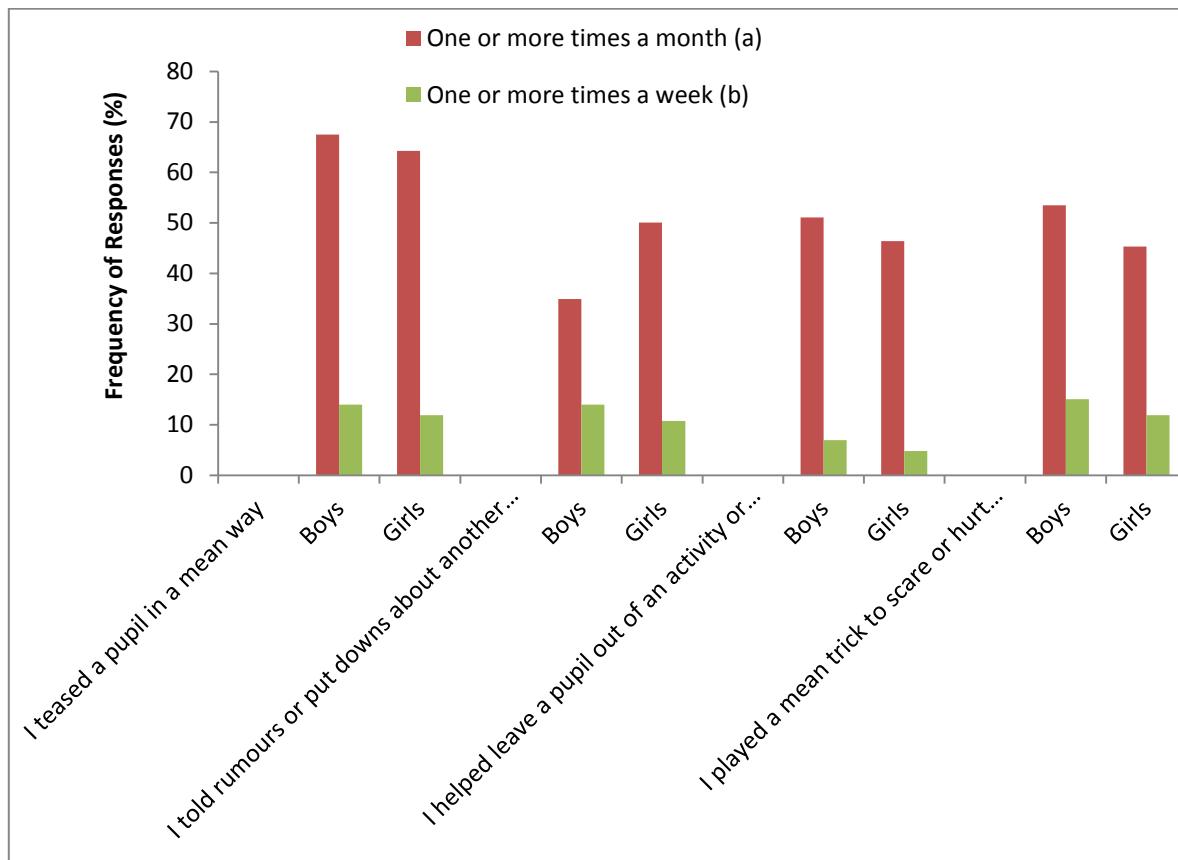


Figure 2

*Frequencies of All Response Categories on the Relational Aggression over a period of 6 months reported on the Peer Experiences Questionnaire by gender.*

Table 5 also shows the mean score for self-reported relational aggression for all the pupils which was 7.5. Boys reported a greater relational aggression mean of ( $M=7.8$ ) compared to girls ( $M=7.2$ ). Pupils in government school reported a higher mean ( $M=8.8$ ) than pupils in the private school ( $M=6.6$ ).

**Table 5:**

*Relational Aggression Descriptive information on the Peer Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ)*

	N	Mean	SD	Range	Skewness	Skewness Std Error
Relational Aggression						
All pupils	170	7.5	3.3	14	1.3	.19
Government School	73	8.8	3.4			
Private School	97	6.6	2.9			
<b>All Pupils</b>						
I teased a pupil in a mean way - ALL	170	2.1	1.2	4.0	1.3	.18
Boys	86	2.2	1.3	4.0	1.3	.26
Girls	84	2.0	1.0	4.0	1.4	.26
I told rumours or put downs about another pupil - ALL	170	1.8	1.2	4.0	1.6	.18
Boys	86	1.8	1.4	4.0	1.7	.26
Girls	84	1.8	1.1	4.0	1.6	.26
I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation - ALL	170	1.7	.95	4.0	1.5	.18
Boys	86	1.8	1.0	4.0	1.5	.26
Girls	84	1.6	0.9	4.0	1.6	.26
I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil - ALL	170	1.9	1.2	4.0	1.4	.18
Boys	86	2.0	1.3	4.0	1.3	.26
Girls	84	1.8	1.2	4.0	1.6	.26
<b>Total Mean and SD on all response categories</b>						
<b>Boys</b>	86	7.8	3.6			
<b>Girls</b>	84	7.2	3.0			

Note: Mean scores based on a 5-point scale with values of 1(never), 2(once or twice), 3(a few times), 4(about once a week) and 5 (a few times a week)

#### 4.4. Gender Differences in Relational Aggression

To examine the hypothesis that girls would be more relationally aggressive than boys, a Mann Whitney U-test was conducted to determine if there was any significant difference between the scores of the boys and girls. The Mann Whitney U-test was used because the results were not normally distributed but positively skewed as can be seen from Table 3 which shows that most responses were clustered around the low end of the scale. Four items of the behaviours listed in PEQ relational aggression subscales were summed up to get a total relational aggression score. Respondents who scored 1 standard deviation or more above the group mean for these items were categorized as being relationally

aggressive. The four behaviours summed up included "*I teased a pupil in a mean way, called him or her bad names or said rude things to him or her*", "*I told put downs or rumours about another pupil*", "*I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation that he or she really wanted to be included in*" and "*I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil.*"

On average, boys engaged more in relational aggression ( $M = 7.8$ ,  $SD = 3.6$ ) than girls ( $M = 7.2$ ,  $SD = 3.0$ ) although as can be seen, the difference was very small (0.6). Table 6 below describes the total relational aggression for both boys and girls. The mean ranks of the two groups were compared. As can be observed in the table, boys had slightly higher mean ranks as compared to the girls. The Mann Whitney U test was performed to determine if the differences in the mean ranks for boys and girls with regard to perpetration of relational aggression were significant at alpha 0.05. The results were  $Z = -0.756$ ;  $p = 0.450$ . The table further shows no significant gender differences on all response categories of the relational aggression subscale; I teased a pupil in a mean way ( $Z = -0.98$ ,  $p = 0.23$ ); I told rumours or put downs about another pupil ( $Z = -1.37$ ,  $p = 0.17$ ); I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation ( $Z = -0.91$ ,  $p = 0.36$ ) and I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil ( $Z = -1.13$ ,  $p = 0.26$ ). These results showed no statistically significant difference between boys and girls. It can therefore be concluded that there was no difference in the way both boys and girls engaged in or perpetrated relational aggression. Meaning that both boys and girls engaged in relational aggression in a similar way.

**Table 6:**

*Gender Differences in Total Relational Aggression and All Response Categories of the Relational Aggression Subscale by Perpetrators*

Case Items (n = 61)	Mean Rank		Test Results	
	Boys (n=32)	Girls (n = 29)	Z	p value
<b>Total Relational Aggression</b>	88.29	82.64	-0.756	0.450
<b>I teased a pupil in a mean way</b>	34.05	27.64	-1.50	0.14
<b>I told rumours or put downs about another pupil</b>	31.02	30.98	-0.01	0.99
<b>I helped leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation</b>	32.50	29.34	-0.73	0.46
<b>I played a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil</b>	31.39	30.57	-0.18	0.85

\* $p < 0.05$

#### **4.5. Relational Aggression and Psychological Well-being.**

Bivariate correlations were conducted to examine whether perpetrators of relational aggression would report poor psychological wellbeing including emotional symptoms, conduct problems, peer relationships problems and hyperactivity problems. The researcher also conducted Mann Whitney U-test to determine if there were gender differences in the psychological well-being of perpetrators.

Table 7 shows correlations coefficients analyses between relational aggression and psychological well-being of perpetrators. There was a significant weak positive relationship between relational aggression and psychological well-being (total difficulties) as evidenced by the results:  $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$  for both boys and girls. This means that relationally aggressive boys and girls are likely to experience difficulties including emotional symptoms (e.g. worrying a lot), conduct problems (e.g. fighting) and peer relationship problems (e.g. loneliness). A further analysis of the same revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between psychological well-being (total difficulties) and boys ( $r = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) showing that boys are more likely to experience a low or poor well-being than girls.

There were no significant relationships between relational aggression and the emotional symptoms scores ( $r = 0.02$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) for both boys and girls. Similarly, there was no significant correlation between relational aggression and hyperactivity scores for the whole group ( $r = 0.19$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) but a significant moderate positive correlation for boys ( $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) existed as shown in Table 7. This means that relationally aggressive boys are more likely to experience hyperactivity problems than relationally aggressive girls. There was a negative but non-significant relationship with prosocial scores ( $r = -0.17$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) for all pupils and particularly a negative but non-significant correlation ( $r = -0.28$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) for boys only.

Meanwhile, there was a significant weak positive relationship between conduct problems and relational aggression for the whole group ( $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed), also a weak but significant positive relationship between relational aggression and peer relationships

problems ( $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results means that aggressive children are likely to experience conduct problems such as fighting and stealing as well as peer problems such as rejection and isolation than their non aggressive peers. However, separate correlations for boys ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and girls ( $r = 0.25$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) yielded positive but non-significant relationships for relational aggression and conduct problems.

Table 7 also shows that there was little if any correlation between emotional symptoms and relational aggression for both boys and girls ( $r = 0.08$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The results also show that there were very weak negative but non-significant correlations for girls on both hyperactivity problems ( $r = -.19$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and peer problems ( $r = -.01$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 7:**  
*Results of the Pearson's Bivariate Correlations Between Relational Aggression and Subscales of Well-being by gender*

Variables Correlated	n	r	p value
Relational Aggression with Emotional Symptoms			
<b>All Pupils</b>	61	.02	.87
<b>Boys</b>	32	.08	.65
<b>Girls</b>	29	.08	.68
Relational Aggression with Conduct Problems			
<b>All Pupils</b>	61	.29	.02*
<b>Boys</b>	32	.26	.15
<b>Girls</b>	29	.25	.20
Relational Aggression with Hyperactivity			
<b>All Pupils</b>	61	.19	.14
<b>Boys</b>	32	.60	.001**
<b>Girls</b>	29	-.19	.32
Relational Aggression with Peer Problems			
<b>All Pupils</b>	61	.29	.03*
<b>Boys</b>	32	.45	.01**
<b>Girls</b>	29	-.01	.95
Relational Aggression with Prosocial			
<b>All Pupils</b>	61	-.17	.19
<b>Boys</b>	32	-.28	.12
<b>Girls</b>	29	.07	.73
Relational aggression with Total Difficulties			
<b>All Pupils</b>	61	.29	.03*
<b>Boys</b>	32	.51	.003**
<b>Girls</b>	29	.01	.95

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

A Mann Whitney test was conducted to compare gender difference on the psychological well-being (total difficulties) of perpetrators as shown in Table 8. There was no significant difference between boys and girls in the total difficulties ( $Z = -0.80$ ,  $p = 0.43$ , mean 29.28 vs. 32.90); hyperactivity scores ( $Z = -0.45$ ,  $p = 0.65$ , mean 30.03 vs. 32.07); peer problems scores ( $Z = -0.32$ ,  $p = 0.75$ , mean 30.31 vs. 31.76) and prosocial scores ( $Z = -1.39$ ,  $p = 0.45$ , mean 28.06 vs. 34.24). However, there was statistically significant differences between boys and girls in emotional symptoms and conduct problems scores. Girls were found to have higher scores than boys on emotional symptoms ( $Z = -2.35$ ,  $p = 0.02$ , mean 36.57 vs. 25.95) and boys scored higher than girls on the conduct problems scale ( $Z = -1.20$ ,  $p = 0.05$ , mean 35.23 vs. 26.33). The results mean that aggressive girls are more likely to experience emotional symptoms than aggressive boys while aggressive boys are more likely to experience conduct problems than aggressive girls.

**Table 8:**  
***Gender Differences in the Well-being of Perpetrators***

<b>Case Items (n = 61)</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>		<b>Test Results</b>	
	Boys (n=32)	Girls (n = 29)	Z	p value
<b>Total Difficulties</b>	29.28	32.90	-0.80	0.43
<b>Emotional Symptoms</b>	25.95	36.57	-2.35	0.02*
<b>Conduct Problems</b>	35.23	26.33	-1.20	0.05*
<b>Hyperactivity</b>	30.03	32.07	-0.45	0.65
<b>Peer Problems</b>	30.31	31.76	-0.32	0.75
<b>Prosocial</b>	28.06	34.24	-1.39	0.43

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\* $p < 0.05$

Further correlations were conducted to determine if there were significant relationships between relational aggression and well-being by gender, type of school and grade level (refer to table 9). There was a significant moderate positive correlation between relational

aggression and hyperactivity scores for grade 6 boys ( $r = 0.64$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, there were positive but non-significant correlations for grade 8 boys ( $r = .51$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and grade 8 girls ( $r = .19$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Grade 6 girls ( $r = -.33$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) recorded a negative but non-significant relationship between relational aggression and hyperactivity problems. Aggressive grade 6 boys also had a moderate and positive significant correlation with peer problems ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Meanwhile, aggressive grade 8 boys had a weak and negative but non-significant correlation ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) with peer problems. Both grade 6 ( $r = .11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and grade 8 ( $r = .38$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) had weak positive but non-significant relationships with peer problems. These results indicate that grade 6 boys are more likely to experience peer problems (e.g. isolation and rejection) and hyperactivity problems (e.g. inattention) compared to grade 8 boys and both groups of girls.

Government schools also reported a significant weak positive correlation between relational aggression and peer relationships problems ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) while private school showed a very weak positive but non-significant relationship ( $r = .11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) for the same analysis. This shows that relationally aggressive pupils in government schools are more likely to experience peer problems than pupils in private schools. For example, government school pupils were more likely than private school pupils to engage in fights and relationships problems.

**Table 9:**  
*Results of the Pearson's Bivariate Correlations Between Relational Aggression and Subscales of Well-being by grade level and type of school*

<b>Variables Correlated</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>p value</b>
<b>Relational Aggression with Emotional Symptoms</b>				
<b>Boys</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	18	.09	0.73
	<b>Grade 8</b>	14	-.12	0.67
<b>Girls</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	16	.07	0.80
	<b>Grade 8</b>	13	.30	0.32
<b>Government</b>		41	-.43	0.79
<b>Private</b>		20	.14	0.55
<b>Relational Aggression with Conduct Problems</b>				
<b>Boys</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	18	.19	0.45
	<b>Grade 8</b>	14	.21	0.47
<b>Girls</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	16	.23	0.40
	<b>Grade 8</b>	13	.40	0.18
<b>Government</b>		41	.26	0.10
<b>Private</b>		20	.39	0.09
<b>Relational Aggression with Hyperactivity</b>				
<b>Boys</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	18	.64	0.005**
	<b>Grade 8</b>	14	.51	0.07
<b>Girls</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	16	-.33	0.21
	<b>Grade 8</b>	13	.19	0.53
<b>Government</b>		41	.17	0.28
<b>Private</b>		20	.23	0.33
<b>Relational Aggression with Peer Problems</b>				
<b>Boys</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	18	.50	0.035*
	<b>Grade 8</b>	14	-.18	0.51
<b>Girls</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	16	.11	0.71
	<b>Grade 8</b>	13	.38	0.20
<b>Government</b>		41	.37	0.02*
<b>Private</b>		20	.11	0.64
<b>Relational Aggression with Prosocial</b>				
<b>Boys</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	18	-.26	0.29
	<b>Grade 8</b>	14	-.43	0.12
<b>Girls</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	16	.11	0.69
	<b>Grade 8</b>	13	.11	0.72
<b>Government</b>		41	-.14	0.38
<b>Private</b>		20	-.22	0.35
<b>Relational aggression with Total Difficulties</b>				
<b>Boys</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	18	.59	0.010*
	<b>Grade 8</b>	14	-.15	0.58
<b>Girls</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	16	.25	0.39
	<b>Grade 8</b>	13	.42	0.15
<b>Government</b>		41	.27	0.09
<b>Private</b>		20	.34	0.15

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1. Overview**

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the study regarding prevalence of relational aggression and gender differences in relational aggression between boys and girls. The chapter further discusses the relationship between relational aggression and the psychological well-being of perpetrators of relational aggression.

#### **5.2. Prevalence of Relational Aggression**

It was hypothesised that relational aggression would be prevalent in the selected schools and this has been confirmed in this current study. About one third of the total sample reported involvement in high levels of relational aggression (i.e. 1 SD above the mean) while about two-thirds reported average involvement in relational aggression indicating that relational aggression is quite prevalent in these schools. These current findings are higher than those found by Swit (2012) in an Australian sample where he found 38% of the children involving themselves in average relational aggression while 21% involved themselves in high level relational aggression.

The findings indicate that pupils in both grade 6 and 8 were involved in relational aggression including 'teasing' and 'name calling', 'spreading rumours' and using 'put downs', 'excluding peers from conversations or activities' as well as 'playing mean tricks on others to make them feel bad'. The findings of this current study are consistent with this studies theoretical framework in that Swearer and Doll (2001) asserted that bullying and victimisation takes place in a social ecological context, in this case the school. In addition, pupils in grades 6 and 8 are in their adolescence, a stage at which past studies (e.g. Hemphill et al., 2010) have found significant associations with relational aggression. The researchers asserted that early adolescence is a period when peer relationships become important for children and adolescents and they use these relationships even to influence each other negatively including aggression.

Findings in the current study also show that more than half of the girls in the sample and about a third to two-thirds of boys reported engaging in the behaviour one or more times a month in the past six months. This is consistent with the findings of Werner and Nixon (2005) who found that an average of about 50% children and adolescents in grades 5 through to 12 have experienced relational aggression at least once a month. Also Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that girls engage in relational aggression more than boys. Findings indicate that on average, girls involvement in relational aggression was more prevalent than boys.

Findings in this study also indicate that smaller numbers of less than a third for both boys and girls reported engaging in the behaviour one or more times a week. These finding indicate that boys and girls do not engage in the relational aggressive behaviours most frequently. These figures are more than the figures reported by Nishioka et. al. (2011). In their study, students who reported perpetrating relational aggression ranged from 20.7 percent to 27.9 percent for girls and 20.3 percent to 24.2 percent for boys on relationally aggressive behaviours.

These findings indicate that relational aggression is prevalent in the selected schools in Lusaka. It has also provided prevalence statistics for relational aggression in the selected schools particularly in the Zambian context. Findings also indicated that on the relational aggression subscale, 'mean teasing' was the most common behaviour for both boys and girls followed by 'playing mean tricks to make others feel bad', then 'spreading rumours or put downs' and 'leaving other pupils out of conversations or activities'.

### **5.3. Gender Differences in Relational Aggression**

The second research question focused on determining whether gender differences existed in the manner boys and girls perpetrated relational aggression. The hypothesis that girls would be more relationally aggressive than boys was not proved in the current study. In the current study, relational aggression did not show any significant gender differences between boys and girls just like Hayward and Fletcher (2003) found no significant

differences between Australian boys' and girls' engagement in relational aggression at the primary and high school level.

Although there are strong theoretical reason why girls might be more relationally aggressive than boys, the evidence of such gender difference is mixed (Underwood, 2003). The majority of early research focused primarily on boys perpetrating direct aggression. As a matter of fact, Olweus cited in Kenny, McEachern, and Aluedo, (2005) asserted that bullying was solely the territory of boys to an extent where he excluded girls from his early research. This was due to early emphases on overt aggression, a form of bullying that girls do not commonly perpetrate. However, by looking at alternative forms of bullying, such as relational aggression, girls are found to be just as likely to bully as boys. Vahedi et. al. (2008) claimed that there is no significant gender difference in relational aggression while physical and verbal aggression are more prevalent among boys. Similarly Crick and Grotpeter, (1995) asserted that boys and girls aggress differently in order to facilitate distinctly different, gender-specific social goals. According to them boys seek physical dominance and girls desire secure social relationships.

In the current study, results showed that there was no statistical difference between the proportion of females and proportion of males who reported perpetrating relational aggression. Both boys and girls engaged in relational aggression to the same degree. This is consistent with results of earlier studies who found that girls and boys may, at particular ages, engage in relational aggression to the same degree (Rys and Bear, 1997).

On the contrary, other studies have found gender differences in relational aggression (Coie and Dodge, 1998; Crick, 1997). These studies found that that boys were more physically aggressive than girls, and when levels of physical and relational aggression were compared, girls were more likely to use relational aggression only, whereas boys often use both physical and relational aggression. Similarly, Crick et al. (1999) also found that girls were more relationally aggressive than boys.

In addition, David and Kistner (2000) found that boys were more relationally aggressive than girls. Similarly, Henington et. al. (1998) also found that boys were higher than girls on relational aggression. The differences in the studies may be due to a number of reasons including culture and variations in assessment. For example a study conducted in Italy found boys to be higher than girls on relational aggression (Tomada and Schneider, 1997). The researchers speculated that this was so because of exposure to the dense, close-knit relational networks of their parents, in which they might acquire relational aggression by means of observational learning. But why this exposure is more powerful for boys is not clear. Studies conducted in the United States found that relational and overt aggression were related to peer rejection.

Methodological assessments variations may also cause differences in the findings in gender differences in relational aggression (Maccoby, 1998). The current study only used a sample of 170 participants as opposed to studies like that of Crick who use larger samples. Questionnaires administered to larger samples will make even fairly small mean differences become statistically significant, whereas these do not achieve significance in smaller samples. Maccoby (1998) noted that the magnitude of the gender difference for relational aggression is almost always substantially smaller than the corresponding difference for physical aggression. Perhaps, this explains why some studies like the current one found no gender difference but may however not explain why other studies, for example, find boys to be more relationally aggressive than girls.

Similarly, completion of self-reports sometimes involves biases. However, Ostrov and Keating, (2004) asserted that studies using more objective approaches such as naturalistic observations have consistently found girls to be significantly more relationally aggressive than boys for children as young as preschool years.

Underwood et al. (2001) have asserted that inconsistencies in gender differences for relational aggression may be due to stereotypes. Children acquire complex knowledge of gender stereotypes as soon as they learn to label gender by age 3 or so (Fagot et al., 1992). These researchers have noted that when gender differences appear in studies, they may be

due to gender stereotypes and not actual differences in behaviour per se. The findings in this study indicate that boys and girls engaged in relational aggression to the same degree and this has contributed to the knowledge base on the existence of relational aggression in the Zambian context.

#### **5.4. Relational Aggression and Psychological Well-being**

The researcher had hypothesized that perpetrators of relational aggression would report poor psychological well-being and this is consistent with the findings of this study. From the self-report strengths and difficulties questionnaire, there was evidence that relational aggression is significantly related to psychological well-being (e.g. conduct problems, hyperactivity disorder and peer problems). These findings are consistent with several studies (see Crick and Grotepeter, 1995; Crick and Dodge, 1994) which found significant relationships between psychosocial maladjustment and relational aggression. Relationally aggressive children tend to display emotional and behavioural maladjustment as well as problems in their peer relationships.

Further correlations revealed that pupils who were relationally aggressive reported higher levels of conduct problems. These children are likely to engage in fights, stealing, temper tantrums or generally display disobedience acts. This parallels Werner and Nixon's (2005) findings that relationally aggressive children tend to have conduct problems as well as health issues including depression and anxiety. This is consistent with Card, et. al. (2008) who observed that relational aggression occurs quite frequently among boys. In addition, boys who display relational aggression as opposed to physical aggression experience greater psychosocial maladjustment than boys who display gender-normative expressions of aggression (Crick, 1997). In addition, findings of this current study parallels the reports of researchers who found consistency in the externalising behaviour of children (Crick and Dodge, 1994; Denham et al., 2000). Similarly, Crick and Grotepeter (1995) asserted that frequent engagement in relationally aggressive behaviours leads to problems when interacting with peers. However, it may also be that peer problems may also lead to relational aggressive behaviours towards those peers.

The results of this current study show that there were gender differences between boys and girls in the way they experienced difficulties. Girls were more likely than boys to experience emotional symptoms. These are consistent with past research that suggest that girls are more likely than boys to express emotions such as anger in direct verbal communication (Underwood et al., 1992). These findings indicate that relationally aggressive girls worry a lot, feel unhappy, experience fears and nervousness. Findings on gender differences also indicated that boys were more likely than girls to experience conduct problems. Gaub and Carlson (1997) asserted that both boys and girls experience conduct problems although boys tend to development more conduct problems than girls. Our findings indicate that boys in this current study experienced conduct problems such as fighting, stealing or display of temper tantrums.

The current findings also indicate that grade 6 boys are more likely than grade 8 boys and girls to experience hyperactivity problems (e.g. attention problems, restlessness) and peer relationships problems (e.g. loneliness, peer rejection).

As for the reason why there was a significant correlation for grade 6 boys and not grade 8 boys, Werner and Nixon (2005) asserted that unlike physical aggression, relational aggression increases with age, often peaking in middle school. Middle school usually comprise pupils aged 10 to 14 and in this current study most grade 6 pupils were in that age range. Similarly, Murray-Close et. al. (2007) asserted that one possible explanation of such findings is that relational aggression may peak in the late elementary school years and then become less and less common. An alternative explanation is that perhaps secondary school adolescents' use of relational aggression is less evident to the peer group as a whole than relational aggression among primary school pupils.

Findings from the self report SDQ indicate that relational aggression is significantly related to total difficulties (conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and emotional symptoms. These findings indicate that relationally aggressive children feel unhappy, depressed and may be rejected by their peers. Findings also indicate that these children may indulge in fights with peers and cheating.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Conclusion**

The current research provides insight on a topic that has become popular in recent years but one not researched in the Zambian context. This study provided a means of exploring the prevalence of relational aggression, gender differences and the relationship between aggression and psychological well-being. This study has revealed that relational aggression is prevalent in the selected schools with boys and girls reporting involvement in relational aggression at least once or a few times in a month. There was no significant gender difference between boys and girls in their engagement in relational aggression. This study concluded that boys and girls in this sample engaged in relational aggression to the same degree. Findings from the self report SDQ indicated a significant relationship between relational aggression and psychological well-being of perpetrators. Relational aggression was associated with symptoms of hyperactivity disorder, conduct and peer problems. Collectively, these findings indicate a need to further explore relational aggression and its impact on the development of pupils.

#### **6.2 Recommendations**

The findings of the present study have a number of important implications regarding relational aggression research and applications. First, the finding that relational aggression exists in our schools indicates that relational aggressive behaviours may be particularly salient experiences among boys and girls in both primary and secondary schools. Thus, it is important that when policy makers or school administrators attempt to understand the use of harmful behaviours by students in this age group, relational aggression is one piece they should consider among other behaviours.

Second, the present findings indicate that there were statistically no gender differences between boys and girls engaging in relational aggression. This means that intervention programmes aimed at reducing relational aggression should target both boys and girls. In particular this study revealed that boys in primary school were more likely than boys in secondary school to experience peer and conduct problems hence interventions may benefit

from targeting primary and junior secondary schools given the increasing emergence of such behaviours across this developmental period. In contrast, Pellegrini and Long (2003) asserted that relational aggression may be less frequent in adolescence.

Finally, the results suggest that further research on relational aggression is necessary, particularly given that this form of aggression is significantly related to conduct and peer problems of the pupils' well-being. It will be important in future research to develop further our understanding of the correlates, antecedents and consequences of relational aggression as well as knowledge of the function it serves in children's peer groups in the Zambian context.

With all of the negative associations (peer problems, conduct problems and hyperactivity disorders), it is imperative that we begin to search for ways to intervene in our schools through individual and group counseling as effective tools in reducing relational aggression. Schools may need to implement programs over a long period of time or a programme each year so pupils are continuously learning how to deal with aggression and continue to assess the prevalence in schools. If the school counselors work collaboratively with guidance committees in the schools, they will be able to then educate the entire student body about relational aggression by planning an awareness training.

### **6.3 Strengths and Limitations**

While this study was intended to offer insight into the issues surrounding relational aggression, several weaknesses limit the generalizability of the study findings. The first weakness of this study was the small group of respondents. This study was confined to grades six and eight pupils aged 10 to 16 from the selected schools. Participants were limited to those who voluntarily agreed and whose parents gave permission to participate in the study. A larger number would have made the assessments more meaningful in regard to relational aggression statistical significance.

The information gathered in this study may not be relevant to other populations such as children in lower primary, early childhood education and senior secondary school as this

current study only focused on grades 6 and 8 pupils. This is because the instruments used are tailored for adolescents which may yield different results with particular populations.

Another limitation of the study was that self-report measures were used. In gathering data via such measures, the possibility for inaccuracy and dishonesty exists. The participants' responses to the questions depended on their level of honesty, their memory and their ability to respond. Because they were aware of the purpose of the study, they may have wanted to meet the researcher's expectation, even though the questionnaire was anonymous. Thus, the participants may not have been honest enough to report the truth in the SDQ-Y which may have given biased or subjective responses. Observation methods may be a possible consideration for future research.

There were notable strengths to this study in spite of aforementioned weakness. This research was the first study known to measure relational aggression in selected schools in Zambia. It has highlighted prevalence of relational aggression and its relationship with the psychological well-being of perpetrators. Prior researchers have focused on physical or overt bullying in school children. This current study points to the importance of considering gender and psychological well-being as relational aggression is investigated. Relational aggression is seriously related to psychological difficulties (Crick et.al., 2006). It is hoped that such research will eventually help in the development of effective relational aggression intervention strategies in schools.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix I**

UNZAREC

FORM 1a



### **THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**

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### **HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **TITLE OF RESEARCH:**

Relational Aggression in Adolescent Pupils in Selected Schools in Lusaka Urban

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The purpose of the study is to find out the prevalence and gender differences in relational aggression and its relationship with the psychological well-being of perpetrators in selected schools in Lusaka.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT:**

The study will focus on relational aggression in selected schools by exploring its prevalence, gender differences and its relationship with the psychological well-being of perpetrators. You have been chosen to take part in this study because you are an adolescent either in grade 6 or 8. Adolescence is a stage in life when peer relationships become very important and peer support helps to improve the state of the mind. You will be asked to complete questionnaires containing information on relational aggression provided for you in a large group setting. You will **NOT** be required to put down your name but we will ask for some information about your classmates and yourself. It will take about 60 minutes to complete the questionnaires

## **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Be aware that the information you will provide will be confidential. The research will not identify you individually. You will not be writing your name on the questionnaires and your name will not be recorded by the researcher. The researcher will make sure that all information given is not known by any other person. All elements that can identify with you will not be included on the questionnaire, for example no physical address or phone numbers. Instead, a number will be assigned to identify you and no one else will know this number. The information you give will be kept safely where no one else will see or hear the answers you have given other than the researcher.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:**

You are taking part in this study on voluntary basis. You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn or destroyed with no penalty and without having to give a reason.

## **BENEFITS AND RISKS:**

You will not benefit from being in this study; however information from this study may help other people and schools in the future by helping them understand better relational aggression in pupils your age in order to prevent it from happening to other pupils in the future.

By participating in this study, you may experience sad or bad feelings as a result of becoming aware of having been bullied or bullied others. If you do experience any of these feelings, talk to a “safe person”. This person can be your parent, teacher, school counsellor or other adult with whom you have a trusting relationship.

## **CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS (Names, addresses and phone numbers of the following):**

1. Principal Investigator  
Audrey Chirwa-Mwanza  
University of Zambia  
Psychology Department  
Contact: +260 9557 54921
2. Chairperson, Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Research Ethics Committee, University of Zambia.  
Contact: +260 211 250753
3. The Director, Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies.  
University of Zambia  
Contact: +260 211 290258

## **WRITTEN ASSENT**

The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself

- Have you read and understood the information sheet?  
YES/NO
- Have you had opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?  
YES/NO
- Have all the questions been answered satisfactorily? YES/NO
- Have you received enough information about the study? YES/NO
- Who have you spoken to Dr/Mrs./Ms .....  
• Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study  
• at any time YES/NO  
• without having to give a reason YES/NO  
• Do you agree to take part in the study? YES/NO

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign below:

Signature.....

Name (In block capitals).....

Date.....

(participant)

I have explained the study to the above participant and he/she has indicated his/her willingness to participate.

Signature.....

Name (In block capitals).....

Date.....

(researcher: 0955 754921)

## **Appendix II**

UNZAREC  
FORM



### **THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**

*Telephone:* 290258/  
*Fax:* +260-1-290258/253937  
*E-mail* drgs@unza.zm

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*P O Box 32379  
Lusaka, Zambia*

### **HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

#### **PARENT/CAREGIVER INFORMATION SHEET**

##### **TITLE OF RESEARCH:**

Relational Aggression in Adolescent Pupils in Selected Schools in Lusaka Urban

##### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The purpose of the study is to find out the prevalence and gender differences in relational aggression and its relationship with the psychological well-being of perpetrators in selected schools in Lusaka.

##### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR CHILD'S INVOLVEMENT:**

The study will focus on relational aggression in selected schools by exploring its prevalence, gender differences and its relationship with the psychological well-being of perpetrators. Your child has been chosen to take part in this study because he/she is an adolescent either in grade 6 or 8. Adolescence is a stage in life when peer relationships become very important and peer support helps to improve the state of the mind. Your child will be asked to complete questionnaires containing information on relational aggression provided for him or her in a large group setting. He/she will **NOT** be required to put down his/her name but we will ask for some information about his/her classmates and himself or herself. It will take about 60 minutes to complete the questionnaires

## **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Be aware that the information your child will provide will be confidential. The research will not identify with your children individually. Your children will not be writing their names on the questionnaires and their names will not be recorded by the researcher. The researcher will make sure that all information given is not known by any other person. All elements that can identify your children will not be included on the questionnaire, for example no physical address or phone numbers. Instead, a number will be assigned to identify them and no one else will know this number. The information they give will be kept safely where no one else will see or hear the answers they give other than the researcher.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:**

Your child will be taking part in this study on voluntary basis. You and himself/herself may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. Your child and yourself have the right to ask that any data your child have supplied to that point be withdrawn or destroyed with no penalty and without having to give a reason.

## **BENEFITS AND RISKS:**

There is no direct benefit that your child may get from being in this study; however information from this study may help other people and schools in the future by helping them understand better, relational aggression in pupils your child's age in order to prevent it from happening to other pupils in the future.

By participating in this study, your child may experience sad or bad feelings as a result of becoming aware of having been bullied or bullied others. If they experience any of these feelings, they will be advised to talk to a "safe person". This person can be yourself, a teacher, a school counsellor or other adults with whom your child has a trusting relationship.

## **CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS (Names, addresses and phone numbers of the following):**

If you would like to ask any questions about the research then you can contact

1. Principal Investigator  
Audrey Chirwa-Mwanza  
University of Zambia  
Psychology Department  
Contact: +260 9557 54921
  
2. Chairperson, Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Research Ethics Committee, University of Zambia.  
Contact: +260 211 250753

3. The Director, Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies.  
University of Zambia  
Contact: +260 211 290258

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

The parent /caregiver should complete the whole of this sheet.

- Have you read and understood the information sheet?  
YES/NO
- Have you had opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?  
YES/NO
- Have all the questions been answered satisfactorily? YES/NO
- Have you received enough information about the study? YES/NO
- Who have you spoken to Dr/Mrs./Ms .....  
• Do you understand that your child is free to withdraw from the study  
• at any time YES/NO  
• without having to give a reason YES/NO
- Do you agree to allow your child to take part in the study?  
YES/NO

If you agree to allow your child to take part in the study, please sign below:

Signature.....

Name (In block capitals).....

Date.....

(Parent)

I have explained the study to the above parent and he/she has indicated his/her willingness to allow their child to participate.

Signature.....

Name (In block capitals).....

Date.....

(researcher: 0955 754921)

## **Appendix III**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Demographic Data**

Audrey Chirwa-Mwanza is a student at the University of Zambia undertaking her research in partial fulfillment of the Masters Degree in Child and Adolescent Psychology.

You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire as honestly as possible. This information will be confidential and purely for academic purposes and will not be used in any way to discredit you.

**1. Gender**

- a. Male
- b. Female

**2. Age .....**

**3. Area of residence .....**

**4. What grade are you doing .....**

**5. Who do you live with? (Please, tick appropriate option) .....**

- a. Mother and Father
- b. Mother only
- c. Father only
- d. Aunt and Uncle
- e. Aunt only
- f. Uncle only
- g. Brother
- h. Sister
- i. Other (*please specify*) .....

**6. Education level of your caregiver. (Please tick appropriate option)**

- a. Primary Education
- b. Secondary Education
- c. Certificate
- d. Diploma
- e. Degree
- f. Other (*Please specify*) .....

**7. Occupation and work activities of caregiver**

## Appendix IV

### Peer Experiences Questionnaire - Student

#### PART 1. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU

**Actions:** These questions ask how often a pupil bullied or picked on you. These can be things that happened at school or somewhere else, as long as they involved other pupils. You should circle the number to show how often each action happened to you in the past six months.

	Never	Once or twice	About once a month	About once a week	Few times a week
1 I have been bullied at school in the past six months?	1	2	3	4	5
2 I teased me in a mean way, called me bad names, or said rude things to me.	1	2	3	4	5
3 A pupil said he or she was going to hurt me or beat me up.	1	2	3	4	5
4 I scared me so that I gave up money or other things.	1	2	3	4	5
5 I told put-downs or rumours about me.	1	2	3	4	5
6 I hit, kicked, or pushed me in a mean way	1	2	3	4	5
7 I grabbed, held or touched me in a way I didn't like.	1	2	3	4	5
8 Pupils left me out of an activity or conversation that I really wanted to be included in.	1	2	3	4	5
9 I chased me like he or she was really trying to hurt me.	1	2	3	4	5
10 I played a mean trick to scare or hurt me.	1	2	3	4	5

#### 2: WHAT YOU DID

**Actions:** The next questions ask how often you have bullied or picked on another pupil. You should circle the number to show how often you did each action in the past six months.

	Never	Once or twice	About once a month	About once a week	Few times a week
1 I have taken part in bullying another pupil(s) at school in the past six months?	1	2	3	4	5
2 I a pupil in a mean way, called him or her bad names or said rude things to him or her.	1	2	3	4	5
3 I tried to hurt or beat up another pupil.	1	2	3	4	5
4 I another pupil into giving up money or other things.	1	2	3	4	5
5 I t-downs or rumours about another pupil.	1	2	3	4	5
6 I ked or pushed another pupil in a mean way.	1	2	3	4	5
7 I ed, held or touched another pupil in a way he or she didn't like.	1	2	3	4	5
8 I leave a pupil out of an activity or conversation that he or she really wanted to be included in.	1	2	3	4	5
9 I a pupil like I was really trying to hurt him or her	1	2	3	4	5
10 I a mean trick to scare or hurt another pupil.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix V

### Strength And Difficulty Questionnaire - Youth Version

For each item please tick the box for not true, somewhat true, or certainly true. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain. Please give your answers on the basis of how things have been for you over the last six months.

**Your number.....** **Male / Female**

**Date of birth.....**

<b>Not True</b>	<b>Somewhat True</b>	<b>Certainly True</b>
---------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------

1	I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings.			
2	I am restless, I cannot stay still for long.			
3	I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness.			
4	I usually share with others, e.g. CDs, games, food.			
5	I get very angry and usually lose my temper.			
6	I would rather be alone than being with friends of my age.			
7	I usually do as I am told.			
8	I worry a lot.			
9	I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill.			
10	I am constantly fidgeting or squirming.			
11	I have one good friend or more.			
12	I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want.			
13	I am often unhappy, depressed or tearful.			
14	Other people my age generally like me.			
15	I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate.			
16	I am nervous in new situations, I easily lose confidence.			
17	I am kind to younger children			
18	I am often accused of cheating			
19	Other children or young people pick on me or bully me.			
20	I often offer to help others (parents, teachers, children)			
21	I think before I do things.			
22	I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere.			
23	I get along better with adults than with people of my age.			
24	I have many fears, I am easily scared.			
25	I finish the work I am doing. My attention is good.			

Robert Goodman, 2000

## **Appendix VI**

### **Ethical Clearance**