Bullying, Victimization and Witnessing among Secondary School Students in Tanzania: Focus on Gender and School Location

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Abstract

Bullying and its associated negative outcomes on adolescents have continued to be a problem of global concern. This paper presents different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing behaviour among secondary school students. A total of 1,259 students (51% female, M_{age} = 16.25, SD = 1.52) completed a self-report questionnaire and a subset of 24 students were interviewed. Findings indicated that students were commonly engaged and witnessed more verbal, physical, social bullying, followed by cyberbullying. For victimization, students reported experiencing more physical, verbal and social followed by cyber victimization. Female students were more likely to experience different forms of victimization and witnessing different forms of bullying compared to male students. Further, female students reported to be engaged in perpetrating verbal and social bullying more than male students. On the other hand, students in semi-urban location reported experiencing victimization and witnessing different forms of bullying more than those in urban areas. Contrary to the expectations, students in rural location were more likely to engage in cyberbullying perpetration more than those in urban and semi-urban areas. Thus, findings suggest for holistic anti-bullying and online safety education and awareness programmes that are gender and context specific.

Keywords: *bullying, cyberbullying, victimization, witnessing*

Bullying and victimization

Although school is one of the social contexts where children spend an enormous period in their life time, it is unfortunate that every day a significant number of children across age levels leave schools feeling scared, sad, anxious, and embarrassed because of school violence or bullying (Gourneau, 2012). Researchers have defined bullying as a form of aggressive behaviour characterized by intention to harm, repetition of a behaviour that harms others and power imbalance between

the perpetrator and the victim (Olweus, 1990; Vaillancourt, Hymel & McDougall, 2003). School bullying can be externalized in several forms (Gourneau, 2012; Man et al., 2022) including physical – such as hitting, kicking, punching and taking items by force; verbal –such as taunting, teasing, threats; and relational or social-such as excluding others from activities, spreading rumours, gossiping around others, and manipulating friendships. Studies have reported variations on the prevalence rates of traditional school bullying, with 10 to 33% of students reporting to have been victimized and 5 to 13% admitting to bully others (Schneider et al., 2012; Perkins, Craig, & Perkins, 2011). According to the World Health Organization report on bullying among children aged 10 to 15 in 43 countries (Currie et al., 2012), about 2 to 32% of children reported of having experienced bullying, while 1 to 36% reported of having bullied others.

With the proliferation of mobile phones and internet technologies, a new form of bullying, cyberbullying, has emerged (Kowalski et al., 2014; Onditi, 2018). Cyberbullying has been defined as the use of electronic communication devices to embarrass or humiliate another person (Ansary, 2020; Tokunaga, 2010). Given the anonymity and diverse online platforms that come with the internet means that a person, no matter their physical stature or personality, can bully another person no matter where the victim is at any time, on any day (Ansary, 2020; Onditi & Shapka, 2019). Studies from Western countries have shown that anywhere from 5.5 to 72% of children and youth have reported being victimized online, and 3 to 44% of youth have reported being involved in cyber perpetration (Juvoven & Gross, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Li, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). In emerging studies on cyberbullying among adolescents from African countries, Onditi and Shapka (2019) found that 42% of Tanzanian secondary school adolescents between the ages of 14 to 18 reported having been involved in cyber perpetration, while 58% admitted having been victimized online in their lifetime.

Socio-ecological perspective of bullying

Bronfenbrenner's Socio-ecological Systems Theory (1979, 2005) is one of the theoretical underpinnings extensively employed in studies on bullying. From socio-ecological framework, individuals' behaviour such as bullying is influenced by the reciprocal interactions between individuals' factors such as age, gender and personality, family, peers, and the environmental and technological contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Johnson & Puplampu, 2008; Johnson, 2010). According to the theory, there are multiple nested contexts that directly or indirectly influence individual's bullying behaviour. Microsystem is the immediate environment, which include proximal settings of an individual for example families, peer groups,

classrooms, and other adolescents' meeting places (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Bullying tends to occur in the bidirectional interactions within the microsystems. For example, studies have reported classrooms, playgrounds, families, and school buses and hallways as the risk places for bullying (Gourneau, 2012). The second context is the mesosystem which includes the bidirectional interactions between the microsystems, for example, interactions between child's family and school. The third layer is the mesosystem which presents interactions in the distal environment outside the child's reach but may indirectly affect child's wellbeing, for example, media influences, parents' workplace, and education systems. Macrosytem is the out layer that represents larger economic, political and cultural norms. From a socio-ecological perspective, bullying is simply a product of the bidirectional interactions between individual, peer, family, school (Swearer & Hymel, 2015) and other related environmental factors including online platforms (Johnson & Puplampu, 2008). Given the breadth of the theory, this study will be mainly informed by the interactions at the microsystem and mesosytem levels.

Gender and bullying experiences

Gender is an individual attribute and one of the common variables in bullying research. Studies have reported differences in bullying occurring between males and females (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Gini & Pozzoli, 2006). In exploring the role of masculinity in children's bullying, Gini and Pozzoli (2006) found that overall, males are engaged in more aggressive bullying behaviours while females are involved more in indirect bullying behaviours such relational. In a study with secondary school adolescents in Canada, Trach et al. (2010) found that male students engaged more on physical bullying, verbal bullying and cyberbullying than girls who engaged more on social or relational bullying. In the same study, males reported more physical and verbal victimization experiences than females who reported more social victimization experiences.

Regarding cyberbullying, studies have reported mixed findings by gender (Ansary, 2020; Onditi & Shapka, 2019). In a study with adolescents from Finland, Salmivalli and Poyhonen (2012) found that male adolescents were more targeted and involved in cyber perpetration than their counterpart female adolescents. This corroborates findings from Italy, England and Spain which reported that male adolescents engage more in cyberbullying perpetration compared with female adolescents (Genta et al., 2012). This is contrary to the findings in a study with adolescents from the US, where female adolescents reported higher level of involvement in both cyberbullying and cybervictimization behaviours (Holfeld & Grabe, 2012). This suggests a need for further studies on the role of gender in cyberbullying,

especially from the developing countries where studies on the topic are still at the infancy stage.

Bullying witnessing experiences

Although students can be bullied by teachers and other adults (Hecker et al., 2018; Kakuru, 2020), one common feature of bullying is that it is a peer group phenomenon occurring among peers in places with less adult supervision and can sometimes be ignored by adults in schools (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Given that parents are often not present at school or online to buffer their children from bullying and that teachers are not always present in all bullying environments to intervene (Cornell & Brockenbrough, 2004; Craig, Pepler & Atlas, 2000) or may sometimes engage in bullying students (Kakuru, 2020), a significant number of children and adolescents are vulnerable for both school bullying and cyberbullying.

Observational data have reported that peers are present in about 88% of bullying episodes (Lynn et al., 2001). This is similar to the findings from student self-report data, which has shown that students are present in about 87% of bullying episodes. One common behaviour reported by the studies is that students witness bullying but will intervene to the incident about 17% to 25% of the time (Lynn et al., 2001; Salmivalli et al., 1996). This suggests that a significant number of students who witness bullying intentionally or unintentionally choose to remain passive during bullying episodes. Remaining passive in the midst of ongoing bullying incidents may escalate the bullying behaviour, making it difficult to stop (Gourneau, 2012). Studies have identified several factors associated with the behaviour to help or not to help in the bullying episodes (Jiang et al., 2022; Onditi, 2021). From traditional bullying, children reported to remain passive witness due to fear of becoming the next target, scared by the existing power dynamics in bullying (Gourneau, 2012), considering bullying to be fun, blaming the victims for the bullying, and fearing to be called a snitch (Forsberg et al., 2014; Gourneau, 2012). Other studies have shown that students remain passive witness in bullying episodes due to lack of competencies and effective intervention skills, differences in age and gender and peer group processes (Onditi, 2021; Salmivalli, 2014).

Negative effects of bullying

Studies have linked both school bullying and cyberbullying with a host of negative consequences for both victims and perpetrators (Moore et al., 2017; Vaillancourt & Mishna, 2017). In particular, school bullying has been linked with feelings of loneliness, humiliation, insecurity, fearfulness, poor relationships, trouble – making friends, difficult to adjust emotionally, poor school performance, drop out

from school (Ansary, 2020; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Moore et al., 2017). The extensive audience, the permanence of the digitally-posted data, as well as the inability of the victim to escape the harassment contribute to the severe negative consequences of cyberbullying (Kowalski, Morgan & Limber, 2012) over and above traditional bullying (Vaillancourt & Mishna, 2017). In particular, studies have linked cyberbullying with feelings of anxiety, depression, frustration, anger and sadness leading to suicidal ideations, and in extreme cases, suicide (Ansary, 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Onditi & Shapka, 2021). Other studies have further shown that many victims and perpetrators of school bullying are more likely to engage in abusive, delinquent and crime behaviours in adulthood (Rigby, 2003). If not addressed, bullying or peer violence may persist into adulthood leading to a loop of violence in the community.

The current study

Despite the ubiquitous culture of school bullying and cyberbullying, and the associated negative consequences for children and adolescents, the majority of empirical work on bullying and cyberbullying have mainly come from western countries (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Kowalski et al, 2014). There is emerging empirical evidence suggesting traditional bullying and cyberbullying as a growing concern for African children and adolescents (Kakuru, 2020; Man et al., 2022; Olumide, Adams & Amodu, 2016), however, very little empirical work has looked into different forms of bullying in terms of perpetration, victimization, and witnessing rates by gender and across different school locations. Using socio-ecological lens by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), this study explored the prevalence of different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing and whether there are variations by gender and school locations in Tanzania. Findings are intended to inform the development of evidence – based education and intervention programmes around bullying. Three research questions guided this study:

1) What is the prevalence rate and experiences of different forms of bullying, victimization, and witnessing among secondary school students in Tanzania?
2) Do different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing experienced by students vary by gender?
3) Do different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing experienced by students differ by school location (urban, semi-urban, and rural)?

Methodology

This cross-sectional study employed a concurrent mixed-method research by embedding qualitative methods within a dominantly quantitative research method

(Creswell, 2009). In particular, a self-report survey was used to gather data on frequency of different forms of bullying, victimization, and witnessing among participants. In addition, a subset of participants who completed a survey was invited for semi-structured interviews to obtain their lived experiences on bullying.

Participants

This study consisted of 1,259 secondary school students (51% female, M_{age} = 16.25, SD = 1.52) in Form I to Form IV from six schools in Mara (3 schools) and Dodoma (3 schools) regions in Tanzania. The schools were randomly sampled from urban, semi-urban, and rural locations in each of the two regions. Thus, 33% of students were from urban, 35% were from semi-urban, and 32% were from rural settings. A subset of 24 participants (11 male and 13 female) among those who completed self-report questionnaire, and were interested in sharing their bullying, victimization and/or witnessing experiences were invited for a semi-structured interview with a researcher.

Data collection

Students responded to a self-report questionnaire that included demographic information such as age, gender, grade, and location of school as well as measures about experiences with bullying, victimization, and witnessing (Trach, 2010; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). A total of 12 items on frequency across the four different forms of bullying (physical-, verbal-, social-and cyber – bullying) were used. In particular, 4 items addressed the frequency of bullying experiences, 4 items measured the frequency of victimization experiences, and 4 items addressed the frequency of witnessing experiences. Prior to responding, participants were provided with a definition of bullying and its different forms. The definition included the criteria of the perpetrator's intention to harm, repetition over time, and a power imbalance between the perpetrator and target (Trach & Hymel, 2020). Participants were asked to recall an incident of bullying, victimization, and witnessing of bullying during the current school year and then answered the items using a 5-point Likert scale (1=never, 2=once/few times, 3=every month, 4=every week, and 5=several times a week). In addition, an interview guide developed by the researcher with a total of five questions (and follow up questions) focusing on participants lived experiences on bullying and victimization was used. Before embarking on interview, participants were asked to reflect on the current school year when responding to different questions. For example, would you explain the common types of bullying experienced by students at your school? Can you explain more on how does bullying happen; Can you explain the type of bullying that happened to you?

Ethical considerations

Approval for this study was obtained from the University of Dar es Salaam ethics board. Subsequent permissions to visit schools were obtained from Mara and Dodoma regional and district administrative officers. At the school level, the heads of schools gave access into the classrooms. One to two weeks before actual data collection, researcher and research assistants visited schools to introduce the study and to distribute parental consent letters. Only students who received permission from parents and gave assent were included in the study. Prior to the completion of the questionnaires, the researcher informed participants on the confidentiality and that their participation is voluntary. The questionnaire was administered by trained research assistants during regular class hours (40 to 60 minutes). An invitation letter to participate in the interview was attached in the last page of the questionnaire and only 24 participants who were willing to share their lived experiences on bullying, victimization, and witnessing experiences were interviewed. All interviews were conducted by the researchers and trained research assistants. Data from the interview that ranged between 30 and 45 minutes were audio-recorded after obtaining consent from the interviewee.

Data analysis

Data were organized and analyzed using quantitative data analyses software (SPSS version 26). In particular, descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviations), independent sample t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed in the analysis of quantitative data. The interviews were thematically transcribed. Themes were both deductively (based on the existing literature) and inductively (based on the field data) developed by the researcher and research assistants based on the codes (Nastasi, 1999; Varjas et al., 2005). In particular, whereas initial basic themes were data driven (inductive coding), major codes or themes were generated from the existing literature (deductive coding).

Findings

Prevalence rate and experiences of different forms of bullying, victimization, and witnessing

Results for research question one on the prevalence of bullying, victimization, and witnessing experiences among adolescents are summarized in Table 1 and Figure 1. Overall, results have shown that students commonly experienced physical victimization (89%), followed by verbal (85%), social (62%) and cyber victimization (20%). With regard to bullying perpetration, participants reported to have been respectively engaged in bullying others verbally (52%), physically

(35%), socially (31%) and online (cyberbullying, 15%). Similarly, participants mostly reported to have witnessed verbal bullying (84%), followed by physical (71%), social (67%) and cyberbullying (40%).

Table 1. *Students Experiences with Bullying, Victimization and Witnessing*

|	n	Never (%)	Once or a few times (%)	Every month (%)	Every week (%)	Several times a week (%)	Overall (%)
Victimization							
Physical	1256	11	38	12	10	29	89
Verbal	1258	15	34	11	12	28	85
Social	1256	38	36	6	5	15	62
Cyber	1255	80	12	3	2	3	20
Witness Victimization							
Physical	1258	29	33	10	9	20	71
Verbal	1254	16	34	13	11	26	84
Social	1244	33	32	10	8	17	67
Cyber	1250	60	19	6	5	10	40
Bullying							
Physical	1258	65	27	2	2	4	35
Verbal	1247	48	37	6	5	4	52
Social	1236	69	21	4	3	3	31
Cyber	1254	85	7	3	2	3	15
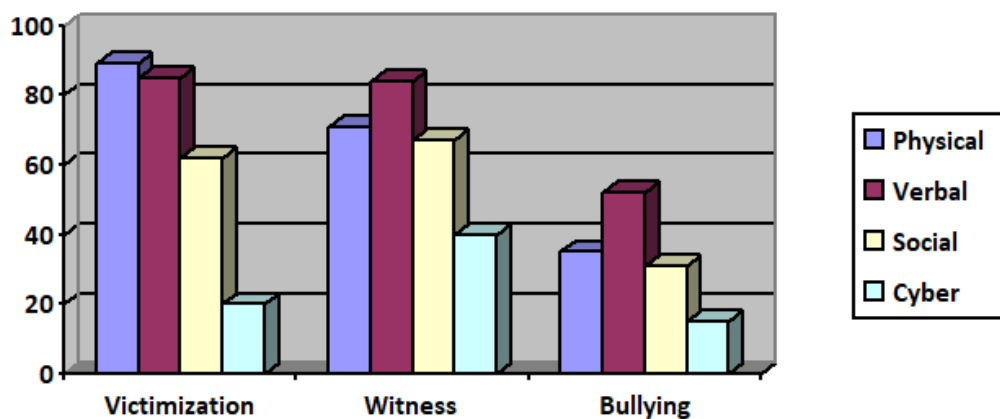
Figure 1. Prevalence of bullying, victimization and witnessing

Qualitative data provide further evidence on students' bullying experiences. Regarding physical bullying experiences, students reported to have been involved in fights among themselves making them feel not secured at school (Gourneau, 2012). Others viewed school as a place of oppression due to the fights among students and severe punishments by teachers. The fights were reported to happen on school grounds and on the way to and/or from home to school. Some female students said that heavy punishments by teachers have affected them to the extent of changing their menstrual cycle. In explaining physical bullying experiences at

school, a female student narrated: "*Here at school we have people who are not in good terms and they normally fight and don't talk to each other…such situations make some of us feel less secured at school.*" In explaining bullying experiences perpetrated by teachers, a female student remarked: "*…when you come late, the teacher tells you to kneel down, beats you up, chases and kicks you on your back with his boots. This makes you lose the mood for learning and motivation to stay at school."* Narrating her bullying experience, a female student said:

> In classroom and playgrounds, some boys touch girls' breasts and waists. One day we were sitting with my friends and some boys came and started touching each of us, when you tell them to stop, they shout asking do we not like it?

Consistent with findings by Man et al. (2022) and Trach et al. (2010), verbal and social bullying were also reported as the common forms of bullying experienced by students. In particular, students reported to have experienced insults and abuse from peers and teachers. This made them feel embarrassed and less secured at school. If not intervened, this type of behaviour may contribute to drop out from school. In explaining verbal and social bullying experience at school, a male student recalled:

> Some students started saying that being a Form One student is a disease, and bad enough, even some teachers are using that statement… In this school, form one students are the ones who clean the toilets for a year until the next group of Form One comes to relieve us from this punishment.

In line with findings by Wang et al. (2021), other students attributed both verbal and social bullying to several factors including socio-economic status and academic ability. Students from low socio-economic status families and those with low ability in academics, especially those who have poor background in English, were more likely to experience bullying. This was reported by a female student who narrated that "*…students who have high academic abilities, good mastery of English and those who come from high socio-economic status normally isolate or despise others."*

Similar to findings by Gourneau (2012), majority of students identified classroom as one of the contexts where verbal and social bullying occur. In particular, some students reported to have experienced bullying by both peers and teachers in the classroom context. which interferes with effective learning and school attendance. For instance, a male student complained:

> For example, whenever sometimes when a student attempts to answer questions in class and gets it wrong, the teacher will comment abusively saying that it is not your problem because that is how your parents are. Such comments really demoralize…

Similarly, a female student expressed her discontent:

> Sometimes as you try answering a question you find that some class members start laughing and mocking at you and the teacher does nothing to intervene the situation. This habit discourages us from responding to the questions during class sessions.

Regarding cyberbullying, the interview results indicate that students have either experienced or heard about incidences of cyberbullying among peers. It was further reported that sometimes bullying at school moves to the online context and vice versa. Also, it was testified that both peers and strangers were involved in cyber perpetration. In explaining cyberbullying experience, a male student narrated that, "*It has happened even to me and I decided to sell my mobile phone to avoid such incidences.*" Another male student witnessed cyberbullying experiences and narrated it as follows:

> My friends were once engaged in a quarrel among themselves and when we wanted them to meet for reconciliation they were not ready for it. The fight extended to the online platform where they started to abuse and insult each other.

This provides further evidence on the overlap between offline and online bullying. Findings show that bullying incidence may begin from or extend to either online or offline context. Thus, holistic prevention and intervention efforts targeting bullying in both offline and online contexts are recommended.

Different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing experienced by students by gender

Regarding research question two on whether bullying, victimization, and witnessing differed by gender, initial descriptive analyses results in Figure 2 indicate that more female students appeared to have been victimized, bullied others and witnessed different forms of bullying compared with their counterpart male adolescents.
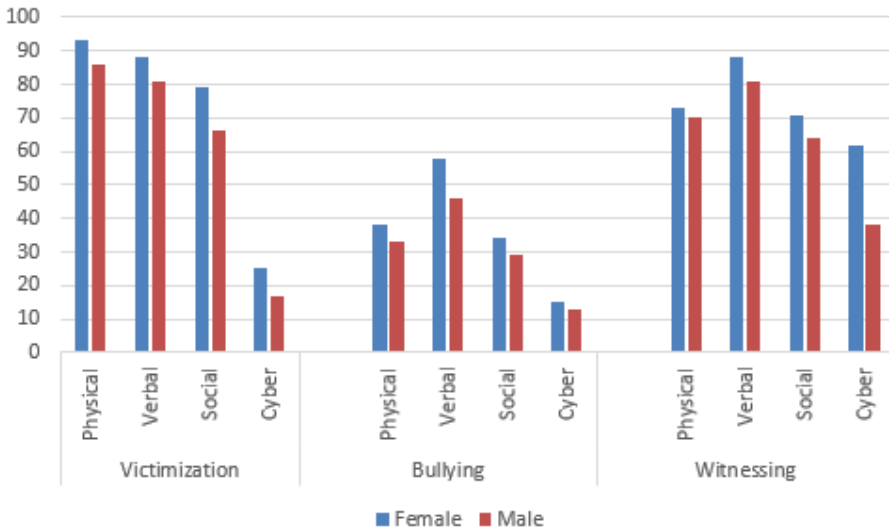
Figure 2. Bullying, victimization, and witnessing between female and male students

An independent sample t-test analyses was performed to establish whether there is a statistically significant gender differences in bullying behaviours. As summarized in Table 2, results indicate a statistically significant difference on victimization and witnessing with female students more likely to experience higher levels of victimization and witnessing different forms of bullying than male students. Regarding bullying perpetration, a statistically significant result was revealed with female students more likely to report verbal and social bullying perpetration more than male students. No significant difference was found on physical and cyberbullying perpetration between female and male students.

Table 2. *Independent Sample t-test Results Indicating Gender Differences in Bullying Behaviours*

	n	t value (df)	Effect Size (η^2)	Males M (SD)	Females M (SD)
Victimization					
Physical	1255	-4.03 (1253)***	.01	1.92 (1.43)	2.25 (1.44)
Verbal	1257	-3.73 (1255)***	.01	1.88 (1.48)	2.19 (1.46)
Social	1255	-5.70 (1239)***	.03	1.00 (1.28)	1.44 (1.46)
Cyber	1255	-3.40 (1184)**	.01	.28 (.74)	.44 (.98)
Bullying others					
Physical	1257	-.18 (1255)	.00	.53 (.99)	.54 (.91)
Verbal	1246	-2.79 (1244)**	.01	.72 (1.03)	.89 (1.05)
Social	1235	-2.14 (1210)*	.00	.44 (.85)	.55 (1.00)
Cyber	1253	-1.56 (1226)	.00	.24 (.75)	.31 (.88)
Witness Victimization					
Physical	1258	-3.08 (1250)**	.01	1.46 (1.41)	1.71 (1.55)
Verbal	1253	-5.45 (1250)***	.02	1.76 (1.41)	2.21 (1.48)
Social	1243	-3.43 (1236)**	.01	1.30 (1.38)	1.58 (1.49)
Cyber	1249	-2.04 (1241)*	.00	.77 (1. 26)	.93 (1.38)

Note.*p = .05, **p = .01, ***p = .001,

Different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing experienced by students by school location

For the research question three on whether bullying, victimization and witnessing differed across school locations (urban, semi-urban and rural), initial descriptive analyses results summarized in Table 3 suggest mixed pattern across the three locations.

Regarding victimization, more experiences of physical victimization were reported in semi-urban, rural and urban locations, in that order. For verbal victimization, more experiences were reported in urban, semi-urban, and rural locations, in that order. With regard to social victimization, more experiences were reported in rural compared with semi-urban and urban locations. For cybervictimization, more experiences were reported in rural, semi-urban, and urban locations, in that order.

Concerning bullying, more experiences of physical bullying perpetration were reported in semi-urban followed by both urban and rural locations. For verbal bullying perpetration, more experiences were reported in urban, followed by semi-urban and finally rural locations. With regard to social bullying perpetration, more experiences were reported in this order: rural, semi-urban and urban locations. For cyber bullying perpetration, more experiences were reported in the order: rural, urban and semi-urban locations.

With regard to witnessing, more experiences of witnessing physical bullying were reported in semi-urban, rural, and urban locations, in that order. Further, experiences of witnessing verbal bullying were more reported both in urban and semi-urban locations compared with rural. Regarding witnessing of social bullying, more experiences were reported in the following order: rural, semi-urban and urban locations. Concerning witnessing of cyberbullying, more experiences were reported in the order: rural, urban and semi-urban locations.
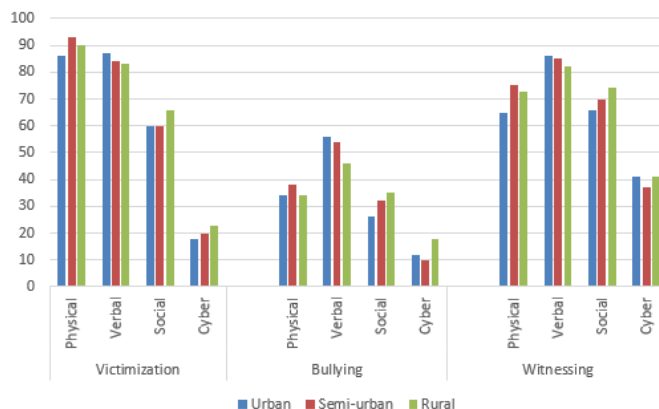

Figure 3. *Descriptive results in bullying behaviours by school location*

To established whether the reported bullying, victimization, and witnessing behaviours varied by location (urban, semi-urban, and rural), Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. As summarized in Table 3, results indicated that students in semi-urban reported experiencing physical victimization more than their counterparts in urban and rural locations. Similarly, students in semi-urban reported witnessing physical bullying more than their counterparts in urban location. Surprisingly, students in rural reported engaging in cyberbullying perpetration more than those in semi-urban location. No significant difference was found across locations with regard to verbal, social and cyber–victimization and witnessing as well as physical, verbal and social bullying perpetration.

Table 3. *ANOVA Results on Bullying Behaviours by School Location*

		Victimization		Bullying		Witnessing	
	Location	*M (SD)*	*F* value (df_1, df_2)	*M (SD)*	*F* value (df_1, df_2)	*M (SD)*	*F* value (df_1, df_2)
Physical	Urban	1.86 (1.43)	10.60	.56 (1.02)	.33	1.44 (1.50)	3.67
	Rural	2.08 (1.43)	(2, 1253)***	.50 (.92)	(2, 1255)	1.60 (1.46)	(2, 1255)*
	Semi-urban	2.31 (1.44)		.54 (.91)		1.72 (1.49)	
Verbal	Urban	2.02 (1.48)	.19	.87 (1.08)	1.75	2.06 (1.48)	.93
	Rural	2.01 (1.48)	(2, 1255)	.73 (1.03)	(2, 1244)	1.92 (1.45)	(2, 1251)
	Semi-urban	2.07 (1.48)		.82 (1.02)		1.98 (1.46)	
Social	Urban	1.13 (1.37)	2.18	.41(.87)	2.70	1.53 (1.54)	2.56
	Rural	1.33 (1.40)	(2, 1253)	.53 (.93)	(2, 1233)	1.31 (1.36)	(2, 1241)
	Semi-urban	1.20 (1.39)		.54 (.98)		1.46 (1.41)	
Cyber	Urban	.31 (.81)	1.82	.26 (.81)	4.90	.93 (1.40)	2.06
	Rural	.42 (.93)	(2, 1252)	.37 (.93)	(2, 1251)**	.88 (1.32)	(2,1247)
	Semi-urban	.35 (.87)		.20 (.71)		.75 (1.23)	

Note.*$p = .05$, **$p = .01$, ***$p = .001$

Discussion

This study explored the prevalence of different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing among secondary school students and whether experiences differed by gender and across school locations. Regarding prevalence rates, results indicate that the most frequently reported forms of bullying and victimization were verbal and physical followed by social and cyber. This is contrary to the findings from previous studies from western countries which identified verbal and social as the mostly reported forms of bullying and victimization followed by physical and cyberbullying (Bonano & Hymel, 2013; Trach et al., 2010). Consistent with previous studies, this study identified verbal as the most reported form of bullying and cyberbullying as the least reported form. Further, this study identified physical as the most reported form of victimization contrary to the previous findings which

identified verbal as the most reported form of victimization. Extending previous studies that did not explore witnessing, this study further identified verbal and physical as the most witnessed forms of victimization followed by social and cyber forms. Findings from this study demonstrate that, bullying is a problem that requires both general and context-specific awareness and interventions.

With regard to gender differences, findings indicated that female students reported engaging significantly more in both verbal and social bullying than male students while no gender difference was found in the reported level of physical – and cyber – bullying. This is somewhat consistent with previous findings that females engage more in social or relational bullying (Trach et al., 2010). Although previous studies have provided evidence supporting that males engage more in physical aggression and bullying than females (Gini & Pozzoli, 2006; Trach et al., 2010), this study found no significant gender differences on students' engagement in physical and cyberbullying, a new form of bullying. This finding is contrary to the previous findings indicating that male students engaged more in verbal, physical, and cyberbullying than female students (Trach et al., 2010). The finding seems to provide a unique gender pattern with regard to Tanzanian students' involvement in the perpetration of different forms of bullying. This is important information for developing gender – and context – specific anti-bullying education and intervention programmes.

This study found that female students reported to have significantly experienced and witnessed different forms of victimization more than male students. This is contrary to the findings by Trach et al. (2010) that female students experienced social victimization more than males, who reported more physical and verbal victimization. Findings that females experienced and witnessed victimization more than males may be attributed to various factors including higher reported level of female students engaging more in different forms of bullying than males. Higher reported level of female students' engagement in different forms of bullying does not only increase their risks for victimization, but also the cycle of bullying. Another unique explanation is that more female students reported experiencing high levels of sexual abuse than male students who were identified as the perpetrators. Perhaps female students respond to victimization and sexual abuse from peers in aggressive ways, leading to more victimization. More studies are needed to discern the way students cope with bullying and for developing relevant gender-targeted education and intervention programmes.

From the interview data, both female and male students identified classroom and playgrounds as the places where most of the bullying occurs. This is consistent with Gourneau (2012) who identified hallways, bathrooms, and classrooms as

locations for bullying. Further, both peers and teachers were also identified as the perpetrators of bullying occurring in the classroom. This is consistent with the previous findings that bullying is a peer-group phenomenon (Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli & Peets, 2009). Students attributed bullying occurring in the classroom to various factors including academic ability, socioeconomic status, power and gender issues. For example, some students who are weak in English language reported to have been verbally and socially bullied by peers who had good background in the language. Other students who answered questions wrongly reported to have been verbally bullied by both peers and teachers. Findings that teachers engage in bullying students or condone bullying behaviours are a concern that needs to be addressed for a positive classroom environment.

Findings indicate that, students in semi-urban schools reported experiencing and witnessing physical victimization more than their counterparts in urban schools. This is in line with the findings from Wang et al. (2021) that students from disadvantaged communities and from varied demographic backgrounds reported higher incidences of bullying and witnessing. Although further studies are required to discern this phenomenon, during the dissemination workshops, it was realized that students from semi-urban schools come from different catchment with varied attitudes, socio-economic statuses and ways of life that may perpetuate bullying. Further, children in semi-urban areas experience transition challenges that may perpetuate bullying incidences. For example, some families may relocate from urban to semi-urban or from rural to semi-urban, which is a new environment to a student. Thus, a student is likely to experience bullying during the transition period into a new context.

The finding that students in rural settings reported engaging in cyberbullying perpetration more than those in semi-urban location was somewhat unique. This may be attributed to different risk and protective factors (Ansary, 2020). First, most of the education and intervention programmes on children safety online are highly concentrated in urban areas. Thus, more children and adults in urban settings seems to be digitally savvy than their counterparts in rural and semi-urban areas. Not having adequate online safety education is a risk for students, especially those who come from rural areas. Second, students from rural areas seem to lack supervision on the use of digital devices which increases vulnerability to cyberbullying behaviours. For example, in narrating the experience on cyberbullying, a female student from a rural school had this to say regarding her experience with cyberbullying: *For example you might be at home but a person sends you harassing messages through your mother's mobile phone.*" This suggests that, due to low level of digital literacy, some parents in rural areas have no skills to protect children from online abuse.

Implications of the Findings

Overall, the current study has provided further evidence that Tanzanian secondary school students experience different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing similar to their counterpart students in Western countries. Contrary to previous studies from the Western countries, the most frequently reported forms of bullying and victimization in the current study were verbal and physical followed by social and cyberbullying forms. Despite ranking low, studies from Western countries have reported that the effects of cyberbullying are above and beyond other forms of traditional school bullying. This suggests for more research work to uncover the outcomes of cyberbullying for empirically informed intervention programmes on bullying. The finding that female students from Tanzania were more likely to engage in different forms of bullying, victimization and witnessing more than their counterpart male students propose a need for gender-specific anti-bullying intervention programmes. A unique finding that cyberbullying was more prevalent in rural than in urban and semi-urban areas can be an advocacy for extending online safety programmes to rural areas. This study further recommends a need for cross-cultural studies for informing holistic and specific national and international intervention efforts and programmes on bullying, especially in the dynamic world of technology.

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