

## **TOWARDS A MODEL OF COMBATING PEER HARASSMENT AMONG RURAL DAY SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN ZIMBABWE**

**Nothabo Shoko**

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Curriculum Studies  
Midlands State University, **ZIMBABWE**

### **ABSTRACT**

The article focuses on the views of what teachers can do to deal with peer harassment which is rampant among learners in Zimbabwean rural day schools so that the wellbeing of learners is enhanced. The study comprised of fifteen learners who were asked to suggest what teachers could do to assist learners when they fell victim to peer harassment. A phenomenological design in which semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the responses from the learners was used to generate the data. Participants for the study were purposively. The criteria for selection was that the participants were aged between thirteen to fifteen years and that they had experienced harassment either as observers or victims. A major finding was that most teachers were not doing much to assist the learners. Failure to do so often led to a number of psychological problems which influenced the wellbeing of learners at school. Most teachers appeared to lack the necessary skills with which they could assist learners who reported that they were being harassed. The study concluded that the simple model could be inculcated in the teacher training curricula to assist rural school teachers to combat peer harassment in their classrooms.

**Keywords:** Youth, model, zero tolerance.

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Peer harassment has become pervasive in school settings the world over (Hutzell & Payne, 2012; Siziya, Muula and Rudatsikira (2012, p. 31) also describe it as a public health concern. According to Bellmore and Cillessen (2006, p. 209), exposure to peer harassment in school has a negative impact on learners. Many studies have linked peer harassment to psychosocial problems such as loneliness, rejection, drug abuse, aggression, low self-esteem as well as to psychosomatic problems that include headaches, insomnia and dizziness (Troop-Gordon & Quenette, 2010; Fleming and Jacobsen, 2009; Siziya et al., 2009; Rusby et al., 2005). Studies by Troop-Gordon and Quenette, (2010); Fleming and Jacobsen, (2009); Siziya et al., (2009); Rusby et al., (2005) also associated peer harassment with school-related problems such as high rates of absenteeism, truancy, lowering of grades and eventually dropping out of school. Houbre, Tarquinio, Thuillier and Hergott (2006, pp.195-196) observed that there was no loser-winner situation for those involved in peer harassment with regards to the effects that it has on an individual since both the harasser and the harassed both experience psychosocial and psychosomatic problems in varying degrees. According to Konu and Rimpela (2002)'s theory of school wellbeing, the social relationships among learners in a school context determine the nature of the wellbeing of the learners.

Hamarus and Kaikkonen (2008) acknowledge that peer harassment is a complicated phenomenon and an attempt to define it risks excluding other important aspects of the