

BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF BULAWAYO: CAUSES, MANIFESTATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

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Abstract

Behaviour problems frustrate many teachers and create an unpleasant teaching and learning environment. When disruptive interactions occur between teachers and learners, these sometimes lead to a chain of actions and reactions that spiral out of control resulting in chaos in the classroom. Behaviour problems are a problem in many secondary schools in Zimbabwe. This study investigated the causes and manifestations of behaviour problems of adolescent learners and suggested guidelines for teachers on how to assist learners with behaviour problems in the classroom. This is a quantitative study that used questionnaires. The questionnaire items for this study were in the form of a four or five point Likert-Scale. The main findings contributing to the causes of behaviour problems among adolescent learners are environmental factors, such as the family and the school and peer pressure. Behaviour problems are manifested by adolescents as disruptive behaviour, aggressive and antisocial behaviour, telling lies and theft. The findings highlight important guidelines, which teachers can use to assist and understand learners with behaviour problems in the classroom. The guidelines present an endeavour to solve problem behaviour in the classroom.

Key Words: Behaviour problems, emotional problems, needs for adolescent learners, disruptive behaviour, causative factors of behaviour problems, manifestations of behaviour problems,

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Students' misbehavior is a prevailing problem affecting schools not only in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, but also across many nations around the world. Students' misconduct in the classroom interferes with teaching and learning and is thought to be precursor to later school dropout and similar negative social outcomes. Students' behavioral problems are also a leading contributor to teachers' stress and attrition. Serious breaches of school discipline policy can have profound negative effects on teachers. Teachers subjected to abuse or intimidation report experiencing fears for their safety, lack of sense of dignity at work, intense feelings of anger, humiliation or shame, isolation and depression. Basically, discipline problems occur when a student refuses to obey rules of the classroom or school. Rules that deal with human actions will eventually be broken and require some sort of punishment.

The question of children's behavioural problems remains a controversial issue for many parents, social workers, teachers, educationists and all others who are concerned with the education of learners. The indiscipline problem in schools is ranked as a major problem among students of primary and secondary schools in Bulawayo. Disruptive behavior is a concern to schools and parents and to fellow pupils, whose education may be adversely affected. So it can't be ignored, and schools must tailor a well understood sound behavior and discipline policy.

A review of literature on problems of adolescents (Scallett 1998:3; Sibaya 1992:25) suggests that class management problems, peer influence, disciplinary problems, family problems, perception of life and social values of learners may cause behaviour problems. The rationale for this study is that behaviour problems of adolescent learners in the classroom situation are the result of interactive factors within the environment, for example, the family, the school, peer pressure and societal changes in the upbringing of the learner. In today's world the adolescents' perception of their life and social values thrust upon them by an adult-dominated society are clearly incompatible (The Chronicle 18 January 2017). In Bulawayo adolescent learners with behaviour problems have perceived their behaviour as normal and compatible with the modern social values of the youth (The Daily News 15 April 1999). Such perceptions contradict the behavioural norms and values of the classroom learning situation in the classroom.

Educationists have expressed concern among themselves about the behaviour of adolescent learners. Some of the breaking news highlighted in the mass media has portrayed the school with learners of misbehaving characters. Some even go to the extent of considering the case of misbehaviors as criminal problem. The local newspapers, such as The Chronicle (28 July 2016), have focused the debate on behaviour problems of adolescent learners within the communities of Bulawayo, complaining about the behaviour of learners in the schools. Teachers and parents have been blamed for causing the behaviour problems of adolescents (The Sunday News 5 December 2016). Such a situation compels one to find out the causes of behaviour problems of adolescent learners in Bulawayo and to develop guidelines for teachers that can assist them to find solutions to such behaviour problems occurring in schools in Bulawayo.

Adolescent learners' thoughts, attitudes and norms are continuously evolving and in certain respects changing negatively or positively. In the classroom learning situation, some adolescent learners have lost respect for their teachers and disturb the learning activities by making unnecessary noise and bullying fellow learners. Some have resorted to delinquency and drug abuse. Standards of behaviour, attitudes and norms and values in society have changed over the past decades. These changes are common in most societies. Such changes affect attitudes of young and old people. Houghton, Wheldall and Merrett (1988:297) and Gardner (1998:123) argue that the norms and values within society are changing and these changes affect the upbringing of children.

It is against this background that the management of behaviour problems in schools needs urgent attention. There is much work to be done since in some schools the situation has reached

alarming proportions. This study therefore concentrates on finding out the causes of behaviour problems of adolescent learners in Bulawayo with a view to providing the means of managing he behaviour problems.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Behavioural problems result from a combination of factors relating to home, family, school and the learner. Indiscipline in school is certainly a matter of immediate concern to the teaching profession. In lieu of the above, the study will highlight factors contributing to the manifestation of behaviour problems of secondary school learners occurring in the schools in Bulawayo and to suggest guidelines for teachers on how to assist learners with behaviour problems.

2.1 Goals of the study

There is a growing awareness of a need for multidisciplinary approach in the treatment of behavioural problems (Apter & Conoley 1984:53). Such an approach emphasizes working or consulting with other professionals, parents and teachers in schools. This study aimed to conduct an empirical study into behaviour problems of adolescents with regard to;

1. The types of behaviour problems that are being experienced in Bulawayo secondary schools.
2. The causative factors of behaviour problems of adolescent learners in the classroom.
3. The means of managing disciplinary problems in the said study area.
4. Finally, to recommend to stakeholders in education to address the behaviour problems plight in secondary schools.

2.2 Research Questions

This study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

- Which types of behaviour problems do adolescent learners in secondary schools in general and in Bulawayo specifically, exhibit?
- What are the causative factors of adolescent behaviour problems in the classroom?
- What guidelines can be suggested to teachers in order to understand and assist adolescent learners more effectively

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

The survey design which was mainly quantitative in nature was used. The survey was used to provide a clear picture of the types of behaviour problems of adolescent learners that are being experienced in Bulawayo secondary schools. Since the present study sought to establish the guidelines that can be suggested to teachers in order to understand and assist adolescent learners

with behaviour problems more effectively in secondary schools of Zimbabwe, the survey design was chosen as the most appropriate design for the study.

3.2 Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 50 secondary school teachers, 20 adolescent learners and 10 parents. These participants were used in this study because they have observed and experienced the behaviour problems as manifested by adolescent learners in secondary schools of Bulawayo. They are also in a position to give the required information on the causes and manifestation of behaviour problems of adolescent learners in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. The sample was drawn from five conveniently selected secondary schools in Bulawayo. The participants were randomly chosen from five secondary schools in Bulawayo, using a table of random numbers. Randomized samples in the survey designs facilitate the generalisability of results to the target population (Neuman & Neuman, 2000:247).

3.3 Instrumentation

Questionnaires were used in this research in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. The questionnaire items for this study are in the form of a four or five point Likert-Scale. The Likert scales were used in this study for the structured items to allow for fairly accurate assessments of beliefs and opinions from the respondents. For most of the items a 5-point Likert scale was used. The items focused on the causes and manifestations of behavior problems among adolescent learners in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. Two education experts were asked to check on the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items.

3.4 Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was sought from and granted by the Heads of the five secondary schools used in this study. The researcher distributed and collected the questionnaires. He explained the purpose of the study to potential participants. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage during the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16 to perform the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The SPSS package allowed the researcher to summarize and display data in graphics, particularly tables.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Types of behaviour problems adolescent learners in secondary schools exhibit

Table 1: The types of behavior problems being manifested by the adolescent learners in secondary schools of Bulawayo

TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS MANIFESTED IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruptive behaviour (disobedience, disorderliness, bullying other learners, attention seeking behaviour, stubbornness)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substance abuse (drug abuse, taking alcohol at school, smoking dagga at school)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antisocial behaviour (aggressiveness, sexual harassment)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juvenile delinquency (telling lies, stealing)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truancy (absconding lessons, habitual late coming to school)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theft by adolescents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression and suicide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male adolescents smoke and take drugs whenever they are playing with peers who indulge in such activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adolescents tend to be aggressive and confrontational when they need independence from their parents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pornographic material would be found hidden or displayed in the adolescent's bedroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The adolescents often lied to escape punishment or to deny responsibility. Some adolescents persist in denying guilt even when all the evidence is against them or they lie because they want to capture their parents' attention

Generally, serious breaches of school discipline policy include assault by students on teachers and other students, verbal abuse, offensive language against teachers and other students, sexual and other forms of harassment, threat and intimidation of teachers and other students, possessing offensive weapons, supplying or using illegal drugs, intrusions into the school or classrooms by adults with the intention of confronting teachers have become a case of study that needed immediate attention. According to Houghton, Wheldall and Merret (1988:309) and Montgomery (1990:127), talking out of turn and hindering other children are the most troublesome and most

frequent misbehavior in the classroom as selected by secondary school teachers. These frequent misbehaviors are the main source of problems for teachers.

4.2 The causative factors of adolescent behaviour problems in the classroom

The Table below shows the causative factors of behaviour problems among adolescent learners in secondary schools of Bulawayo as observed by the respondents to the questionnaires.

Table2: Causative factors of adolescent behaviour problems in secondary schools of Bulawayo

Causative factor	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The school curriculum which is deficient of moral training	30(37.5%)	30(37.5%)	15(18.7%)	5(6.3%)
The ever changing curriculum confuses learners	25(31.2%)	35(43.8%)	20(25%)	0(0%)
Poverty as a result of lower socio-economic family status enhances poor discipline	70(87.5%)	5(6.3%)	5(6.3%)	0(0%)
Societal celebrations of negative values over positive values makes children to indulge in deviant behaviour	20(25%)	20(25%)	20(25%)	20(25%)
Acquisition of negative information from the media promotes behaviour problems in schools	80(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Learners find the curriculum boring and unrelated to their needs	10(12.5%)	50(62.5%)	25(31.2%)	5(6.3%)
Bad behaviour emanates from parenting styles at home	5(6.3%)	75(93.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Troublesome parents have problem children	26(32.5%)	4(5%)	15(18.7%)	15(18.7%)
Neglected children are troublesome at school.	50(62.5%)	20(25%)	6(7.5%)	4(5%)
Financial problems makes most parents to ignore their children's behaviour and education	20(25%)	35(43.8%)	15(18.7%)	10(12.5%)
Over crowdedness in the classroom causes difficulties in handling classes effectively by the teachers	75(93.7%)	5(6.3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
School environment influences disciplinary problems among students	60(75%)	20(25%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Some students imitate the unruly behaviour of their peers	80(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

From the above findings it is clear that all the participants (100%) agreed that students imitate unruly behaviour from their peers and that the media also negatively influences the behaviour of

adolescent learners in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. All the participants agreed that behaviour problems emanate parenting styles at home. A violent marriage renders parents unable to meet the developmental and emotional needs of their children. Children adapt to violence in ways, which may distort their functioning in class (De la Rey, Duncan, Shefer & Van Niekerk 1997:177). In addition, child abuse within the family may also cause behaviour problems among children. Child abuse includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Difficulties in interpersonal relationships with the family members are often the root cause of problem behaviours among the adolescents. It has been found that adolescent suicide takes place mostly in family context as a reaction to disharmonious relationships in the family.

Families, which are incomplete as a result of, divorce; death or extra-marital birth, may influence the adolescents to feel shame, discomfort, guilt or rejection at the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent may lead to the feelings of impotence, rebellion and inadequacy, which are often connected with depressive behaviour. Parents who find it difficult to deal with stressful circumstances, as a result of their own poor coping skills, sometimes relieve their anger, frustrations and disappointments by venting them on their children. Disputes, arguments or some other conflicts with a parent are the most common stress situation in cases of adolescent suicide. In such relationships there is usually a total breakdown of communication, often connected with disciplinary problems, peer group conflicts and clashes about academic achievements.

4.3 Management of behaviour problems for adolescent learners in secondary schools of Bulawayo

Table 3: How behaviour problems could be dealt with

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Team work among teachers will improve behaviour problems of adolescents in secondary schools	30(37.5%)	40(50%)	5(6.3%)	5(6.3%)
Moral punishment, rewards, praise and blame will improve discipline in the school system	70(87.5%)	5(6.3%)	5(6.3%)	0(0%)
More commitment on the part of educators will improve discipline in the school system.	20(25%)	25(31.2%)	30(37.5%)	5(6.3%)
Suspension/temporary exclusion will	80(100%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

improve the tone of behaviour management				
Deprivation of privilege in the school will improve school discipline among adolescent learners	40(50%)	20(25%)	10(12.5%)	10(12.5%)
Involving learners in developing rules of the school	60(75%)	20(25%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

From the above Table the respondents agreed that involving learners in developing rules of the school can improve the behaviour management of adolescent learners in secondary schools of Zimbabwe. 100% of the respondents also agreed that temporary exclusion will improve the tone of behaviour management. However 43.85% disagreed with the view that commitment on the part of educators will improve discipline on the school system.

Teachers influence the learners' behaviour patterns. According to Charlton and David (1993:3), "what the schools offer and how they offer it, helps determine whether pupils respond in desirable or undesirable ways" In other words, the schools make a difference to their learner's behaviour for better or for worse. The behaviours of learners can be modified if a teacher uses appropriate strategies to combat the behaviour problems being manifested by the learners (Gwarinda 1994:86). The teachers should not only focus on the learner, but on his/her environment and find ways of assisting the learner from his/ her environment. The environment determines all behaviour of the learners through their interaction with other role players within his/her environment.

Teachers should interact among themselves in regard to services rendered to learners exhibiting behaviour problems. They can exchange ideas and experiences on how to assist learners with behaviour problems. They can advise each other on how they can help the learners with behavioural problems such as truancy, and disruptive behaviour using the parents, school environment and the teachers themselves. Failure to coordinate can create more problems for the school than the actual behaviour problems exhibited by the learner. Parents and teachers should be involved when solving the behaviour problems of learners. They must be viewed as partners instead of the guilt party who is responsible for the behaviour problems of adolescent learners. They should consult teachers about their children's problems and help the teachers in finding ways of assisting the learners with behaviour problems.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This paper concludes that the teachers, parents and adolescent learners in this research experienced excessive talking, incomplete homework, late-coming, back-chatting, arguing, a lack of concentration, bantering, and eating in the class as common behavior problems for adolescent learners in secondary schools. Defiance and disrespect of teaching manifested as a

flagrant flouting of school rules and structures, and a total disregard for the teacher in the classroom. The teachers in this study reported, physical attacks and vulgar threats as examples of teacher-targeted bullying.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for effective management of disciplinary problems:-

- All members of the staff, including the principals and vice principals should exhibit the spirit of teamwork in order to energize morale and enhance staff motivation.
- The causes of disciplinary problems are addressed if teaching staff are actively involved in the teaching programmes of their school. This will lead to active participation of the students which subsequently confine their frivolities.
- Parents should make education a priority for their children, this will make the children achieve better and behave in an acceptable manner.
- Moderate right syndrome and formulation of behavioural expectations for teachers and learners will improve school discipline. In view of the above, a Code of Conduct for learners and staff is very important in all schools. It serves as an important stepping-stone towards fostering a culture of learning, mutual respect, accountability, tolerance, co-operation, personal development within the school and its surroundings.
- Teacher effectiveness training leads to increase in classroom activity engagements of the students
- The school should employ specialist guidance counsellors to help learners with behaviour problems in order to reduce behaviour problems in the classrooms
- Teachers should create opportunities for learners with learning problems to excel in other areas, for example giving the learners chances to play sports instead of concentrating on academic subjects alone. Poor class achievement an academic subjects may lead to behaviour problems
- Good teacher/parent communication should be enhanced and allow the two sides to work as a team. The teachers and the parents should be partners in education so that standards, rules, norms and values are the same at home as at school.

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