



# Bully victimization among adolescents in the Western Cape: Does frequency make a difference?



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# Introduction

- Many SA children and adolescents are exposed to neighbourhood, domestic and school violence (“baseline violence”)
- Does bullying become an acceptable way of social interaction between peers?
- Infrequent, occasional bullying considered harmless, “normal” peer interaction – and ignored
- Accepted definition focuses on frequent, repeated bullying over time only
- Masks whether infrequent, occasional bullying is harmful



# Introduction

- Prevalence of bully victimization varies world wide
- Higher in LMIC compared to HIC
- Very few published SA studies
- Only 2 studies examined infrequent, occasional bullying (Netherlands & USA)
- Documented associations:
  - Depression
  - Unhappiness / sadness
  - Suicide ideation
  - Anxiety / PTSD
  - Violent behaviour & weapon carrying

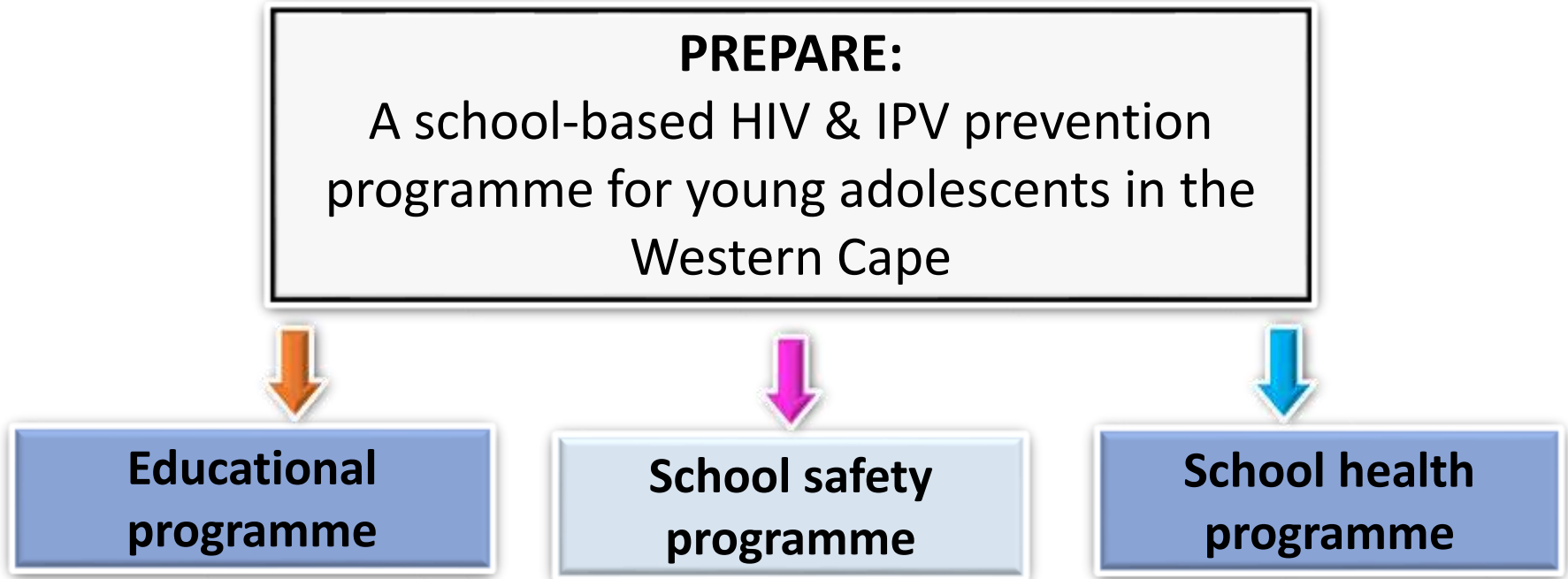


# Aims

- To report the prevalence of
  - Infrequent direct & indirect bully victimization
  - Frequent direct & indirect bully victimization
- To examine the relationship between
  - Infrequent & frequent bully victimization and mental health difficulties, suicidal acts & anti-social behaviours



One of the PREPARE schools



- Data from the **PREPARE** longitudinal, cohort
  - 21 control schools
  - 1715 Grade 8 students



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Full colour “teen  
magazine”  
questionnaires

- Self-completed survey at baseline, 6 & 12 months
- We used 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> follow-up survey data



Classroom-based  
questionnaire completion



# Measures

- Eight items – frequency (not at all, once, 2-3 times, 4 or more times) of direct and indirect **bully victimization**:
  - Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale
- One item – **suicidal acts**
  - Tried to harm self that could have resulted in death
- Three items – **anti-social behaviours**
  - Involved in physical fighting, theft, vandalism
- **Mental health difficulties**
  - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) for 11-17 year olds



# Measures

- Direct bullying
  - Punching, kicking
- Verbal
  - Calling names / swearing at
- Indirect bullying
  - Made others not talk to me
- Recoded bullying:
  - Not victimized (none or 1 behaviour);
  - Victimized (any 1 behaviour  $\geq$  2 times);
  - Occasional (any 1 behaviour, 2-3 times)
  - Frequent (any 1 behaviour,  $\geq$  4 times) in past 6 months



Enacted, physical  
bullying





# Analysis

- Two-tailed Pearson Chi-square tests
  - Differences between boys & girls on bully victimization and SDQ
- Separate logistic regression models were run for each type of bullying
- All regression models were adjusted for differences in age, gender and SES

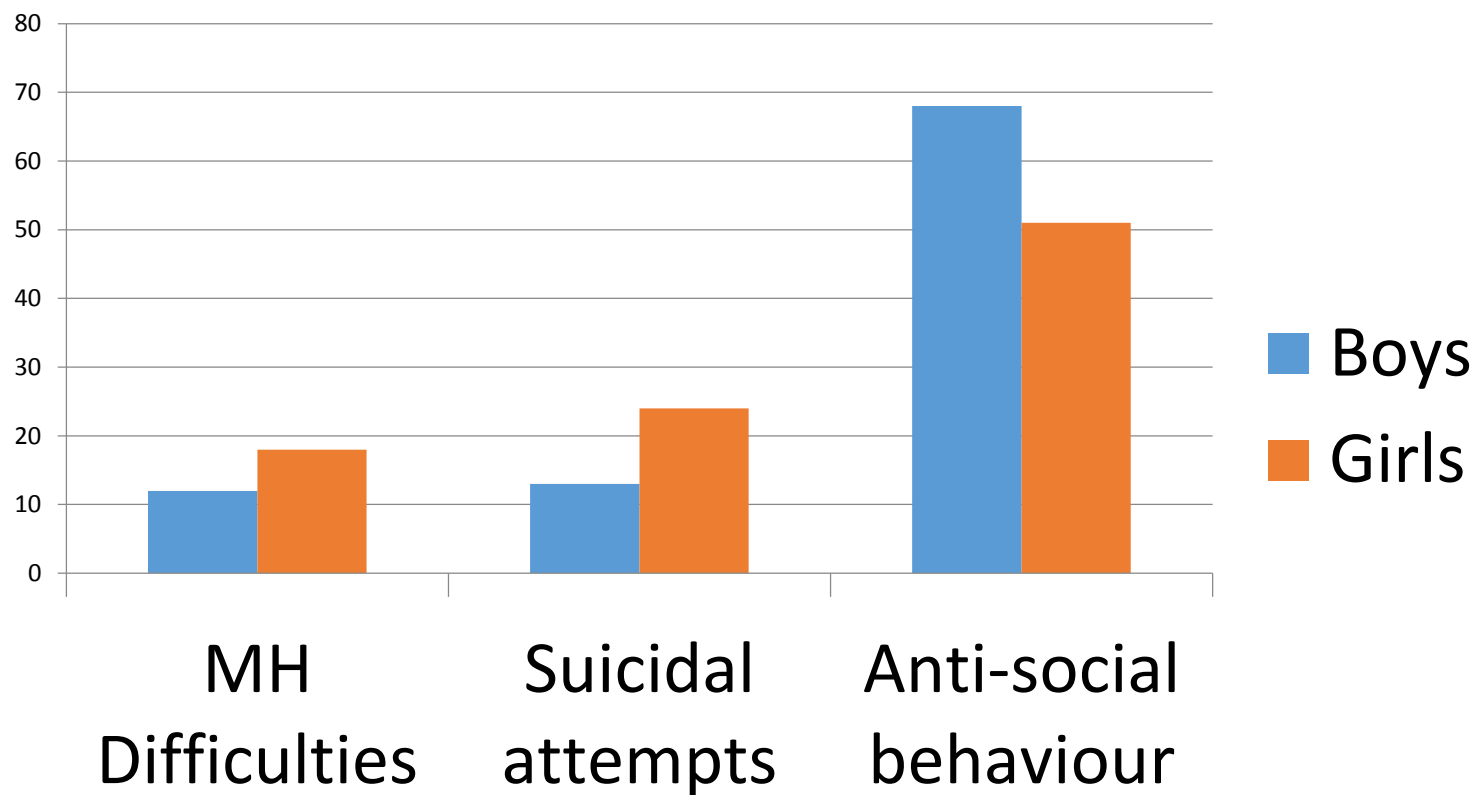


# Results

- Mean age: 13.7 years. 38% = boys
- 23.4% reported bully victimization
  - Any 1 behaviour,  $\geq 2$  times in past 6 months
- 17% reported occasional, infrequent bullying
  - Any 1 behaviour, 2 or 3 times in past 6 months
  - Few gender differences
- 15.5% reported frequent bullying
  - Any 1 behaviour,  $\geq 4$  times in past 6 months
  - No gender differences



# Results





## Logistic regression models adjusting for age, gender and SES

	MH DIFFICULTIES	SUICIDAL ATTEMPTS	ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
<b>VERBAL BULLY VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Occasional	✓		✓
Frequent	✓	✓	✓
<b>PHYSICAL BULLY VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Occasional	✓	✓	✓
Frequent	✓	✓	✓
<b>INDIRECT BULLY VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Occasional	✓	✓	✓
Frequent	✓	✓	✓



## CONCLUSIONS

- Does bullying have a unique ‘stress signal’ that is distinct from other forms of violence?
- Does baseline violence have a priming effect that might explain why even occasional bullying leads to mental health adversity?
- Does bullying contribute to an ‘additive model’, where even occasional bullying might be the ‘last straw’ that leads to mental health adversity?
- Revisit the impact of low frequency bullying.
- The accepted definition of bully victimization may need to include infrequent bullying.



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  - Thereza Bothma



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## Logistic regression models (OR & 95%CI), adjusting for age, gender and SES

	MH DIFFICULTIES	SUICIDAL ATTEMPTS	ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
<b>VERBAL BULLY VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Occasional	2.34** (1.26-4.33)		2.03*** (1.41-2.93)
Frequent	2.91*** (1.65-5.12)	2.70*** (1.81-4.01)	1.99*** (1.38-2.87)
<b>PHYSICAL BULLY VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Occasional	2.75** (1.34-5.66)	2.05* (1.18-3.58)	4.05** (2.19-7.46)
Frequent	3.44*** (1.75-6.78)	3.13*** (1.80-5.45)	3.02*** (1.70-5.35)
<b>INDIRECT BULLY VICTIMIZATION</b>			
Occasional	1.98* (1.01-3.91)	2.41*** (1.52-3.81)	3.16*** (1.97-5.06)
Frequent	3.83*** (2.09-7.04)	2.92*** (1.79-4.77)	2.81*** (1.72-4.59)

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001