EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF SCHOOL BULLYING

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Research on bullying has grown noticeably and is coupled with a rise in the development of anti-bullying programmes. Educator intervention is at the core of most of these programmes. Yet learners claim that educators are often unaware of bullying behaviour and/or are unwilling to intervene. Educators' understanding of school bullying may impact on their willingness to become part of anti-bullying programmes. Against the background of the foregoing the aim of the paper is to investigate educators understanding of bullying. The paper presents a discourse analysis of 81 South African educators' responses to open ended survey questions on bullying. The surveys were completed by educators who were furthering their studies at the University of the Free State, South Africa, during 2012. Using a poststructural approach the following bullying discourses were found: (1) the vilification of the bully, which portrays the bully as an unsavoury character, (2) the resistance discourse, which emphasise the victims' attempts to resist the bullying, (3) the submission discourse, which provides reasons why the victim was unable to prevent the bullying, (4) the judgemental discourse which portrays the victim as responsible for what has happened, (5) bullying as physical violence discourse which stresses the physical violence nature of bullying, (6) the gendered discourse which portrays bullies and/or victims as either gender deviants, or not adequately performing ideals of masculinity and femininity, and finally (7) the racial discourse which stresses the racial differences between bullies and their victims. The discourses show that bullying is frequently seen as "natural" and even condoned. Cultural and legal foundations of the discourses are discussed in the paper. The paper explores the implications of the bullying discourses for educator education programmes in South Africa with the responsibility of preparing educators effectively to address bullying in schools