

## **An Investigation into the Involvement of Secondary School Pupils in Anti-Social Activities in Mutare Urban Schools in Zimbabwe**

**Regis Fanuel Gutuza<sup>1</sup>, Mufunani Tungu Khosa<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Arts and Education, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

### **\*Corresponding Author:**

Regis Fanuel Gutuza

Email: [tichmap@gmail.com](mailto:tichmap@gmail.com)

---

**Abstract:** The major aim of this study was to examine the extent to which school pupils in Mutare urban secondary schools engage on anti-social activities using the qualitative methodology. The sample was made up of 200 pupils from 8 of the secondary schools which were purposively selected. The study used the quantitative methodology and employed the descriptive survey design. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The study revealed that school youths in Mutare urban schools are heavily involved in anti-social activities. The study also revealed that anti-social activities have negative effects on class performance and discipline of pupils. Teachers should work closely with parents to curb the prevalence of anti-social activities by children in secondary schools. Elders both in the schools and within the wider community should behave in exemplary ways in order for the young pupils to evaluate good habits and actions.

**Keywords:** Anti-social activities, secondary schools, involvement, pupils, urban

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Zimbabwe, as in many developing and developed countries, anti-social activities are rampant across many spheres of life, and schools, particularly secondary schools are equally affected [1]. A number of incidents that have shocked the nation are reported almost weekly in popular papers and media outlets that involve school pupils engaging in anti-social activities. For example, just a few days ago in Harare, (Zimbabwe's capital city) all the major papers reported an incident where about forty school pupils were arrested when they were reportedly partying without clothes [24,25]. In schools themselves, as Nderezima [2] postulates, students who often engage in numerous anti-social behaviours such as fighting, bullying, sexual promiscuity, theft and vandalism of school property are most likely to be under the influence of drugs or alcoholism. Engaging in anti-social activities in schools deprives pupils the adequate time to concentrate on their studies; and this may affect negatively their performance [3]. Apart from affecting pupils' academic performance, anti-social activities in schools may develop in the young adults very bad habits like violent behaviour, promiscuity and general disorders [27]. It is on account of this information that this study set out to investigate the involvement of secondary school pupils in anti-social activities in order to come up with measures to mitigate the effects of these behaviours.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Anti-social behaviours are disruptive acts characterised by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others [4]. According to Larson [5], anti-social behaviors exist along a severity continuum and included repeated violations of social rules, defiance of authority and of the rights of others, deceitfulness, theft and reckless disregard for self and others. Anti-social activities among youth are a major national concern and about one out of every three students drop out of school due to anti-social activities and these are reported to be most acute among urban youths particularly boys who commit higher rates of these activities especially, those coming from poor family backgrounds irrespective of race [5].

According to Adams [6] anti-social activities include the following: abusive verbal behaviour, begging, damage to property, drug and alcohol abuse, improper dressing, handling stolen property, harassing others, prostitution and pregnancy, bullying, internet abuse, pornography, pre-marital sex as well as vandalism and graffiti among others. Anti-social activities are recurrent violations of socially prescribed patterns of behaviour usually involving defiance of adult authority and violation of social norms and morals of society [7].

As Ellias [8] postulates, there are a number of factors that contribute towards anti-social behaviours

---

within the home, community, school and media that require the collective efforts of all stakeholders to address. However, as Farrington (2005) posits, aversive or punitive environments predictably promote anti-social activities such as substance misuse and aggression among others. According to Gibson [9] such symptoms are associated with poor performance and academic achievement and school failure.

Environmental experiences such as child maltreatment and domestic violence are anti-social activities and the victims themselves are likely to be perpetrators in most cases [10]. These experiences in youth going to school may contribute to both poor school performance and anti-social activities. On the other hand as Roach [11] observes, there could be genetic influence on anti-social activities as it is highly likely that the offspring of anti-social parents will both inherit genetic predispositions to anti-social home environment, a situation termed gene-environment correlation. Students coming from this environment are most likely to engage in school vandalism, substance abuse, aggressiveness and malicious communication among others.

Empirical evidence also indicates that teachers too often emphasise punitive measures to manage student behaviour. As DuPront and Humphreys [12] states, this overemphasis occurs with many students, but disproportionately with males, minorities, developmentally delayed students and students from low income homes. As Mpofu [1] further amplifies, teachers' disapproval statements directed at developmentally delayed students have been observed to out-number approval statements. Teachers in low income areas more frequently endorse the use of punishment and the removal of students and similarly school youths from low income homes report a greater number and variety of school imposed penalties that tend to be disproportionate to the offences and humiliating in their nature.

Another factor that influences individuals especially young people is what Borland [13] terms socio-cultural context which is characterized by rundown urban environment neighbourhood, upheaval, lack of recreational facilities, existence of gangs or organized groups for drug distribution, prostitution among others. Menard [26] highlights the influence of peer groups to which individuals belong and states that having delinquent friends usually predicts the development of anti-social activities as these friends influence the adolescents' own delinquent behaviour inciting it on some occasions and modeling it on others.

The media is also identified as one of the variables that play a critical role in the development of anti-social behaviours by pupils. As Schwarz (2012) postulates, violence of lesser or greater nature is present

in the media to such an extent that it is presented to people as normal, immediate, and a frequent aspect of daily life. Students take in the impact of these images directly, while the responsibility is left to parents and educators to help them discern the media message and above all to be critical with the information being transmitted. Farrington [14] states that in the United States of America by the time a child reach the age of eighteen (18), he/she will have witnessed more than 200 000 violent acts on television.

A research conducted by the African Health Sciences [15] revealed that pupils with behavioural disorders had poor academic performance. Pupils with anti-social behaviour underachieved more than others. The study also revealed that there was a strong correlation between delinquency and illiteracy. As Knight and Levy [16] observe, failure level of academic tasks result in significant increases in problem behaviours for some students, and poor scholastic experiences are significant causes of delinquent and disruptive behaviour.

### **Statement of the problem**

Deviant acts perpetrated by students in urban secondary schools are a great cause for concern as these acts may be responsible for the poor performance of pupils. In light of the challenges of anti-social behaviour exhibited by some pupils in secondary schools, it becomes very necessary to the investigate exact magnitude of this phenomenon.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following sub-questions:

- To what extent are urban secondary school pupils involved in anti-social activities?
- What is the relationship between anti-social activities and school performance?
- Does gender contribute to anti-social activities in school youths?
- How can anti-social activities be curbed among secondary school pupils?

### **Significance of the study**

The importance of the study lies in the fact that school authorities would be enlightened through empirical evidence about the magnitude of the prevalence of anti-social activities in their schools in order that they may take practical mitigatory measures to curb the phenomenon.

### **Limitations of the study**

Pupils, who are the respondents in this study, may not reveal all the information about themselves and their school mates as they may not be sure about their fate as anti-social activities are punishable both as school and at home. The use of questionnaires which

promote anonymity was expected to mitigate this limitation.

### Delimitations of the study

The study was confined to Mutare Urban in Manicaland Province in Eastern Zimbabwe. The sample comprised 200 pupils composed of 102 boys and 98 girls. Views used were those from secondary pupils and those from teachers, heads of schools, parents, police, health personnel and community leaders were not solicited for this study.

### METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative paradigm. The quantitative methodology was found useful because it is statistics driven and can provide a lot of information [17]. It is also relatively easier to compile the data onto a chart or graph because of the numbers that are made available. As Cohen and Manion [18] postulate, another advantage of quantitative research is that the research can be conducted on a large scale and give a lot more information as far as value is concerned. However, one major weakness of the quantitative methodology is that numbers change often [19]. So if research is conducted on a statistical level, then it would have to be conducted much more frequently to help balance out the numbers [20]. The study employed purposive sampling because those people who are unsuitable for the sampling study or who do not fit the bill are eliminated; only the most suitable candidates remain [21]. The researchers used a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents and close-ended questions enabled the researcher to collect pre-determined respondents' opinions regarding the studied phenomenon [22]. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the selected schools and collected them after two weeks through the heads of the schools.

### Presentation of data

**Table-1: Profiles of respondents by sex (N=200)**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	102	51
Female	98	49
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

The sample was made up of 51% boys and 49% girls. The significance of this statistic is that there were more boys than girls in the Advanced Level classes in the secondary schools studied.

**Table-2: Responses to the question: Are pupils at your school involved in anti-social activities (N=200)**

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	196	98
No	4	2
Not sure	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 above shows that the overwhelming majority of the respondents (98%) indicated that pupils at their schools were involved in anti-social activities (98%) and only 2% stated that pupils were not engaging in anti-social activities.

**Table-3: Responses to the question: "Which are the most common cases of anti-social behaviours that pupils at your school engage in? (N=200)**

Nature of anti-social behaviour	Frequency	Percentage
Rudeness	24	12
Drug abuse and alcohol	72	36
Prostitution	20	10
Vandalism and graffiti	22	11
Improper dressing	20	10
Bullying	32	16
Others	10	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

The most common anti-social behaviour recorded was drug abuse and alcohol taking (36%), followed by bullying (16%), rudeness was third with (12%), and vandalism and graffiti at (11%). Prostitution and improper dressing each accounted for 10% of the responses and finally other behaviours were 5%.

**Table-4: Responses to the question: "Do pupils who are not well behaved perform better than those who are well behaved? (N=200)**

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	8
No	184	92
Not sure	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Respondents clearly indicated that anti-social behaviours did not help students to perform better in their school work (92%).

**Table-5: Responses to the question: Who are more likely to engage in anti-social behaviours between boys and girls? (N=200)**

Anti-social behavior by sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	156	78
Female	44	22
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of the respondents (78%) indicated that boys were more likely to be involved in anti-social activities than girls. Only 22% indicated that girls were more likely to engage in anti-social activities.

**Table-6: Responses to the question: “From which home background do students who take part in anti-social activities come? (N=200)**

Home background	Frequency	Percentage
Well-up families	90	45
Poor families	110	55
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Students from poor families were said to be more likely to engage in anti-social activities at school than those from rich families (55% and 45% respectively). However, the small variance (10%) indicates that pupils from both backgrounds engage in these activities (anti-social).

**Table-7: Responses to the question: Are teachers and the head aware of the anti-social activities done by students? (N=200)**

Responses categories	Frequency	Percentage
To a great extent	10	5
To a moderate extent	36	18
To a lesser extent	42	21
Not at all	112	56
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Most respondents believe that teachers and heads seem not to be aware of some of the anti-social activities perpetrated by students in their schools. A few thought that teachers were quite aware of these anti-social activities.

**Table-8: Responses to the question: Are teachers and heads doing enough to stop pupils from engaging in anti-social activities? (N=200)**

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	24	12
Agree	30	15
Disagree	48	24
Strongly disagree	94	47
Not sure	4	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of the respondents indicated that teachers and heads were not doing enough to stop pupils from engaging in anti-social activities (71%). Those who thought their teachers and heads were doing enough constituted 29%.

## DISCUSSION

Evidence from the study reveals that the majority of pupils in the secondary schools are involved in anti-social activities. Both boys and girls overwhelmingly stated that most pupils were engaging in unacceptable activities. The most common cases of anti-social behaviours included drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, rudeness, vandalism and graffiti, prostitution, improper dressing, among others. This information

tallies with observations by Ryan and Bernard [23] who state that anti-social activities among youth are a major national concern in most countries. Adams [6] further adds that anti-social activities include the following: abusive verbal behavior, begging, damage to property and drug and alcohol abuse, improper dressing, handling of stolen property, harassing others, prostitution and pregnancy, bullying, internet abuse, pornography and graffiti among others.

Pupils are aware that those pupils who engage in anti-social behaviours experience serious challenges when it comes to academic work. Pupils are therefore, not convinced that wayward behaviour is a sign of wisdom as some people allege [9]. This finding tallies with observations by Farrington [14] who posits that the learner who engages in anti-social behaviours may experience deterioration in scholastic performance, achieves low grades and may display hostile, defiant and unco-operative behaviour towards others in the school.

Boys were said to be the ones more likely to engage in anti-social activities than girls. This finding tally with Ellias’ (2012) observations that adolescent boys commit the majority of violent crimes with a prevalence ration in comparison to girls of from 3:1 to 12:11 depending upon the exact type of violent offence reported. Boys also have higher drug use than girls [1]. However, as Roach [11] advises, while boys commit more anti-social crimes than girls, the rate of girls charged with violent crimes has increased twice as fast as boys and in recent years, female offenders are entering the juvenile justice system at a younger age at a higher rate.

Pupils from poor families were said to be more likely to engage in anti-social activities at school and outside school than those from affluent backgrounds. There was a very marginal variance though as quite a number of pupils indicated that pupils from affluent backgrounds also were likely to engage in anti-social activities. This implies that the home economic background may not be a major variable as far as engaging in anti-social behaviour is concerned. As Borland [13] argues, the socio-cultural context which is characterized by rundown urban environment, neighbourhood, upheaval, lack of recreational facilities, existence of gangs or organized groups for drug distribution, prostitution among others are the major contributors of anti- social behaviour patterns.

Pupils also believe that their teachers and heads were not largely aware of the magnitude of the prevalence of anti-social activities at their schools. This could be due to the fact that pupils engage in anti-social activities away from the eyes of the school authorities. As Roach [11] advises, teachers should minimize periods when students are left alone within and outside

---

the classrooms as this provides them with opportunities for mischief.

Teachers and heads had no consistent practical strategies to curb anti-social behaviours by students. It was business as usual as most schools seem to view anti-social activities as a natural reality which cannot be removed from the school set-up. As Adams [6] postulates, school system efforts can help divert most school pupils from anti-social activities, keeping them in school and out of the juvenile justice system. Gibson [9] suggests a three-tier strategy of prevention and intervention. This includes primary prevention, where school wide activities to prevent risks of anti-social patterns which include teaching conflict resolution, emotional literacy and management skills on school wide or universal basis; secondary prevention involves targeting students at risk for more individualized prevention activities; and tertiary prevention which is a long term intensive service for students and persistent patterns of anti-social behaviour, delinquency, violence and destructiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS

In view of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- School pupils in Mutare urban secondary schools engage in a myriad of anti-social behaviours, but notably in drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, rudeness, prostitution, among others.
- Pupils are aware that engaging in anti-social behaviours has serious negative repercussions on academic performance.
- Boys were more likely to engage in anti-social behaviours, although the number of girls who misbehaved was quite significant.
- Those pupils from poor backgrounds tended to feature prominently in anti-social behaviour, though a big number of pupils from affluent homes also engaged in mischief implying that family background may not be a key variable in influencing misbehaviour.
- Most of the incidents of anti-social behaviour go unnoticed by school authorities making it very difficult for them to deal with these cases.
- Schools had no practical strategies to eliminate anti-social behaviours by pupils. It is business as usual.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward by the researcher:

- Schools should create structures that detect mischief expeditiously and promptly in order to nip anti-social behaviours in the bud.
- Proper early childhood development should be promoted by all institutions charged with

socializing children, starting from the home, the church, community and most importantly, the schools.

- Good behavior should be consistently reinforced when it occurs by praising or rewarding the good pupil.
- Schools should have robust guidance and counseling programmes to educate pupils about the dangers of engaging in anti-social activities.
- Schools should invite police officers from the Public Relations Unit to provide lectures and guidance to pupils periodically in order to complement the schools' efforts.
- Heads, teachers and adults, who interact on a regular basis with pupils, should themselves exhibit exemplary behaviour in order for the young adults to emulate good behaviour. For example, smoking and drinking in front of pupils by both teachers and parents may send the message that these are good things to do.

## REFERENCES

1. Mpfu S; Causes of indiscipline in Zimbabwean Schools. Harare: College Press, 2011.
2. Nderezina B; What teachers say about indiscipline. Harare: College Press, 2008.
3. Chikoko B; Discipline in schools. Harare: ZPH, 2013.
4. Frick PJ; Developmental pathways to conduct disorder: Implications for serving youth who show severe aggressive antisocial behaviour. *Psychology in the Schools*, 2004; 13(4): 120-145.
5. Larson J; Addressing aggressive behavior in secondary schools. New York: Guilford Press, 2005.
6. Adams JE; Understanding adolescence: Current development in adolescence psychology. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2006.
7. Oni AA; Peer group pressure as a determinant of adolescent social adjustment in Nigeria. *Asian Pacific Journal of Educators and Education*, 2010; 25(10): 189-202.
8. Ellias B; Anti-social behavior in schools. London: MacMillan, 2012.
9. Gibson T; Tackling anti-social behavior. Sunderland: Sunderland City Council, 2011.
10. Brodinsky B; Student discipline, problems and solutions. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 2010.
11. Roach SL; Law and social change. Finders: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008.
12. Humphrey J; Antisocial behavior and conduct disorders in children. London: National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2011.

- 
13. Borland T; Anti-social behavior in Dorchester. Dorchester: Longman, 2011.
  14. Farrington DP; Early prevention of adult antisocial behavior. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2005.
  15. Makerere Medical School; Academic performance of school children with behavioural disorders. Uyo: Longman, 2010.
  16. Knight GP, Levy SR; Handbook of child psychology, social and emotional behaviour. Child Development, 2007, 48(5): 110-118.
  17. Bell J; Doing your research methods. Buckingham: Open University, 2013.
  18. Cohen L, Manion L; Research methods in education. London: Routledge, 2005.
  19. Anderson C; Research in education. London: DP Publications, 2011.
  20. Ary DJ, Razaviah A; Introduction to research in education. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovamich, 2012.
  21. Kumar FS; Research in education settings. London: University of London, 2008.
  22. Blumberg C; Research methods. Boston: Irwin, 2010.
  23. Ryan GW, Bernard HR; Techniques to identify themes. Field Methods, 2009; 15(1): 55-109.
  24. Daily News; Pupils arrested for partying. Harare: Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (RIT), 2013.
  25. Herald; School pupils arrested in an all night party. Harare: Zimpapers, 2015.
  26. Menard S; Antisocial behavior in schools. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
  27. Madziyire NC; Supervision of educational personnel. Harare: Zimbabwe Open University, 2010.