

## Suicide Among Rural Primary School Learners in Zimbabwe: An Epidemic in Need of Mitigation

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### Abstract

Suicide among rural primary school learners Zimbabwe has reached epidemic proportions, yet there is dearth. However, the causes and potential mitigation strategies are still limited. This article aims to address that gap by exploring Zimbabwe rural primary learners' perspectives. Using a socio-cultural theoretical framework, this qualitative study will conduct focus group with 12 learners from Mahoto rural area, Masvingo North Constituency to elicit learners' lived experiences and suicide motivations. The data will undergo thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. Initial findings suggest that academic struggles without access to counselling drive many rural primary school learners to end their lives prematurely. This highlights the need for Zimbabwe's Government, through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to urgently deploy professional counsellors. By giving voice to the disadvantaged rural learner suicide epidemic firsthand, this study seeks actionable strategies to stem the tragedy of learners' suicide and promote the well-being of Zimbabwean rural learners.

**Keywords:** *counselling; learners; rural primary schools; suicide; Zimbabwe*

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### INTRODUCTION

There is a scarcity of literature on the prevalence and strategies to mitigate suicide among rural primary school going adolescents aged 7-14 years in Zimbabwe hence, this study intent to address this gap. Therefore, there is need to unpack the causes of suicide and mitigation measures of suicide among rural primary school learners aged 7-14. Suicide happens throughout the one's lifespan and was the fourth leading cause of death among young people age 15–29 worldwide in 2019 (World Health Organization, 2022). On the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the WHO launched a campaign to raise awareness and push for collective action to stop suicide prevention in the African region including Zimbabwe, which has the world's highest rates of death by suicide (World Health Organization, 2022). In Zimbabwe, death by suicide was ranked as 19<sup>th</sup> cause of death in 2018 after 1 641 people killed themselves (Herald et al., 2020). To show devastating effects of suicide in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Republic Police reported that, in the first three months of 2019, there were 142 people who committed suicide. Suicide cases are on increase in Zimbabwe among both male and females - parents, teachers, learners and there is an urgent need to collectively deal with causes of suicide (Chidarikire, 2024). Now in 2023, the death by suicide in Zimbabwe is ranked as number 4 by Gonye and Mugugunyeki [2023] whereas in 2018, suicide

as cause of death was ranked number 19 (Herald et al., 2020), this drastic movement from being number 19 to number 4 is highly shocking and devastating.

In Mozambique, Seudi et al [2023], found that adolescent suicidal behaviours are causing public health problems in Mozambique. There is an increase in the number of adolescent learners.

Mozambique who died due to suicide. On the other hand, the study on the indicators and prevalence of suicide in Botswana shows that it is experiencing devastating effects of suicide cases among both male and female primary and secondary school learners (Forty et al., 2023). In South Africa, Kuzwayo, Taylor and Connolly [2022] in South Africa rural school in KwaZulu-Natal found that, The prevalence of suicide attempts among SA learners is high and is influenced by multiple factors, including the high-risk environments in which they live and a range of risk behaviours. Similar risk factors, such as physical violence and drug abuse, were found to be associated with suicide plans and suicide attempts in previous studies. In Philippines, Ramos [2023:1] found that, “A total of 404 young learners in various parts of the country took their own lives and 2,147 others attempted suicide during Academic Year 2021-2022 when most schools were still shuttered because of the pandemic.” The above statistics of learners who commit suicide and attempted to commit suicide in Philippines were due to many issues affecting their mental health such as poor academic performance, poverty and shortage of learning materials. The analysis of the above literature shows that Zimbabwe and many countries in Southern Africa and beyond are experience high rates of suicide among learners between the age of 10- 29 due to drug abuse, academic failure among others. Also there are interventions that, the Governments of Zimbabwe, South Africa and other nations cited above are implementing to mitigate suicide among learners. However, there little research especially in Zimbabwe on the causes of suicide and ways to mitigate suicide among rural primary school learners aged 7-14.

### **Statement of the problem**

Suicide among primary school learners is a growing concern, particularly in rural areas of Zimbabwe. The sudden increase in suicide in Zimbabwe rural primary schools has become a cause of concern as many learners are dying. The purpose of this article is to explore the perspectives of learners on the causes of suicide among rural primary school learners in Zimbabwe and propose effective strategies to mitigate this distressing issue. By understanding the underlying factors contributing to suicide and implementing appropriate interventions, it is possible to create a safer and more supportive environment for vulnerable children in Zimbabwe rural learning spaces. In order to unpack this issue under discussion, we will respond to two critical questions: *What are the causes of suicide among rural primary school learners in Zimbabwe and what are some of the effective strategies that can be employed to mitigate suicide cases in Zimbabwe?*

### **Theoretical lens**

When examining learners' perceptions on the causes and ways to mitigate suicide in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe through a sociocultural theoretical lens, it is important to consider the social and cultural factors that shape their understanding and experiences. Firstly, Learners perceptions of suicide can be influenced by their social interactions with peers, family members, and teachers. Peer relationships play a significant role in shaping attitudes and beliefs (Phillips et al., 2022). Furthermore, social support networks within the school community can positively impact learners' well-being and resilience, potentially mitigating suicide risk. Secondly, cultural norms and beliefs prevalent in rural Zimbabwe can shape learners' understanding of suicide and can cause learners to commit suicide especially if one kills a person, Zimbabwe cultural norms and beliefs of being haunted by the spirit of a dead person, may led the killer to commit suicide (Chidarikire, 2024). It is essential to consider the cultural context to avoid imposing Western perspectives on mental health issues. In Zimbabwe, communal values and traditional beliefs often prioritize collective welfare and emphasize the importance of community support. Understanding and respecting these cultural beliefs is crucial when developing strategies to address suicide prevention in rural primary schools. Thirdly, stigma surrounding mental health issues is a

significant barrier to seeking help and support. Learners may perceive suicide as a taboo topic due to cultural and social stigmas associated with mental health challenges (Shumba et al., 2020).

Lastly, in rural areas in Zimbabwe often face socio economic challenges that can impact learners' well-being. Poverty, limited access to healthcare and mental health services, inadequate infrastructure, and high levels of unemployment can increase stress levels and contribute to feelings of hopelessness among learners (Chidarikire, 2024). Addressing these socioeconomic factors and providing support systems such as counselling services, mentorship programs, and community-based initiatives can help mitigate suicide risk.

Against this theoretical framework and literature review backdrop, the main aim of the research is to explore learners' perceptions on the causes and ways to mitigate suicide cases among rural primary school learners in Mahoto rural areas, Masvingo North Constituency, Zimbabwe. The objectives of this article are: 1. To establish the causes of suicide among rural primary school learners in Zimbabwe and 2. To understand their views on the solutions to mitigate suicide among rural primary school learners. In line with 'Nothing for Us Without Us' and power of dialogue (Maila & Ross, 2018) aver that, for any transformation, problem identification and ways to mitigate challenges to take place the marginalised community members such as rural learners' voices should be heard through active engagements. Consequently, this article gives disadvantaged rural primary school learners a platform to articulate their perceptions on causes of suicide and solutions.

## **METODE**

### **Research Approach and Design**

This article is located within an interpretive, qualitative paradigm. In the context of learners' perceptions on causes and mitigating strategies of suicide, interpretive research would aim to explore their subjective experiences, beliefs, and meanings attached to these topics. It seeks to uncover the underlying meanings, values, and social constructions that shape their perceptions rather than seeking generalizable statistical data (Maila & Ross, 2018).

### **Population and Sample**

The target population of this study is all grades 5-7 rural primary school learners aged between 7 to 14 in Mahoto, Masvingo North Constituency. This community is regarded as poor because it has poor services infrastructure such as no qualified registered counsellors, social workers, one clinic, high unemployment, high reliance on Government and donor support, experiencing severe drought and this affects their subsistence farming (Grimsrud et al., 2023). The study of the causes of suicide and ways to mitigate suicide among Mahoto rural primary schools learners involves examining the factors that contribute to suicidal tendencies among this specific population and identifying strategies to prevent such occurrences. The study aims to provide insights into the unique challenges faced by learners in rural primary schools and propose interventions to address these issues effectively. Mahoto rural primary schools refer to educational institutions located in rural areas of Mahoto, which include multiple schools catering to learners from surrounding villages or communities. This sample aims to represent a diverse range of learners from different backgrounds and experiences.

### **Research instruments**

We used the Open-ended questionnaires written in vernacular language which we view have advantageous when gathering data from rural primary school learners on causes and ways to reduce suicide. Three experts in language and suicide were requested to read the questionnaires. The experts were requested to check if all question items were clear and captured all rural primary school learners' view on causes and ways to mitigate suicide. The experts confirmed that the questionnaires were valid hence their suitability for this study. Below are some of the advantages of using open-ended questions written in participants' vernacular language:

Firstly, using vernacular language in questionnaires helps to overcome language barriers and ensures effective communication with rural primary school learners. It allows learners to express their thoughts and opinions more freely, leading to more accurate and meaningful responses (Berek et al., 2023). Secondly, vernacular language questionnaires are culturally relevant to rural communities. By using language familiar to the learners, the questionnaires can resonate with their experiences, beliefs, and values, which can result in more authentic and context-specific responses (Agustina et al., 2019).

Thirdly, when questionnaires are presented in vernacular language, learners may feel more comfortable and confident in participating. This can lead to increased response rates and a higher level of engagement, as learners are more likely to complete the questionnaire when they understand the questions and feel that their voices are being heard (Gao, 2011). The open-ended questions in vernacular language allow for more detailed and nuanced responses and learners can express themselves in a more natural and comprehensive manner. This can provide researchers with deeper insights into the causes of suicide and potential ways to reduce it within the specific cultural and linguistic context of rural primary school learners (Thorsson et al., 2018). Learners may be more inclined to provide honest and genuine responses when they are comfortable with the language used in the questionnaire, leading to a more accurate representation of their experiences and perspectives (Agustina et al., 2019)

### **Procedure**

The researchers explained the purpose of the study to all participants. After the explanation, all participants answered a questionnaire. Out of the 12 questionnaires distributed, 12 usable responses were returned and that translated to 100 % questionnaire retention was written in an unclear handwriting. The participants answered these questionnaires in a classroom on Saturday from 11am to 1pm as per participants and researchers' agreement.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data (Annisa, 2015). In the context of analysing rural learners' perceptions on causes of suicide and ways to mitigate it, thematic analysis can provide valuable insights into their perspectives and experiences. We followed the thematic analysis general process steps as proposed by Braun and Carke [2006]: (1) Coding Process: During the coding process, it is important to maintain consistency and transparency. Once you have generated a set of initial codes, look for connections and patterns among them. Group similar codes together to form broader themes (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2017). Themes should reflect the most salient or significant ideas present in the data. We used a coding framework to manage our codes. Review the identified themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and capture the participants' perspectives. Refine or revise the themes as needed, merging or splitting them to create a coherent and meaningful thematic framework. Provide clear definitions and names for each theme that capture its essence. These definitions should be supported by evidence from the data to maintain rigor and transparency. It can also be helpful to involve multiple researchers or coders to enhance the reliability of the coding process. Regular meetings or discussions among the coding team can help address any discrepancies or disagreements in coding decisions (Creswell, 2017); (2) As researchers, it is crucial to reflect on our own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2017). We kept a reflexive journal to document our thoughts and reflections, and consider how our own perspectives might influence the interpretation of the data (Dube, 2020); (3) Triangulation: investigates beneficial outcomes of human neurofeedback for design suggestions (Mostafavi, 2022); (4) Member checking: we shared our findings with participants and other relevant stakeholders [teachers and counsellors] to ensure the accuracy and validity of our interpretations This process, known as member checking, allows participants and stakeholders to validate or provide feedback on the identified themes and interpretations. It can provide valuable insights and enhance the trustworthiness of our analysis (Chikuvadze, 2023); (5)

Ethical Considerations: throughout the research process, we maintained ethical standards by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants (Dube, 2020). We obtained informed consent, assure participants of their right to withdraw from the study, and ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical and responsible manner (Rodríguez-Vázquez et al., 2015); (6) Reporting: Finally, we wrote a comprehensive report that describes the thematic analysis process and presents the findings (Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2019). The report included a detailed description of the themes, supported by relevant quotes or excerpts from the data. When reporting our thematic analysis, we clearly described the methodology, including the data collection process, coding procedures, and analytical steps taken (Creswell, 2017). In addition, we interpreted the findings in the context of existing literature and theories, highlighting the unique perspectives of rural learners on suicide issues. Thematic analysis is a flexible and iterative approach, allowing for the emergence of new themes or modifications as the researchers delve deeper into the data (Rodríguez-Vázquez et al., 2015).

## HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

### Perceptions on learners regarding causes of suicide among rural primary school learners

Majority of the participants had the knowledge on the causes of suicide among rural primary schools. Following are the top four causes of suicide mentioned in this study by [participants] rural primary school learners which are: academic failure, early and unwanted pregnancies, poverty and bullying. The following written responses from rural primary school participants encapsulated this theme:

#### On academic failure as a catalyst of suicide

Female Learner Participant [6] commented that,

*“I almost committed killed myself three months ago after my father and mother severely assaulted me for failing a weekly Mathematics test. I got 12%, they assaulted me using wood log and wire. I have head and hand injuries due to the assault.”*

In support of the influence of academic failure on the increase of suicide among rural primary schools, the following male Learner Participant [1] averred that:

*“I did not perform well during my end of year tests during 2022 and I only passed one subject Shona [vernacular subject] out of 8 subjects. This was my worst performance since grade 1 and I was devastated. I used to win academic awards due to my academic performance. Other learners laughed at me for failing. I drank rat poison in order to kill myself but was rushed to hospital and received treatment.”*

Academic failure can be a significant stressor for learners, and in some cases, it can contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair that may lead to suicidal ideation or even suicide (Herald et al., 2020). This negative self-perception can lead to feelings of shame, self-blame, and a distorted view of their future prospects. Such thoughts and emotions can contribute to a sense of hopelessness and despair, which are risk factors for suicide (Klonsky et al., 2016). In addition, academic failure can create a sense of social isolation and alienation. Lastly, academic failure can be particularly challenging for individuals who lack effective coping strategies to deal with setbacks. If learners are unable to manage the stress and disappointment associated with academic failure, they may feel trapped and see suicide as a way to escape their circumstances.

#### Early and unwanted pregnancies as another cause of suicide among rural learners

This story shows that rural primary school learners can fall pregnant through rape among others. Commenting on the issue of early and unwanted pregnancies as a push factor to commit suicide among rural primary school learners, female Learner Participant [3] said,

*“My elder sister aged 14 committed suicide by hanging herself in her bedroom hut during the night on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 after she discovered that she was pregnant. She had unprotected sex*

*with our male adult neighbour. The neighbour refused the ownership of the pregnancy. Also our father and aunt severely assaulted her alleging that she was promiscuous.”*

Furthermore, on early and unwanted pregnancies as a driver of suicide, the male Learner Participant [4] opined that,

*“Her sister aged 14 was expelled from one rural Primary school in Mahoto area, Zimbabwe after she fell pregnant in 2019 and she committed suicide by drinking dangerous poison in the bush nearby the school. In Zimbabwe, a pregnant learner will be expelled from school, although recently, there are intentions to allow pregnant learners to pursue their studies.”*

Taking into consideration above narrations by participants, early pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies can have significant psychological and emotional impacts on individuals, including learners, and in some cases, these can be contributing factors to suicide [Gómez-Pomar, Fisher, & Stratton, 2013]. Unplanned or early pregnancies can lead to heightened psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness among rural learners. These emotional challenges can increase the risk of suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviours. According to Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe [2020] teenage girls who experienced an unplanned pregnancy had a higher likelihood of suicidal ideation and attempts compared to their peers who did not experience an unplanned pregnancy. Negative judgment from peers, family, and society can contribute to feelings of shame, guilt, and a sense of being trapped. These negative social experiences can intensify emotional distress and increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviours (Chidarikire et al., 2021).

Lastly, unplanned pregnancies disrupt educational pursuits, leading to additional stress and feelings of failure among learners (Chidarikire, 2024). The fear of academic setbacks, compromised career opportunities, or social exclusion can significantly impact an individual's self-esteem and mental well-being.

### **Poverty leads rural learners to commit suicide**

The participants argued that some of their peers have committed suicide or intended to commit suicide due to poverty that causes them to fail to pay their fees, uniforms, buy food, medication and another necessities.

Male participant Learner [8] has the following views on relationship between poverty and suicide among rural primary school learners,

*“I wanted to kill myself in October 2020 during COVID-19 era after I fell sick due to COVID-19 infection. I had no money to go for treatment due to poverty and my single mother used traditional herbs but to no avail. I was in deep pain and just wished to die to deal with pain. I felt that death was my exit from COVID-19 pain.”*

In addition, female participant learner [10] support the submission that poverty may lead rural learners to resort to commit suicide,

*“In 2018, I dropped out of school after my grandmother aged 78 failed to raise money to pay my fees, uniform and food. She tried to engage school authorities to enroll me under the Basic Education Assistance Module [BEAM] that was created by the Government to pay fees for the disadvantaged learners but the school authorities refused to assist me. I had to drop out of school aged 10 and had to work in neighbours fields and herding cattle. One day, I took a rope out of hopelessness and tried to kill myself, I was rescued a man who was passing through the road near the tree where I had hanged myself.”*

From the above submissions, some learners in rural areas have committed suicide due to poverty. Poverty can have a profound impact on individuals and communities, including rural learners, and can contribute to increased rates of suicide (Bergam et al., 2022). In Zimbabwe rural areas such as Mahoto rural area where this study. In addition, poverty can lead to failure to pay school and examination fees, limited educational opportunities and resources for rural learners. Furthermore, poverty can lead to social isolation and feelings of shame or stigma, particularly in small rural communities where there may be a lack of understanding and support for those experiencing financial hardship (Dube, 2020).

### **Participants agreed that bullying among rural learners causes learners to commit suicide**

The last cause of suicide identified by rural learners who participated in this study is bullying. Female participant [5] noted that,

*“My friend committed suicide after one male learner posted her naked pictures on WhatsApp status. He took these pictures whilst she was bathing in the river. The pictures were downloaded from this male learners’ WhatsApp status and the pictures went viral. Many community members started to laugh at her, she was depressed and then committed suicide.”*

Moreso, one male participant [9] argued that,

*“One learner from our nearby primary committed suicide in the nearby mountain after seven secondary school learners severely assaulted him in the presence of other learners. Other learners were celebrating while he was being beaten for stealing a ballpoint, the offence he denied. Out of fear and shame, he ran into the mountain and died thereafter he hanged himself using a shoe lace.”*

It can be deduced from the above learners’ experiences that, bullying is a serious issue that can have devastating consequences on rural learners, including an increased risk of suicide. Firstly, rural communities often have limited mental health resources and support networks compared to urban areas [Kanyoapa, 2023]. This lack of access to mental health services can leave bullied learners feeling isolated and without adequate help, exacerbating their distress. Secondly, rural learners who experience bullying may be hesitant to disclose their struggles due to fears of being judged or ostracized, which can contribute to a sense of shame and prevent them from seeking support (Klomek et al., 2010). In rural spaces, cyberbullying has become increasingly prevalent in recent years and rural learners may be more susceptible to cyberbullying due to their reliance on digital platforms to connect with peers [Gini, & Espelage, 2014]. The perpetration of online harassment in rural schools and communities can have a profound impact on mental well-being, leading to an increased risk of suicide.

The next section deals with ways to mitigate suicide among rural primary schools. A collective action among learners, parents, teachers, community members, Government, religious groups among others should be implemented to fight suicide causes in rural communities.

On solving academic failure, the participants in rural primary schools offer the following interventions and strategies to mitigating academic failure in their schools: On strategies to mitigate academic failure, male learner participant [2] proposed that,

*“Our school does not have enough classrooms block, we are having afternoon classes because of lack of classrooms. Also classrooms do not have electricity at school to use with computers and reading. Furthermore, there are no libraries in all rural primary schools, which incapacitate us in the learning process. We also do not have resources such as textbooks as in some instances eight learners share one textbook.”*

Another strategy to assist rural learners achieve their academic goals, was proposed by female learner participant [7] who opined that:

*“We kindly request the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to deploy highly qualified teachers to teach in rural schools. There are few qualified Mathematics and English language teachers at my rural school. This negatively affects our teaching and learning process.”*

Parental involvement was also proposed as an intervention strategy by rural primary school learners:

Male learner participant [1] articulated that, parents should help them in their academic journey:

*“I am an orphan learner staying with my form 2 sister aged 16, she and my neighbor female teacher help me in my studies. I have managed to pass all my subjects last term because of their help. They assist me in Mathematics, English language and other subjects that I have challenges. Also, our School Development Committee has recently purchased textbooks, solar lights, drilled a borehole and built two new classroom blocks. This has greatly helped us to learn.”*

From participants' observations cited above, there is a need for Government, Non-Governmental Organisations and other empathetic community members to collectively build physical infrastructure, such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, to create a conducive learning environment. It also includes providing adequate teaching materials and resources such as textbooks (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, many rural primary schools do not have qualified teachers, this has contributed to high failure rate (du Plessis & van Niekerk, 2013). Therefore, there is a need for Government High-quality teacher training programs that focus on pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and classroom management are crucial for improving educational outcomes (Dube & Hlalele, 2018). Those qualified rural teachers currently teaching should get free ongoing professional development opportunities and mentoring support that can enhance their effectiveness (Chikuvadze, 2023). Lastly, there is a need for active rural community engagement and parental involvement in the education process of rural learners (Phillips et al., 2022).

To deal with unwanted early pregnancies in rural schools, the participants proposed the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education among others.

Female Learner Participant [6] requested that there should be compulsory Comprehensive Sexuality Education [CSE]:

*“I know in our culture, it is taboo to teach us young learners about sexuality education but we are being raped, sexually abused among others. We need to be taught about the dangers of unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS causes and ways to mitigate it among others.”*

In addition, Male Learner Participant [1] stated that,

*“Our school authorities such as School Head, School Development Committees and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should organize workshops, awareness campaigns and competitions to discuss ways to deal with early and unwanted pregnancies.”*

The above perceptions by rural learners clearly state that, implementing age-appropriate and culturally sensitive sexuality education programs can help equip young learners with accurate information about reproductive health, contraception, and the consequences of early pregnancy (Grimsrud et al., 2023). In addition, engaging parents, guardians, and community members is crucial in addressing early pregnancies. Involving parents and guardians in these efforts can foster a supportive environment for young rural learners. The collaborations with local health centres, Non-Governmental Organisations [NGOs], and other stakeholders can help establish accessible and youth-friendly services, particularly in rural areas where healthcare facilities may be limited (Phillips et al., 2022).

Addressing bullying in rural primary schools requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders, including educators, parents, and community members. Participants provided the following potential ways to address bullying in rural schools:

On strategies to stop bullying in rural schools, the female Learner Participant [3] proposed that,

*“Our school authorities, parents, teachers, learners and other community members make and effectively implement comprehensive school policies and laws on and against bullying. In addition, learners should be taught about the rules, regulations on bullying and punishment subjected such as being expelled from school to those who engage in bullying. This act as deterrent punishment to learners who may want to engage in bullying.”*

Male learner participant [4] recommended that,

*“There is a need to inform learners through classroom discussions, workshops, awareness campaigns about dangers of bullying such as injuring and killing the victim of bullying. In addition, the schools should have anonymous letter boxes or hotlines that learners can report bullying whilst their identity is protected. Also, the schools should have teachers who are professionally trained to assist victims and perpetrators of bullying. Alternatively, the school authorities should be able to refer the victims and perpetrators of bullying to social workers, police officials among others.”*



The learners urged the school authorities to develop a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that involves the entire school community. This approach should include clear guidelines on prevention, identification, reporting, and intervention strategies. It helps establish a safe and respectful school culture [Gini, & Espelage, 2014]. Educating learners, teachers, parents, and community members about the negative effects of bullying is essential and this can be achieved through workshops, awareness campaigns, and classroom discussions [Hinduja, & Patchin, 2018]. Encourage empathy, kindness, and respect among learners. Schools should implement a confidential reporting system that allows learners to report incidents of bullying safely and ensure that learners feel comfortable reporting bullying and have confidence that appropriate action will be taken [Maila & Rose, 2018]. Rural Schools should offer counselling services to learners who have been bullied and those who engage in bullying behaviour [Chidarikire, 2022]. Provide a safe space where learners can discuss their concerns and receive guidance on conflict resolution and social skills development.

## CONCLUSION

The recent research studies on suicide among learners show that in Zimbabwe rural schools there is a surge in statistics of learners who are committing suicide. As a result, there is an urgent need to unpack the root causes of suicide among rural learners, in this article we found that unwanted early pregnancies, poverty, academic failure and bullying were among the causes. In order to mitigate these root causes of suicide, we recommended that, there is need for collective action by Government, teachers, learners, Non-Governmental Organisations, counsellors among others to make cultural sensitive laws and policies against bullying, provision of fees and learning materials to disadvantaged learners, professional counselling among other strategies to curb suicide among rural learners.

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