

## Bullying in a Learning Space

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**Abstract:** Bullying behavior among school children is a concern which is on the rise across the globe. It can be described as an act of aggression with the intent to humiliate the victim. It impacts both the victim and the perpetrators adversely in terms of their learning abilities and mental health. It has been found to have a strong correlation with violent and aggressive behavior during later years. This behavior needs to be understood as a type of violent behavior by a relatively powerful person on an individual who is weaker.

The socio-emotional impact on the victim have far reaching consequences. The current study was carried out among college students to understand the impact of bullying behavior in their later life. The study covered a sample of 109 adolescent's students. It tries to explore the dimensions of the personality traits both of the victim and the bully and to provide social and emotional interventions for a positive learning environment and preventing mental dysfunctions in adolescents and young adults.

**KEYWORDS:** Bullying, Socio-emotional impact, mental dysfunctions, conflict, personality traits.

### I. Introduction

Bullying in the school space is a major public health problem in India and abroad. It is a considered to be a threat both for the mental health of the bully as well as the victim. A recent study carried out in Indian context found that though our Country accommodates the majority adolescent population in the world but there is scantiness of data on the issue of bullying (Thakkar et.al, 2020). Bullying can be defined as an interaction between two parties, in which a child exerts power over the weaker one. In other words, it's a negative activity from one child to another, usually repetitive in nature. Bullying includes various forms such as hitting, kicking, teasing and taunting the other child (Limber et.al, 1998). Bullying is measured to be a hazard both for the victim as well as the bully. It also impacts the conditions at school including all other children studying there. It also hinders the well-being of the bystanders, in other words the other children at school who witness such experiences or gets to know about it. A research study reported that witnessing bullying can develop feeling of being guilty for not being able to stop the bully or for not being able to support the victim (Craig et.al, 1999). Keeping the above explanation in mind, the study aimed to understand bullying experiences at school level from college going students.

**Review of Literature:**

**Sapra R (2020)** The study has aimed to bring awareness regarding bullying and its hazardous impact on school going children. The paper further strengthens the fact that bullying can have negative effect on the bully as well as the victim of bully. It suggests a whole school approach with its focus on core competencies of self-management, social awareness, decision making, relationship building and conflict resolution as these can help the child in controlling the negative behavior at school setting.

**Thakkar et.al (2020)** The study has compiled review of literature in the Indian context on bullying and victimization among school-going adolescents. The paper reviewed 37 studies and collected data on methodological characteristics, prevalence estimates of bullying behavior, forms of bullying, risk factors and consequences of bullying. The study found that bullying in India is associated with adverse consequences for both the aggressor and the victim. Many studies on bullying from India should be interpreted cautiously because of problems with data collection processes, instrumentation, and presentation of the findings.

**Barker (2017)** The study aimed to identify children at-risk of aggressive social behavior and communication. The study uses a social ecology model as it compares bullying involvement among adolescents. The study found that segregated programming may increase the higher risk of bullying and victimization among students. It further suggested that inclusive programming for most adolescents with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders may be more developmentally preferable and protective.

**Hensley (2015)** The research aimed to understand the services provided by healthcare professionals with regard to bullying in childhood years. The pediatric health care professionals were part of the study. The way these professionals were conducting bullying assessment practices was noted along with their own attitudes and knowledge regarding bullying. The study found that half of the health care professionals were assessing children to check bullying behavior among them. The strongest predictor of positively assessing for bullying were their attitudinal scores.

**Waseem et.al (2013)** The research carried out in US, reports that up to 30% of children are exposed to bullying which negatively impacts the bully, the victim and also parents, other children, school staff and health care providers. It reports an increase in psychiatric referrals to emergency departments because of serious emotional and behavioral symptoms shown by bullied children. The study suggested that emergency victim being the first responders in the health care system for bullying cases need to be highly aware regarding physical and psychosocial symptoms related to bullying.

**II. Methodology**

An online survey was developed to seek information from college students regarding their bullying experience during the school years. Data was collected to get their demographic profile as a victim or a bully, to understand their experiences and its impact on their later life. The online survey was shared through social media for a limited time period during May - June 2020. It included an undertaking that the information collated through this form would be kept

confidential and that the participants are agreeing to take part in the study. Many forms were forwarded but completely filled data was obtained from 109 students and has been the basis of the study. The findings of the study was supported with secondary research.

### III. Result and Discussion

This section has been divided into five parts covering the demographic profile of the respondents, the characteristics of victim as well as bully, reasons and place of being bullied and so on.

#### 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

The data was collected from 109 college going students to understand their bullying experience at school level. Out of 109 students, 35 students reported that they were bullied by other students due to various reasons. Below 2% of respondents admitted that they bully other weaker students in their class.

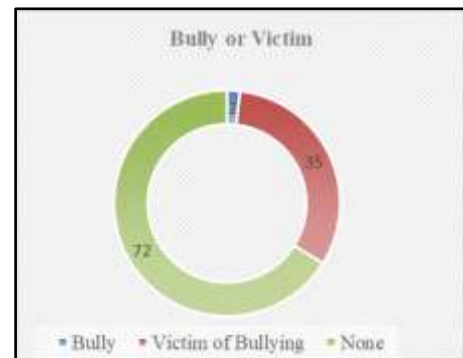


Fig. 1: Bully or Victim

#### 2. Socio-emotional Impact on the victim of bullying behavior

Many research studies have found that there can be short term and long term consequences for both the bully and the victim. The current study data revealed that below 40% of victims of bullying reported to have faced being humiliated and teased by the bully. Few reported being criticized or made fun (27%). Above 30% of the respondents reported being physically abused.

When asked about the consequence of being bullied, it was found that around 70% of victim respondents shared to be insecure and showed aggressive behavior as a result of being bullied. Other symptoms reported by the victims includes complains of body aches, sleep issues and so on. Similar findings were reported by a study in which chronic victim's experienced physical and psychological problems as compared to other children (Williams et.al, 1996).

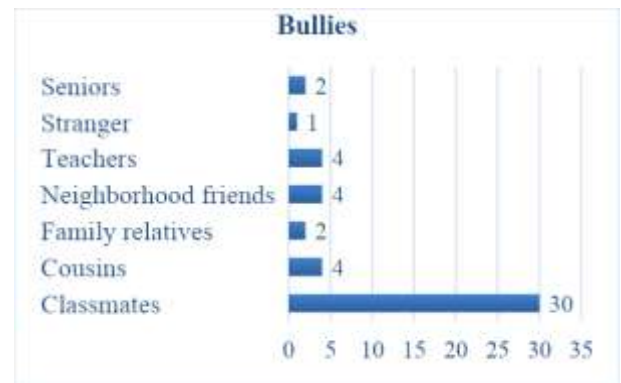
Regarding later impact of being bullied in the current scenario, 40% (table 1) of respondents reported that they are at-risk of depression and have poor self-esteem due to the hazardous bullying experience faced by them during the school years. In addition, around 18% respondents feel they are unable to maintain healthy cordial relationship in their later life because of bullying by others. A longitudinal study carried out in 1993, stated that bullying experiences at early grades leads to similar experiences in the later years of life (Olweus, 1993).

**Table 1 : Impact of being bullied in present life**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>At-risk of self-harm</i>                        | 10% |
| <i>Poor quality of relationships in later life</i> | 18% |
| <i>At-risk of depression and poor self esteem</i>  | 40% |
| <i>I got even more stronger</i>                    | 3%  |
| <i>Low performance</i>                             | 8%  |
| <i>Sense of insecurity about myself</i>            | 3%  |
| <i>Suicidal thoughts</i>                           | 3%  |

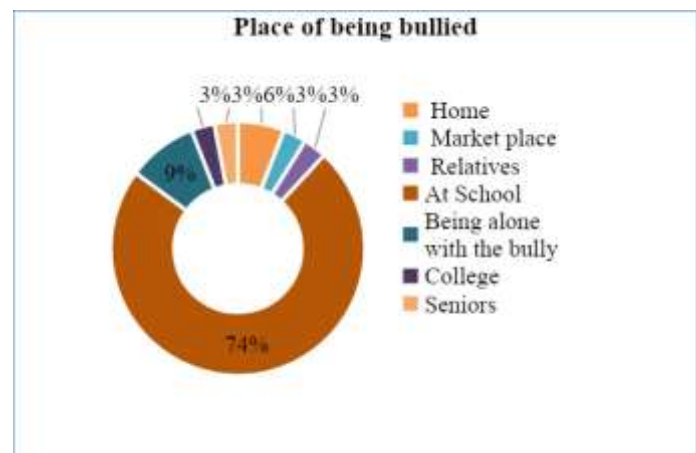
### 3. Reasons of being bullied

The current study found that above 50 % of the victim respondent's felt physical appearance as a major reason of being bullied which includes being overweight, having acne and so on. Another reason stated by 35% of respondents was poor performance in academics or co-curricular activities at school. Other reasons given by students (3% respectively) includes being introvert, from low socio-economic status, children with special needs etc.

**Fig. 2: Bullies**

When asked from victims regarding who were the possible bully's, above 60% (fig.2) of victims reported classmates as bullies. In addition, 8.5% of respondents reported cousins, neighbors and teachers respectively.

Around 75% (fig.3) of respondents reported school as the place of being bullied. Looking at the numbers, it is really alarming for the school to watch such incidences. It is essential for teachers and school staff to take all the required preventive measures as bullying effects the mental health of school going children. Similar findings were revealed by a study, which found that many teens reported skipping school because of being bullied, which also lead to dropping out of school (Hensley, 2015).

**Fig. 3: Place where the child was bullied**

#### 4. Coping mechanisms taken up by victims or bully

As per table 2, around 45% of the respondents reported that they seek help from close friend's in-order to overcome the impact of bullying behavior. In addition, 23% of respondents took help from parents to resolve the issue. Understanding the severity of the problem, it is very important for the victim to share and take support from trusted individuals. One interesting response shared by the respondent '*I changed myself to fit in the crowd better so that I won't be an easy target to pick on*' reveals the defense mechanism adopted by the individual to tackle bullying.

**Table 2: Measures taken to reduce the impact of being a bully or a victim on your behavior**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Discussed with parents   | 8  |
| Discussed with teacher   | 3  |
| I changed myself to fit in the crowd better so that I won't be an easy target to picked on | 1  |
| I didn't do anything   | 1  |
| Never talked to anyone   | 1  |
| Seek help of close friends   | 15 |
| Spoke to School Counselor  | 4  |
| Grand Total  | 34 |

#### 5. Bullying behavior

The study found that among the 2% respondents who view themselves as bullies, felt inability to regulate their emotions as a major cause of exhibiting bullying behavior towards others. They also felt sense of superiority over others as a cause for such behavior. When asked regarding the impact of showing bullying behavior on the present life, 35% reported exhibiting violent behavior even today. Similar findings were reported by Olweus (1993), according to which bullying children are at a higher risk of committing anti-social activities such as engaging in fights, thefts, robbery and substance abuse and so on as compared to their non-bullying peer group.

In addition, the current study also found that more than 20% felt that they still live in an illusion of superiority which impacts their performance. Around 15% reported being abusive and aggressive as a result of bullying others.

#### IV. Conclusion:

It can be concluded that the issue of bullying is on the rise and need special attention by parents, teachers as well as children. The parents must provide a conducive environment to their adolescents to share freely and in a friendly manner. The paper highlights alarming numbers in terms of bullying experienced by school going children. It also refers how bullying experience at school are still impacting their current life. Looking at the findings of the study, it provides a wide scope for researchers, professionals and educators to plan interventions for bully children as well as victims.

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