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Understanding Bullying: Roles, Types, Gender Difference and Effect on Mental Health

Kirti Balayan¹, Meenakshi Verma^{2*}

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to understand bullying, bullying roles and types, bullying and gender differences, bullying and its effect on the mental health of school going students in the last decade. The review of literature shows that boys and girls use different strategies of bullying. School going students involved in bullying activities (bully/victim) shows mental health problems. Mental health problems related to depression, suicidal tendency, anxiety, stress, low self-confidence and self-esteem, disturbed sleep and emotional and behavioural problems are seen among victims. Mental health issues such as symptoms of depression, externalizing problems, alcohol abuse, tobacco abuse and hyperactivity are some of the mental health problems seen among bullies.

Keywords: *Bullying, Bullies, Victims, and Mental health problems*

Bullying is a complex form of aggression, which takes place in many forms like hitting, punching, teasing, name calling, spreading rumors and many more. Bullying is commonly found at elementary, secondary, and high school level (Ross, 2002). Bullying is defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as a threat or physical use of force, which aims at the individual, other individual, a targeted community or group resulting in injury, loss of life, physical damage, or some developmental disorder/deficiency. Bullying is a behaviour by an individual or a group over a period, meant to intentionally hurt a person either physically, verbally, socially, or mentally. When this behaviour continues for a longer time, it become a major problem for the children facing it. Bullying can be direct i.e. directly hitting, fighting, threatening someone or it can be indirect that is spreading rumors, manipulating things and electronic threatening (Aneasha Babani, 2016).

Many school going students may involve themselves in bullying. In a study carried by Nielson in 2012 for age group 11-14 in rural government schools for UNICEF's Meena radio programme shows that 60% students know what bullying is, 10-30% accepted being a bully or a victim. In Maharashtra 87 % of students were aware of bullying whereas only 21% were involved in the acts. In Jharkhand the numbers were 64% and 31% respectively and in Madhya Pradesh it stand at 73% being aware and 10% being involved.

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The amount and degree of involvement of bullying varies among the school going students. A study conducted by Rashima Grover (2017) on 320 students of class 11th and 12th in Haryana revealed that 40% high school students were involved in high level of bullying, 4.1% on average and 55.9% on low level.

Various theories were used to predict the phenomena of the bullying behaviour, and these help us understand the effects of bullying on the victim. These are:

- Organizational culture theory
- Humiliation theory
- Social capital theory
- Dominance theory

Organizational culture theory- culture is the shared set of ideas, behaviours, attitudes, rituals, beliefs, and traditions that exist within a group. Each organization have their own set of beliefs or cultural norms. School is also such an organization which have its own culture and often referred as school culture. These norms or culture affects the functioning of the organization. A good and positive school culture will provide safety and feeling of belongingness to the students where teachers help them fulfil their needs and help them overcome the effects of bullying. The chances of bullying will decrease in a positive culture.

Humiliation theory- humiliation refers to derogation that occurs when a powerful person reveals of weaknesses of a less powerful person in public, which make him ashamed. It is putting a person down. In this process three persons are involved i.e. humiliator (who humiliate other person), victim (who experience the humiliation) and the witness (who observes this humiliation). The humiliator reduces the social standing of the victim and give him psychological distress and pain by their acts.

Social capital theory- it refers to the gain a person gets from social relationships. Individuals form social relations or contacts to gain profit from them, to fulfil their goals or desires and to get resources from these relations that will help them. Social capital was described by Putman (1995) as features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. It can be of two types. First is bonding, they are the ties that form between persons of a homogeneous group that provide them togetherness and sharing of belongings. Second is bridging, it contains ties from heterogeneous groups.

Dominance theory- it is based on the individual social hierarchy. The dominant individual or group suppress the less powerful individual or group to form hierarchy with the more powerful or dominant groups residing at their top. Bullying process works on the process of power and dominance. For example, if a bully dominates or bully a person and in return get support and respect from the classmates then their acts will get reinforcement and further motivate them to continue. This will help them to become a member of more powerful group which ultimately make them more dominant.

Bullying Roles

According to Dr. Olweus (1993) bullies are dominating than the others, impulsive, aggressive, no or little empathetic. While victims are submissive, sensitive, shy, sad, low-confident, anxious, depressed and less friendly. School going students who were both

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perpetrator and victims are described as easily angered and provoked, have more adjustment issues, and mostly rejected by their peers. (Veenstra et. al., 2005; Haynie et. al., 2001)

Various researchers have identified mainly two roles in bullying i.e. bully and victim while the third role i.e. bully-victim is lesser studied (Navarro, 2016). In research by P James Rajith, Christ Jayakumar, M Thomas Kishore, B Binukumar and Adhir Bhaskar (2019) found out that 97% students reported being a bully once in their school time. Peter J. Lovergrove and Dewey G. Cornell (2013), conducted a study on 3500 high school students in Virginia to find the patterns of bullying and victimization associated with behavioural problems using questionnaire of School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) and 8 items from Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance Scale (YRBS). 12 % of students reported being a bully, 16% being victim, 8% were bully-victims and 65% were not involved in any kind of bullying activities.

The Types of Bullying

Some researchers have identified four types of bullying:

- Physical– it includes fighting, kicking, pushing, slapping, spitting, harming belongings and other harms to body.
- Verbal- it includes abusing, writing, or speaking cruel words to others, name calling, making fun of others, taunting and teasing.
- Psychological/ emotional- it comprises of spreading rumors, destroying social relations, social exclusion, and intimidation. Emotionally hurting the person and their sentiments also comes under this form. It is also known as social bullying.
- Cyber- The fourth form of bullying i.e. cyberbullying is also shown by school going students. The term cyberbullying was first used by Canadian educator Bill Besley. It includes behaviour that take place through internet or in digital form. It includes cyber stalking, making fake profiles of others, flaming, or threatening through messages.

The various research indicates the type of bullying, the nature and percentages in which various forms of bullying is carried out.

In research by Thomas, Hannah & Chan, and others (2015) used Gatehouse Bullying Questionnaire (GBQ) 12 item scale to assess bullying victimization. Bullying is experienced by 30.6% in the form of teasing and name calling, 17.9% in the form of rumors, 14% in the form of social exclusion, and 10.7% as physical harm or threats. Verbal bullying was found more commonly. Incidences of physical bullying were less as compared to other forms of bullying. Similarly, in a survey conducted by National Center for Educational Statistics (USA) in 2015 on students of age 12-18 years shows that 21% students reported being bullied at school premises, 13% are made fun of and insulted in front of others, rumors were spread about 12% of students, 5% were victims of pushing and shoving, 5% face social exclusion, belongings of 2% students were damaged, 4% were threatened.

Bullying in India is no less. A 5-year study was conducted at Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Bhopal and 11 other cities of India. The results shows that 42% and 36% students of class 4-8 and 9-12 respectively are subjected to be bullied by peers in the school. It includes various forms such as teasing, name calling, fights, insulting, pushing, making fun and social exclusion. 54% of boys reported being physically harassed and beaten up by peers whereas girls stand at 46% (Times of India, 2017).

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Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (US) conducted a study in 2017, 19% reported bullying at school, 6% were threatened, 15% were bullied electronically, and 7% missed school whereas in year 2015, 20% were bullied at school, 15.5% bullied electronically and 5.6% missed school due to safety concerns. Drishti Sharma, Jugal Kishore, Nandini Sharma and Mona Duggal (2017) conducted a survey in Delhi, India on 174 middle school students. The findings shows that 8% of students reported being indulged in cyberbullying as a bully while 17% reported being a victim.

Bullying and Gender Differences

In a survey conducted by National Center for Educational Statistics (USA) in 2015 on students of age 12-18 years, reported that girls were more prone to be victims than boys. Thus, pointing to the fact that the gender differences exist in relation to bullying. Sonia Raquel Seixas, Joaquim Pinto Coelho and Gustave Nicolas Fiacher (2013) in a study on 581 Portuguese students of age 12-17 years found that boys were found to be more bully-victims in comparison to girls. 55% boys and 45% girls reported being a victim while 69.2% boys and 30.8% girls reported being a bully in the same study.

In India too, bullying is more among boys as compared to girls. In a study by Shiba, Meena Rajput, Ankit Goutam and Gaurav Rajawat (2018) conducted a study on 300 students of age 11-18 years in Rohtak, Haryana reported that boys (24.4%) were found to be more active in bullying activities as compared to girls (1.7%). Similar results were also reported in another study by Pranhjot Malhi, Bhavneet Bharati and Manjit Sidhu (2014) which was conducted on 209 students of class 9-10th studying in government and private schools of Chandigarh. They concluded that girls were found to be more victims (21.6%) whereas boys were more likely to be both bully and victims (27.9%). Similar results were obtained in another research by Raul Navarro, Elisa Larranaga and Santiago Yubero (2015)

In Karnataka, another state of India, S.G. Ramya in 2011 interviewed 500 students of 5 different schools which were randomly selected using a pre-tested questionnaire. The students, parents, and teachers were also interviewed. 302 students out of 500 reported being bullied. This study concluded that bullying among girls was less (53%) as compared to boys (63.9%).

Bullying is carried out by the boys and girls differently. S Pengpid & K Peltzer (2013) conducted a study on 2758 adolescents of Thailand to assess bullying and factors related to it using School-Based Student Health Survey (GSHS). This study found that boys used hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving around, or locking the victims indoors as a predominant form of abusive activities while girls bullied in different ways by making fun of, making rude comments, gestures, and sexual jokes.

Bullying and Mental Health Issues

Bullying has adverse effects on the mental health of the bully as well as the victims. Much research across countries were conducted to see the effect of bullying on the mental health of the school going students.

The students involved in bullying activities show conduct problems, emotional problems, and hyperactivity. Boys show more emotional problems than girls (Rasalingam, 2017). Students involved in direct bullying shows symptoms of behavioural problems, emotional problems, and social issues. While those involved in indirect bullying shows low perception of self. Both the groups show signs of social rejection and low self-esteem (Smith, 2012).

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Mental health problems are associated with the victims as well as to the passive bully. Active bully reported less generalized anxiety than passive bullies (Yen, 2014).

Victims as well as bullies who were highly involved in bullying acts show higher symptoms of depression, distress, and suicidal tendencies. Girls who experience bullying on continuous basis but in low degree were found to have worse mental health than boys in the same situation (Hong, 2016; Campbell, 2017). Psychosomatic problems are found more in victims. (Kelly et al., 2015). Victims were more prone to problems like depression, anxiety, disturbed sleep, phobias, self-harm, and suicidal tendency whereas bullies were more prone to alcohol abuse, hyperactivity and internalization problems leading to poor functioning in day today life. (Yen, 2014; Ford et.al., 2017; Sigurdson et.al., 2015)

A study was conducted by Savita Prabhu, Reema Rai and Binil Velayudhan in 2018 on 460 students of age 13-17 in Udupi district of Karnataka, India to find the prevalence of bullying and its effects on their psychosocial wellbeing using Illinois Bullying Scale and Psychological Wellbeing Scale. It reveals that bullying have negative impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of the victims.

Sinem Siyahhan, O. Tolga Aricak and Nur Cayirdag-Acar in 2012 in Turkey carried out research on 419 students at middle school. According to this research those students who do not report the incidences to either parents or teachers are found to be more hopeless and sadder. Therefore, it becomes important to develop an intervention programme to control bullying.

CONCLUSION

Bullying are the negative actions which are repeated by an individual to harass another individual. Bullying is commonly found in school years. From the review of literature, we can conclude that bullying was found more in boys than in girls. Boys were more involved in the physical form like kicking, hitting, punching or physical harming someone. While girls were engaged in verbal and social form. For instance, abusing, taunting, spreading rumors, social exclusion, name calling etc.

Bullying has serious mental health impacts on both bullies and victims. The bullies show externalizing problems like alcohol abuse and hyperactivity. While victims were more prone to internalizing problems like sadness, helplessness, fears, disturbed sleep etc. Both bullies and victims show symptoms of depressions. Victims were found to be lonelier and more excluded from social gatherings, which decreases their self-confidence and self-esteem. They have poor perception of reality and faces extreme stress. It was seen that victims have poor day to day functions, faces emotional and behavioural problems.

Limitations

The present study was limited to theoretical reviews of past studies. The target population was school going students only. Therefore, the study was limited age-wise. Future studies may focus on cultural aspect of bullying among school going students. Further studies may consider rural-urban background of the bullies and the victims.

Suggestions

Further studies may be carried out considering bullying in rural and urban background. As we can see from reviews that mostly bullying takes place in schools thus its impact on school- teachers or other staff can be assessed. Impact of bullying in childhood and

problems faced later in adolescents and adulthood can be taken into consideration. Hence, Longitudinal studies factoring academic achievement, motivation, internalizing and externalizing problems, alcohol abuse and self-concept may be planned. Studies on anti-bullying laws or intervention programs to control bullying may be planned.

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Conflict of Interest

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