

Original Article

BULLYING AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Objective: To study different forms of bullying and its effects on primary school children

Material & Methods: This cross sectional study was conducted in three primary schools in Mozang and Samanabad areas of Lahore. Data was collected by interviewing each student using a structured questionnaire. SPSS 17.0 was used for data entry and analysis.

Results: A total of 414 primary school children participated in the study. Seventy four percent of the students reported having being bullied in one form or the other. Frequency of bullying was higher among males than females. The major types of bullying were, teasing (37.5%), hitting (42.7%), and calling names (34.9%).

Conclusion: Bullying is an ever rising phenomenon in our society. It is a significant mental and social health problem in primary school children in Pakistan. It affects students' right to learn in safe and secure environment.

Keywords: Bullying, School children, Students, Relationship

Introduction

Bullying is defined as use of power and aggression to cause distress and control others. It can be categorized into two forms, direct and indirect. Direct would include use of expression of power through physical aggression (e.g. hitting, kicking) and verbal aggression (e.g. insults, racial or sexual harassment, threats). Indirect bullying (relational aggression) is the manipulation of social relationships to hurt (e.g. gossiping, spreading rumors) or exclude the individual being victimized.

Two elements of bullying are key to understanding its complexity. First, bullying is a form of aggressive behavior imposed from a position of power. Children who bully have more power than the children they victimize, and this power is often not evident to adults. Children's power can derive from a physical advantage (such as size and strength) or from a social advantage (such as a higher social status in a peer group or strength in numbers). The second key element is that bullying is repeated overtime, and with each repeated incidence, the power dynamics become consolidated. Research reveals bullying as a destructive relationship problem.

Bullying can lead to numerous health problems. Children who are bullied are likely to develop both physical and psychological symptoms. Physical symptoms that are commonly experienced are headaches, stomachaches. Psychosomatic symptoms are also experienced (such as difficulty in sleeping or bed-wetting).

Bullying is a social phenomenon that transcends gender, age and culture. While there are wide ranges in the definition of the term, bullying is essentially

characterized by one or several individuals aggressing on a vulnerable peer, primarily to assert control or power. The aims for our research was to increase our knowledge about bullying in primary school children in Pakistan, to study prevalence of bullying in school children, to determine different forms and types of bullying, and the areas where bullying took place.

History and review shows that bullying as a separate offence has been recorded in recent years but there have been well documented cases recorded earlier. Previous records, Newgate calendar, shows it as early as 1700, when two Eton scholars were charged for killing and slaying of their new fellow students.¹

Pediatric case records showing frequent headaches, tummy aches, poor sleeping and bedwetting had been reported due to bullying.² Evidence suggests that in the United States, the incidence of bullying among children is increasing and becoming a nationwide problem. One out of five children admits to being a bully.³

The patterns of bullying in females and males have been worked out by Roland et al (1989) showing that boys resort to physical means and girls employ psychological methods such as exclusion. Girls tend to bully less as they get older. The percentage of boys, who bully, however is similar at different age levels.⁴

Twenty five to fifty percent of children report being bullied as mentioned in one study. The great majority of boys are bullied by other boys while sixty percent of girls report being bullied by other boys. Eight percent of children report staying away from schools one day per month because they fear being bullied. Forty three percent of children have a fear of being harassed in the school bathroom.⁵

Material & Methods

Study Area/Population

A cross-sectional study was conducted in primary school children in three schools, in Mozang and Samanabad area in the city of Lahore. Convenient sampling was done. Sampling was based on socio-economic status, according to which two public schools were chosen falling in the low socio-economic group and one private school falling in the high socio-economic group. Study was carried out in students belonging to the first, fourth and the fifth grade. Some sections were selected randomly and all the students in the same section were included. Data was collected using standardized questionnaire and students were interviewed in person. The examination was conducted by a doctor.

Headmistresses of the schools were contacted. Their permission was sought. For primary school children, informed consent was taken from the parents. Only those who got that were interviewed. The interview was conducted by 4th year medical students, Fatima Jinnah Medical College, Lahore. Information was collected on basic demographic characteristics such as age, sex, education, occupation, area where they lived. Information was also collected on specific study characteristics such as teasing, physical abuse, threatening, calling offensive names, snatching things and the places where these events occurred.

Bullying was defined as teasing, physical abuse, threatening, calling offensive names, and snatching things.

The variable under study was bullying in primary school children and it was analyzed as a categorical variable. Entry of data was done using SPSS 16. Data was analyzed initially using frequency distributions. Odds ratios were calculated to measure associations. To test for statistical significance, chi square was used.

Results

The study population consisted of 414 primary school students, aged 5-10 years from three different schools of Lahore, Pakistan. Out of these 414 students, 172 (41.6%) belonged to the age group 9-10 years, 162 (39.1%) were of 7-8 years and 80 (19.3%) were in the age group of 5-6 years. 264 (63.9%) of the students were studying in classes 1-3 at that time and 150 (36.1%) in class 4-5. The frequency of bullying was higher in males compared to females.

Out of 414 students, 307 were bullied in one form or the other. The frequency of hitting was the highest

Table-1: Basic demographic data

	Name	Percentage
Age (n=414)		
5-6	80	19.3
7-8	162	39.1
9-10	172	41.6
Gender (n=414)		
Male	222	53.7
Female	192	46.3
Father's Occupation		
Professional	53	12.8
Non professional	345	83.4
Don't work	16	03.8
Mother's Occupation		
House wife	13	75.6
Working	53	12.8
Deceased	09	0.2
Classes (n=414)		
1-3	264	63.9
4-5	150	36.1
Total	414	100

Table-2: Different forms and places of bullying experienced by primary school children.

	Number	Percentage
Bullied (n=414)		
Yes	307	74.2
No	107	25.8
Forms of bullying (n=307)*		
Teased	115	37.5
Hit	107	34.9
Snatched things	131	42.7
Scared	71	23.1
Asked for money	55	17.9
Places of bullying (n=307)*		
Near home	48	15.6
During class	128	41.7
	120	39.1

During games	88	28.7
In school outside class	31	10.1
Some where else	17	5.5

* Multiple responses possible

Students also reported snatching of things, and were forced to give their money in some instances. Bullying took place near home, in classrooms, during games time and in between classes. Overall bullying was higher near homes with 128 (41.7.%) students reporting it. (Table 2)

Table-3: Stranger anxiety and subsequent reactions.

	Number	Percentage
Has experienced fear of stranger (n=414)		
Yes	123	29.7
No	228	55.1
Don't know	12	02.9
Missing	51	12.3
Reactions		
Screamed	8	1.9
Ran away	20	19
Told someone	50	12.1
Did not tell anyone	7	1.7
Anything else	1	0.2

* Multiple responses possible

Students were also asked about stranger fear and their subsequent reaction. 123 reported being scared of strangers (Table 3). Most of the students chose to run away or reported the incidence to some adult. A very small percentage of students (1.7%) did not tell anyone (Table 3).

Discussion

In our study we found out that bullying is an ever rising phenomenon in our society. It has become a significant social and mental health problem in primary school children in Pakistan. During our study we found out that bullying affects a vast majority of young children. It has a negative impact on school climate. It affects student's right to learn in safe and secure environment. There are both physical and psychological implications of bullying.

In contrast to previous studies on bullying, we also found out the different forms of bullying and abuse. Fear of stranger was also part of our study. However, our study group was limited and study participants were chosen conveniently from primary schools.

Multiple forms of bullying exist in our society such as teasing, hitting, scaring, snatching things, asking for money and others. Children respond differently by screaming, running away, telling some elder or police etc.

Recommendations

We recommend that steps should be taken to make the school environment safe and healthier for students to function more efficiently and in a productive way.

There should be a constant system of vigilance and supervision by the teachers and the staff to prevent the occurrence of bullying.

Special attention should be paid to improve peer relationship.

Bullies should be recognized and disciplined and victims should be provided support and counseling.

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