

Original Research Article

Bullying and being bullied: prevalence and psychosocial outcomes among school going adolescents of Rohtak

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ABSTRACT

Background: Bullying is a problem which is commonly faced by so many school going children and adolescents usually in the form of nasty teasing, name-calling, threatening, physically hurting, exclusion from group, spreading false rumors etc. A victim of bullying is at increased risk of behavioural and emotional problems, depression, psychotic symptoms including anxiety, insecurity and poor school performance. The objectives of the study were to measure the prevalence of bullying behaviours among adolescents and to determine the effects of bullying and being bullied on psychosocial adjustment.

Methods: Cross-sectional study was carried out from August, 2016 to February, 2017 among school going adolescents 11-18 yrs of age. A total of 300 students were chosen using multi stage sampling from ten schools of five community development blocks of Rohtak.

Results: Out of 300 participants 176 (58.7%) were male, 124 (41.3%) were female. 21.6% (65) students bullied other students, 19% (57) were being bullied. More boys reported bullying others and being victims of bullying.

Conclusions: The effects of being bullied are direct, pleiotropic and long- lasting with the worst effects for those who are both victims and bullies.

Keywords: Bullying, Bullied, Adolescents, Depression

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as repeated purposeful attempt by one or more person over time to injure or inflict discomfort on another, either through words, physical contact, gestures, or exclusion from group. Bullying has also been defined as intentional aggressive behaviour repeated over a period of time, where there is a power imbalance between the person being bullied and the one who is bullying.¹

WHO identifies adolescence as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and

before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It represents one of the critical transitions in the life span and is characterized by a tremendous pace in growth and change that is second only to that of infancy. Besides physical and sexual maturation, these experiences include movement toward social and economic independence, and development of identity, the acquisition of skills needed to carry out adult relationships and roles, and the capacity for abstract reasoning.² If anyone becomes a victim of bullying during childhood and adolescence, there is increased risk of behavioral problems, emotional problems, depression and poor school performance. Being bullied is associated with increased risk of suicidal attempts.³

It is impossible to predict who will get bullied on the basis of age, sex, race, class, sexual orientation, national origin or any other factor. Bullying occurs to people in all of these categories and no one combination of traits can guarantee that a child will or will not be bullied. However, those who frequently get bullied do exhibit some common characteristics. These may include a personality that tends towards caution and shyness, introversion, low self-confidence, unhappiness and anxiety. Bullies usually don't have a large support network of friends or may not have even a single friend and may seem to relate better to adults than peers. Being smaller in height or weaker than average can make a boy target of bullying.⁴

The prevalence of bullying varies considerably among countries. In an international survey of adolescent health-related behaviours, the percentage of students who reported being bullied at least once ranged from as low as 15% to 20% in some countries to as high as 70% in others.^{5,6}

Bullying is the most common form of violence in Indian society as well. Studies have found that approximately 30% of students in grades 6-10 are involved in bullying as a perpetrator, victim, or both. Nowadays the public attention in India is concentrated on School Bullying, a major issue in our schools. In fact, it is general perception and considered view of all stakeholders, including law enforcing agencies and social workers that school bullying adversely affects conducive climate in schools and also affects pupils right to study without fear in a secure environment.⁷ Frequent bullying is of particular concern and is defined as bullying that occurs once a week or more. The prevalence of frequent bullying internationally ranges from a low of 1.9% among Irish sample to a high of 19% in a Malta study.^{8,9}

Bullying behaviour can take many forms. Historically it was seen as only repeated verbal and physical acts. Verbal bullying includes both name-calling and threatening behaviours, and physical bullying includes behaviours typically directed to victimized person and/or their property. Similarly, social bullying aims to damage a person's social standing, usually through spreading nasty rumours or lies about the targeted person. Other forms of bullying, such as relational are also recognized. Relational bullying aims to damage person's peer relationships through exclusion or attempts to break up friendships.¹⁰

Verbal name-calling and teasing is different from threatening behaviours. Threatening behaviour is also different from actual physical actions taken against another person or their property. Similarly, relational bullying aims at damaging relationship and social bullying targets a person's reputation.¹¹

The effects of bullying aren't temporary and last long into adulthood. Effects vary depending on role of the person

in bullying situation. The long-lasting psychological impacts are due to the short-term impacts that children experience as a result of being bullied consistently. Depression and anxiety affects the emotional outlook well beyond the bullying years, extending into their adult lives where they become chronic, sometimes lifelong problems. These issues make eating, sleeping, working, exercising and engaging in interesting hobbies more difficult. The person being bullied sometimes also face difficulty in making and keeping relationships, whether with friends or romantic partners.⁴

Bullying results in the bully victim's inability to trust himself or herself as a capable individual. In particular, this shows effects during tough or difficult times, where the victim has been taught they are too weak or hopeless to persevere, and so they do not. This can have major repercussions on work, relationships and other life situations that require persistence and grit to overcome or succeed in.⁴

The objective of the study is to measure the prevalence of bullying behaviours among adolescents and to determine the effects of bullying and being bullied on psychosocial adjustment.

METHODS

Cross-sectional study was carried out from 3rd August, 2016 to 11th February, 2017 among adolescents 11-18 yrs of age (class 6th to 10th). For the purpose of the present study, students from both government and private run schools were taken. Sample size was calculated considering prevalence of 30% and allowable error 20%. Sample size came out to be 234. A total of 300 students were chosen using Multi Stage Sampling. Consent from the principals of schools was taken prior to administration of interview schedule. Sample was drawn from the students who were present in school on the day of visit.

Sampling procedure was adopted in three stages.

Stage-I

At the outset all the schools were categorised under five community development blocks namely Group-1 (Rohtak), Group-2 (Kalanaur), Group-3 (Sampla), Group-4 (Meham) and Group-5 (Lakhanmajra).

Stage-II

Then, two schools (one government and one private) from each group were selected by lottery method.

Stage-III

From each of the school, 30 students were taken. The authorities of selected ten schools were informed about the study objective and the permission to conduct study was obtained. 6 students each from class 6th to 10th were

selected by systematic random sampling. Thus 30 students were interviewed from each school.

Study tool

Bullying was assessed using predesigned pretested semi structured schedule participants who reported bullying others or being bullied were asked to specify the most common form of bullying.

Depression was assessed using 4 item PROMIS depression scale. Each question on depression were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, corresponding to responses of “Never,” “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always.” Thus, the total possible raw score was between 4 and 20. The raw scores

were collapsed into tertiles of “low,” “medium,” and “high” for primary analysis. Score <5 indicates low depression, score 5-8 indicates moderate depression and score between 9-20 indicates severe depression.

Relationship with classmates, perception of class climate, perception of school climate, loneliness and ease to make friends was measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = least positive to 5= most positive.

RESULTS

Out of 300 adolescent participants, 176 (58.7%) were males, 124 (41.3%) were females. It was found that bullying was more common among males (24.4%) compared to females (17.7%) as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of students reported being bullied or bullying others.

		Participants bullying others		Participants being bullied	
		Males (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
Frequency	None	133 (75.5)	102 (82.3)	137 (77.8)	106 (85.6)
	Once/Twice	21 (11.9)	10 (8.1)	9 (5.1)	3 (2.4)
	Sometimes	14 (7.9)	8 (6.5)	10 (5.7)	6 (4.8)
	Many times	8 (4.7)	4 (3.1)	20 (11.4)	9 (7.2)
Total		176 (100)	124 (100)		

Table 2: Most common form of bullying according to participants who were bully or being bullied.

Forms of bullying	% of participants (bullying or being bullied)		
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Belittled about religion or race	18 (21.2)	2(5)	20 (16.39)
Belittled about looks or speech	10 (11.8)	11 (27.5)	21(17.21)
Hitting, pushing, slapping and punching	12 (14.6)	0	12 (9.8)
Hurtful email / SMS	9 (10.6)	5 (12.5)	14 (11.47)
Subjects of Rumours	21 (24.7)	8 (20)	29 (23.77)
Excluding from groups	12 (14.1)	14 (35)	26 (21.31)
Total	82	40	122 (100)

Table 3: Psychosocial behaviour of participants.

Psychosocial behaviour	Being bullied (%)	Bullying (%)
Perceived school climate		
1 (least positive)	23 (40.4)	15 (23)
2	10 (17.5)	7 (10.8)
3	17 (29.8)	8 (12.3)
4	5 (8.8)	17 (26.2)
5 (most positive)	2 (3.5)	18 (27.7)
Relationship with classmates		
1 (least positive)	26 (45.6)	0
2	15 (26.3)	9 (13.8)
3	7 (12.3)	11 (16.9)
4	5 (8.8)	17 (26.3)
5 (most positive)	4 (7)	28 (40)
Friendship making		
Very easy	3 (5.3)	29 (44.6)
Easy	18 (31.6)	18 (27.7)
Difficult	15 (26.3)	11 (16.9)
Very difficult	21 (36.8)	7 (10.8)

Psychosocial behaviour	Being bullied (%)	Bullying (%)
Loneliness		
1 (least lonely)	2 (3.5)	42 (64.6)
2	1 (1.8)	13 (20)
3	4 (7)	7 (10.9)
4	16 (28)	1 (1.5)
5 (most lonely)	34 (59.6)	2 (3.8)

Table 4: Depression among bully and being bullied.

	Low depression (%)	Moderate depression (%)	Severe depression (%)
Bullying	36 (55.4)	17 (26.1)	12 (18.5)
Being bullied	10 (17.5)	19 (33.3)	28 (49.2)

65 (21.6%) students bullied other students and 57 (19%) were victims of bullying. Out of 57 victims who were being bullied, 12 (21%) participants reported being bullied once, 16 (28.07%) reported being bullied sometimes and 29 (52.6%) were bullied many times. Bullying others was reported by 65 (21.6%) and was more common among victims of bullying. It was found that majority 44 (77.2%) were bullied by peers/classmates and rest 13 (22.8%) by senior students.

More boys reported bullying others and being victims of bullying. Most common form of bullying was found to be spreading rumours which was seen in 29 (23.77%) respondents. It was followed by excluding from group which was experienced by 26 (21.31%) respondents. Hitting, pushing, punching was reported by 12 (9.8%) respondents. Further, only a handful of respondents (11.47%) have stated that they had experienced bullying in the form of hurtful SMS received from their bullies (Table 2).

It was found that both the bullies and those being bullied demonstrated poorer psychosocial adjustment than their peers; however, differences in the pattern of maladjustment among the groups were observed as in Table 3. Poorer relationships with classmates (45.6%) and increased loneliness (59.6%) were associated more with those being bullied. Poorer perceived school climate on the other hand was seen associated with both bullying (23%) and being bullied (40.4%). Ability to make friends was very easy for those who bully others (44.6%) (Table 3).

On accessing the amount of depression among the victims of bullying, it was found that 17.5% suffered low depression, 33.3% had moderate depression and 49.2% developed severe depression (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

Numerous studies have focused on individual level factors associated with bullying. However, in recent years, there has been a theoretical shift toward a socio-ecological approach which places greater emphasis on the study of contextual factors. An area in which there

remain limited and mixed findings is the school setting. The results of this study provided insights into various aspects of bullying and its psychosocial and emotional consequences. It was found that the prevalence of bullying was about 21.6% among the students. These rates are almost same as the nationally representative sample of U.S. adolescents in grades 6 through 10 using a similar measurement approach.¹²

Studies of prevalence rates often do not differentiate between students who are involved in bullying just once and those who are bullied repeatedly, although repetition has been identified as a defining characteristic of bullying.¹³ Overall, the percentage of students with repeated bullying were found to be 4% among the total participant. Previous studies suggest that student self-report measures may provide a more accurate estimate of the prevalence of bullying, as also found in a study by Solberg and Olweus.¹⁴ Reasons that school bullying reports (i.e., staff collected data) may be less accurate than self-reports are that (a) as students get older, covert forms of bullying become more common and harder to observe and (b) students are less likely to report bullying as they get older.¹⁵

The school level findings of this study suggested a less consistent pattern in regards to perceived school climate and bullying. However, Elsaesser et al found that risk for involvement in relational aggression is distinct from that of physical aggression in that no school-level indicator of climate was related to relational aggression.¹⁶ Overall, this suggests that high rates of bullying involvement could still exist in a school despite an overall positive school climate and feelings of safety among students and relational forms of aggression are distinct from physical aggression. Consistent with these findings, Wang et al. found that students' collective perception of school climate did not moderate the connection between peer victimization and academic performance.¹⁷

This study suggests that a positive school climate may not be sufficient to protect students from the negative effects of peer victimization. Thus, changing school culture and perceptions of school climate may not be

sufficient to reduce bullying, but can be reduced by involvement of teachers and parents.

Overall, parental involvement has been associated with positive outcomes for academic achievement and reductions in bullying which is pointed out in studies done by Huang et al and Shen et al.^{18,19}

Additionally, this study revealed that involvement in bullying behaviour (as a bully, a victim, or both) in the absence of other risks in high school did not predict later depression, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts.

In regards to recommendations for bullying prevention and intervention efforts, it is recommended that a multiple stakeholder approach consisting of community involvement, assessment of the school climate, developing a consensus on the definition of bullying, student and parental engagement, teaching empathy, professional development for faculty and staff, and ongoing program evaluation are mandatory.

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