

BULLYING VICTIMIZATION AS A DETERMINANT OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IN ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to explore that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of emotional distress, depression and anxiety in adolescent students. Sample for the present study was 200 adolescents. The age range of the entire sample was from 13 to 18 years and their education standard was from 6th grade to 12th grade. The sample was selected through simple random sampling technique from various private and government educational institutions across Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan. For the assessment of bullying Illinois Bullying Scale (IBS by Espelage & Holt, 2001), and for the evolution of the emotional distress, depression and anxiety the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were used. Linear regression analysis indicated that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of emotional distress ($R = .41$; $R^2 = .16$; $F = 41.48$; $P < 0.01$) in adolescents. Further, the results also indicate that bullying victimization is a significant predictor of depression ($R = .35$; $R^2 = .12$; $F = 27.77$; $P < 0.01$), and second, bullying victimization is a significant predictor of anxiety ($R = .36$; $R^2 = .12$; $F = 28.29$; $P < 0.01$) in adolescents.

Keywords: Bullying, Victimization, Emotional Distress, Depression, Anxiety, adolescent

INTRODUCTION

Bullying behavior is grown to be a burning issue in every society and it is also one of the great concerns and serious problems in educational institutions. Bullying means a specific conduct of aggressive behavior that causes suffering or damages, it shows an imbalance of power, and occurs again and again. Bullies show violent behaviors towards their peers with the purpose of dominating others students because they share little empathy. Further, individuals use this behavior to gain power and control; they get pleasure or satisfaction from inflicting distress to their peers. Heinemann (1973) was one of the first researchers to draw attention to bullying. His definition of bullying focused on group violence against a 'deviant' individual. Olweus (1993) surmised that bullying behavior is usually happened with the content to gain power and occur repeatedly against the same individual or group.

Cohn and Canter (2003) concluded that physical bullying involves in kicking, hitting, pushing, property destruction and stealing and psychological bullying include spreading rumor, manipulating social relationships, separating others from a friend or group, and threats. Verbal bullying includes hateful teasing, calling bad names, taunting and given threats.

The term victimization refers to such condition in which an individual is continually target of bully's violence (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Further Olweus (1996) differentiated the bully and bully victims by concluding that the bullies are physically strong and they have

more aggressive tendencies rather than the victims. Moreover, the bully victims are known to be weak and presented as less hostile. Additionally, many studies conclude the characteristics of victims that in general victims are found to be more nervous, uncomfortable and not confident about themselves. Boulton and Smith (1994) stated that bully victims experience many negative symptoms related to themselves like poor self esteem, lack of confidence, feelings of failure, especially experience loneliness in school settings. One more study concluded that male youngsters are more victimized by their peers as compared to female youngsters in middle school (Bernstein & Watson, 1997).

Kaplan (2004) explored that adolescence is a psychological and physical human developmental condition that change from one state to another it usually takes place during the period from puberty to legal adulthood. During this transitional stage bullying causes long term negative impacts on adolescent's later life. The purpose of this research is to find out the drawbacks of bullying on those adolescents who are victims of bullying, as bullying victims may experience emotional distress such as depression, anxiety and stress which are important aspects of one's life.

Bullying is a type of aggression that happens again and again systematically towards their age follows, is highly connected with a collection of emotional distress which may include depression and anxiety. According to Copeland, William, Wolke, Angold, and Costello (2013), bullying has negative consequences for the victims, further they also found that victims are highly diagnosed with panic disorder, agoraphobia and generalized anxiety as compared to those who are not victims, and that the victims had a high risk of depression, anxiety and suicide in later life.

Depression is a mental disorder with the symptoms of excessive depressed mood, loss of interest and pleasure, disturbance of sleep, poor appetite, less energy, guilt feelings, poor self-efficacy, and lack of attentiveness. Along with these symptoms, impairments in everyday functioning and in last depression can lead to suicide (WHO, 2012). Stark et al. (2008) viewed that depression is caused by turbulence in cognition, interpersonal, and environmental performance, as well as disturbance in emotion directive Skills. Further, Bhatia and Bhatia (2007) stated that stressful life experiences are also leading factors of depression and bullying is specifically stressor for adolescents. Moreover, Hawker and Boulton (2000) also concluded that bullying side effects can lead the victims to depression.

Furthermore, as bully victimized adolescents feel fear from their peers, try to avoid that peer or situations and these symptoms can lead to anxiety disorder. An anxiety disorder is an internalizing problem which can be illustrate by excessive worry or stress, it is viewed that anxiety symptoms have different side effects on an individual's physiological and psychological wellbeing. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-fifth edition (APA, 2013) classify anxiety is an emotional condition which is described by feelings of pressure, nervousness, excessive tension, unrealistic beliefs and bodily problems such as high rush of blood, hot flushes, high palpation. Kochenderfer -Ladd (2003) found that anxiety symptoms found to be a risk factor in being targeted as a victim. The experience of victimization due to bullying has been repeatedly linked to emotional problems such as anxiety (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006; Huphrey, Storch, & Geffken, 2007; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Storch, Zelman, Sweeney, Danner & Dove, 2002).

Additionally Bond and colleagues (2001) explored in their study that the victims of 8th grade who are being bullied over 2 years period and found to be victims at any time in 8th class,

they were diagnosis with anxiety symptoms in 9th grade (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin & Patton, 2001; Hanish & Guerra, 2002). Further, there is strong relationship found between bullying victimization and depression, anxiety and other health issues (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

METHOD

Participants

200 adolescents, regular students were randomly selected from different public and private educational institutions of Sialkot, Pakistan. The age range of the participants was 12 to 18 years (mean age 14.86). All participants were Pakistani national, regular students and the grade of the entire sample was from grade 6th to 12th.

Measures

Illinois Bullying Scale

Illinois Bullying Scale (IBS) by Shujja and Atta (2011) was used in study. Reliability of the scale is ($\alpha = .88$). The scale consisted three sub scales (Bully, Fight, and Victim). Bully: Item are No. 1, 2, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18), (Fight: Item No. 3, 10, 11, 12, 13), (Victim: Item No. 4, 5, 6, 7). The responses on the each item is designed like, Never = 0, 1 or 2 times = 1, 3 or 4 times = 2, 5 or 6 times = 3, 7 or more times = 4.

The Depression Anxiety Stress 2 Scale (DASS-21)

The Depression Anxiety Stress 21 (DASS-21) was developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). This test is consists on 21 items, and these 21 items are further divided in three subscale. Each subscale examined the level of emotional condition of the adolescents that is Depression, Anxiety, and stress. In DASS-21 the portion of the depression estimated the following symptoms of depression in detail like depressive mood, lack of interest in activities, hopelessness, poor self-statement, and suicidal ideation. The subscale of the Anxiety examined the anxiety symptoms such as excessive worry, poor motor coordination, poor functioning, hot flushes, personal experiences of negative evaluation and situational anxiety. Finally the 3rd subscale of stress observed the symptoms of stress which included restlessness, short tempered, difficulty to keep him or herself relaxed, long lasting worry, nervousness, having little impatient, and overreaction.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (frequencies and percentages) (N=200)

Variables	Frequency	%
Age		
12years	26	13.0
13years	38	19.3
14years	31	15.5
15years	27	13.5
16years	27	13.5
17years	23	11.5
18years	28	14.0
Mean Age for total sample	14.86	
Gender		
Male	99	49.5
Female	101	50.5
Education		
6 th grade	28	14.0
7 th grade	30	15.0
8 th grade	29	14.5
9 th grade	29	14.5
10 th grade	28	14.0
11 th grade	28	14.0
12 th grade	28	14.0
Income Group		
Low	37	18.5
Middle	53	26.5
High	110	55.5
Family structure		
Joint	93	46.5
Nuclear	107	53.5

Table 2. Regression analysis shows Bullying victimization (a-bullying, b-victimization, c- fight) is a significant predictor of emotional distress, depression and anxiety in adolescent students

Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R Square	F	P
<i>Bullying Emotional distress</i>	.41	.18	.17	41.48	.00
<i>Bullying Depression</i>	.35	.12	.11	27.77	.00
<i>Bullying Anxiety</i>	.36	.12	.12	28.29	.00

N=200,df=199,**= Significance level at 0.01

DISCUSSION

Bullying is a worldwide problem that happens around us almost everywhere and every day. Bullying is an aggressive behavior which cause emotional distress in victims. Current study result indicated bullying victimization is a significant predictor of emotional distress. The adolescents who are bullied in this age may at the high risk of severe depression.

Moreover, various researchers reported that bullying and depression and concluded that victims reported more emotional problems and symptoms of depression as compared to other students (Mills, Guerin, Lynch, Daly, & Fitzpatrick 2004; Vander Wall, De Wit, Hirasing, (2003)

Adolescence is an era of rapid change, in which an individual suffer many problems due to many physical and emotional changes during this period. During this phase if a person is bullied, it may cause harmful effects to their cognitions which may result in emotional distress. Bullying victimization can cause depression, anxiety, academic failure, fear, poor self-esteem and social isolation, and all these symptoms may ends up with depression among them. Long term problems identified in adults, who were bullied, especially during adolescence suffered anxiety disorders, depression, low self-esteem, suicide ideation, emotional loneliness, fearful attachment style and friendship difficulties (Roeger, Allison, Korossy Horwood, Eckert & Goldney 2010; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). One study demonstrated that the students who are being victimized more than seven times were reported all symptoms of depression than those students who are bullied 2 times (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007). A meta-analysis of studies also support our assumptions and exploring the connection between victimization and psychological maladjustment established a strengthened relationship with depression, anxiety, unhappiness, isolation and self-worth (Schneider, 2012).

Further, bullying victamization is a risk factor that plays a significant role in the development of emotional problems in adolescents. Fear of being victimization and fear of negative evaluation leads to emotional distress in adolescents. This distress may create difficulties for young adults due to whom they fail to achieve the demand of everyday life and feel themselves unable to maintain psychological balance. These findings are consistent with the

previous researches which explored that bullying victims report high level of anxiety as compared to other students (Neary & Joseph, 1994; Slee, 1995). Some Silverman, La Greca & Wassterin (1995) argued that if an individual repeated exposure to such object which can be harmful and dangerous for him this may cause anxiety symptom and anxiety may cause physical and emotional problems in adolescents in response to repeated exposure to bullying. Some researchers reported that bullying victims significantly report higher anxiety, social anxiety and depressive symptoms (Craig 1998).

Distress is thought to be really destructive if it is associated with interpersonal violence and relational bullying can lead to many negative outcomes. Bullying victimization in childhood was associated with higher anxiety in adulthood. It was estimated that 92 percent of anxiety cases were registered of those who were victimized in childhood (McCabe, Antony, Summerfeldt, Liss & Swinson, 2003).

Troy and Sroufe (1987) reviewed that when victims show their anxious feelings they may easily expose to attack. Thus, those adolescent who are already anxious by personality are at high risk to being bullied and continually victimization may result in higher level of anxiety and these types of individuals may experience all types of victimization. For instance physical, verbal, and indirect, as well as indirect and verbal aggression, there is some evidence to support a negative cycle in the development of repeated victimization. As the bullying and victimization continues over time, these children may increase in their feelings of anxiety. Furthermore, the victims make myth about themselves that they are weak so they are deserve their peer violence, and this thinking pattern may contribute to the development of depression and sense of helplessness. In other words, for victims, there is a negative cyclic relationship between anxiety and victimization. From the bullies' perspective, this increased anxiety may serve to further reinforce the bullies' negative behaviors and increase the likelihood of future attacks. It is also interesting to note that bullies had significantly lower anxiety levels than victims.

Summing up, the overall findings indicate that bullying leads to emotional distress in adolescents. In this era many problems and challenges are present for adolescent and bullying is one of them. Being a victim of bullying adolescents may become emotionally and socially disturb, this may decrease their ability to perform their activities properly. Due to feeling of less competence, and feeling of rejection from others and negative evaluation about themselves, they fail to maintain balance in vast areas of functioning, which leads to maladjustment such as they develop emotional distress (depression & anxiety). The findings of the present study significantly showed that adolescent experiences emotional distress when they are being victimized Thus, the bullying is an inarguably stressful experience that carrying increased risk for depression, anxiety and stress in adolescent's life. Bullying is a serious issue so the present research will be a productive addition and open doors for new investigations as well as parents and teachers for better understand of the adolescent's problems and psychopathologies.

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