

Prevalence of Bullying and Victimization among Sixth Graders with Reference to Gender, Socio-economic Status and Type of Schools

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ABSTRACT Current study was aimed to find overall prevalence of bullying, victimization and fighting behavior among 836 sixth graders (M = 12, SD= 1.20) and specifically in context of socio-economic status, type of schools and, gender in Pakistan. Data were collected from 16 private and public schools using Illinois Bullying Scale (Urdu translation) along with demographic form. Findings revealed 19.6% - 24.1% prevalence among sixth graders generally and 20.9% - 21.8% among children of low socio-economic status and, 22.7% - 23.6% among average socio-economic status specifically. Furthermore, prevalence among private and public school children ranged from 20.4% - 23.8% and 19.1% - 24.9% respectively. Children of public schools were found more involved in bullying, fighting and victimizing others as compared to private school children. Gender-wise prevalence has been found as 22%- 24.9% in boys and 22% in girls. Boys were engaged in more bullying, victimization and fighting than girls.

INTRODUCTION

School violence or bullying has been a fundamental concern of school teachers, parents, educationists and researchers for almost three decades. School Bullying is defined as “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus 1994). Students who bully or being bullied as compared to non-bullies or non-victims are more likely to face health related problem. Researchers claim that primary and secondary school children feel anxiety, depression like symptoms, sleep problems, loneliness (Salmón et al. 1998; Stanley and Arora 1998; Hawker and Boulton 2000). Specifically, victim of bullying remain in severe threat like anxiety, depression and psychosomatic complaints, lower academic achievement and low self-esteem (Kaltiala-Heino et al. 1999; Fekkes et al. 2004; Schwartz et al. 2005; Srabstein et al. 2006). Keeping the adverse impact of bullying behavior in view, it is important to know the extent to which bullying

and victimization is prevalent in various countries. One study reported 29.9% school children were found to be involved in bullying behavior in United States including 13% bullies and 10.6 % victims (Nansel et al. 2001). Another study reported that prevalence of victimization is higher in elementary school children and declines in secondary school children (Pellegrim and Long 2002). Prevalence of bullying other students ranges from 4.1% in Finland (Olafsen and Viemero 2000) to 49.7% in Ireland (Kumpulainen et al. 2001). Students in 8th grade were found to be more victimized than becoming bullies as US studies reported 9% to 11% were bullied while prevalence of bullying varied from 5% reported in an English study (Menesini et al. 1997) to 14.1% in an Italian study (Baldry and Farrington 1999). Another prevalence study found that bullying increases in middle school as children enter in adolescence; this phenomenon prevails across the culture (Rios-Ellis et al. 2000; Carney and Merrell 2001; Cook et al. 2009). A recent study reported that among the different countries, Egypt was rated as highest on bullying (34.2%) and Macedonia (3.4%) was rated lowest on bullying (Wilson et al. 2013). Additional to prevalence reported from different countries, evidences about role of socio-economic status of children involved in bullying and victimization vary. Sourander et al. (2000) reported non-

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significant relationship between socio-economic status of children and becoming bully or victim. Whereas another study reported that children from low socio-economic families are more prone to become bully or being victimized from others than children of non-low socio-economic status (Wolke et al. 2001). In the same stream, socio-economic status is associated with anti-social behavior and researchers claimed that children of low socio-economic status are more likely to be engaged in anti-social behavior (Okon 2006 as cited in Maliki 2009). Studies revealed that significant relationship exists between socio-economic status and bullying and children who become victim of bullying mostly belong to low socio-economic families (Nansel et al. 2001; Analitis et al. 2009). Kumpulainen et al. (1999) reported presence and persistence of bullying behavior is associated with low socio-economic status. Similarly, bullying is more prevalent in middle school children who belong to low socio-economic class (Whitney and Smith 1993) and bullying is more prevalent in countries with high economic inequalities than countries with low economic inequalities (Elgar et al. 2009). A study carried out with Greek children reported that victimization was not associated with socio-economic status while perpetrators (children who bully others) came from low socio-economic families (Magklara et al. 2012).

Gender differences exist in bullying and victimization. Boys are more involved in bullying than girls (Branwhite 1994; Charach et al. 1995). Other researchers claim that boys and girls are equally likely to be engaged in bullying behavior when different forms of bullying are taken into consideration like girls are higher in spreading rumors than boys (Ahmad and Smith 1994; Smith and Sharp 1994). A study reported no gender difference in bullying behavior (Craig 1993). Boys involve in direct and aggressive bullying while girls engage in indirect and relational bullying (Craig 1998; Crick and Bigbee 1998). Commonly, boys are more involved in fight and bullying behavior than girls but both boys and girls are equally victimized (Olweus 1993; Salmivalli 1999; Fekkes et al. 2005; Cerezo and Ato 2010). A study used class room observation reported that boys were more victimized than girl (Atlas and Pepler 2000). These findings are consistent with some studies (Stephenson and Smith 1989; Olweus 1991; Rigby and Slee 1991; Olweus 1993) but inconsistent with Toronto Board of Education Survey which claims that boys and girls are

equally victimized (Ziegler and Pepler 1993). However, males are traditionally more aggressive than girls and girls are victimized mostly by relational or indirect bullying (Whitney and Smith 1993).

A recent study used 8th grade children at three time points (1989, 1999, 2005) to study the change in prevalence across the time and gender. Findings revealed that bullying behavior slightly reduced among boys from 1989 to 2005 while teacher reported that bullying increased from 5% to 9% among girls (Iloa and Sourander 2013).

The existing literature regarding associations of bullying, victimization, socio-economic status and gender provides mixed evidences and no research caters indigenous Pakistani perspective in this regard. Owing to socio-economic conditions, Pakistan can be listed as country with high economic inequality and research posits that prevalence of bullying is greater in countries with high economic inequalities (Elgar et al. 2009). Studies also claimed that children belonging to low SES have the higher probability of bullying others and being bullied than children from non-low SES (Nansel et al. 2001; Analitis et al. 2009). A recent study reported that 17% children were found to be engaged in bullying and 13% were bully-victim while less than 4 % were found to be victim. Socio-economic status increases the risk of becoming bully or bully-victim. Children who come from disadvantageous socio-economic family background are more likely to be engaged in bullying and bullying-victimization (Jansen et al. 2012).

Apart from role of socio-economic status, bullying may trigger maladaptive behaviors like drug abuse, school violence and pose serious threat to psychological and physical health (Shepherd et al. 2006). That is why prevalence of bullying behavior in Pakistani school children was an important issue to be investigated. Studies revealed gender difference in bullying and victimization and boys were involved in direct bullying and girls were found to be engaged in relational or indirect bullying (Craig 1998; Crick and Bigbee 1998) but no gender difference was reported in terms of victimization (Fekkes et al. 2005; Cerezo and Ato 2010). The researchers intend to investigate gender difference in bullying and victimization and to ensure external validity of previous research findings in indigenous culture.

Besides, two parallel educational school systems are being run in Pakistan, public (Urdu

medium, managed and funded by the government) and private (English medium, managed and funded by private authorities). Bullying and victimization have never been investigated in public and private school context prior to current study. The atmosphere in public and private schools differs to greater extent as their education quality does. Students of private schools are observed to be more disciplined, achievement oriented, strict followers of organizational policies and strictly defined organizational rules and policies do not allow them to get involved in bullying behavior. On the other hand, rules and policies of public schools are lenient and flexible enough for the children to become bullies or victim of bullying behavior. To the researchers' knowledge, no research has been conducted yet to investigate whether intensity of bullying or victimization varies across the type of schools. Current study was aimed to investigate prevalence of bullying and victimization among sixth grade children across socio-economic classes and types of schools (public and private). Along with this, gender differences in terms of bullying and victimization were also taken into consideration.

On the bases of above mentioned objectives and literature review, it was hypothesized that bullying acts, victimization and fight behavior would be more prevalent among children of low socio-economic status than average socio-economic status. Similarly, prevalence of bullying, victimization and fight would be higher in public school children compared to their counterparts in private school children and boys would show greater prevalence of bullying, victimization and fight than girls.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample

Sample of ($N = 836$) 6th graders with age range 10-14 years ($M = 12$, $SD = 1.20$) was conveniently drawn from 16 private and public schools. The total sample included boys ($n = 335$), girls ($n = 501$). Children from private and public schools were 294 and 541 respectively.

Determining Socio-economic Status (SES)

The criterion used for determining SES of designated sample was definition provided by Ravallion (2010). He defined middle economic class on the bases of expenditure ranging from 2

\$ - 13\$ per day. As per this definition it was inferred that families earning < 6000 per month fall in low socio-economic class, between 6000-38000, fall in average socio-economic class and > 38000 fall in high socio-economic class.

Measure

Illinois Bullying Scale: Illinois Bullying Scale (Espelage and Holt 2001) is a reliable and valid measure of bullying, victimization and fight behavior among 6-16 year old children. It contains 18 items and three sub-scales (that is, Bullying, Victim and Fight). This scale has been translated in Urdu language with the permission of author of original scale (Shujja and Atta 2011). Reliability analysis revealed that alpha coefficients of three scales ranged from .73-.81 for current study. This translated version was used in current study after ensuring its suitability.

Demography: Demographic form included variable of interest, that is, socio-economic status, types of schools (private and public), age and gender. Data obtained through this form were encoded and subjected to statistical analyses.

Procedure

In order to administer Illinois Bullying Scale on designated sample, prior permission was sought from heads of private and public schools after clearly communicating adverse impact of bullying, victimization and fight on children's psychological and physical health, academic performance, and school atmosphere etc. then children were personally approached and informed consent was taken to ensure willingness of participants. Children were ensured that information taken would only be used for research purpose and kept highly confidential. Illinois Bullying Scale along with demographic form was administered as per sampling schedule plan (group of 13-14 boys or girls). Oral as well as written instructions regarding completion of data set were clearly given using hypothetical example. The obtained data were subjected to statistical analyses.

RESULTS

Data obtained from ($N = 836$) sixth graders were subjected to statistical analyses and results revealed that 23.2% of designated sample

bullied others, 24.1% were victimized, and 19.6% engaged in fight in last 30 days prior to data collection. Further analyses revealed prevalence of bullying, victimization and fight with relevance to socio-economic status, types of schools and gender (Table 1).

Bullying and victimization were equally prevalent in children with low and average SES while children from average SES families were found to be more aggressive than those who belong to low SES.

The comparison between private and public schools revealed that children of public schools were more bullies than children of private schools. Although prevalence of victimizing others and fight was higher in private school children but on average, children of public schools were reported to be more victimized and engaged in fight compared to children of private schools. Students of public schools scored high on bullying, victim and fight scale (Table 2).

Almost equal prevalence of bullying in boys and girls was evident while boys are more victimized by same-sex-gender than girls being victimized by girls. Fight behavior was also more prevalent among boys than girls. t- Statistics reveals significant differences on bullying, victim and fight. Boys scored higher on bullying, victim and fight scales than girls (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

Prevalence of bullying behavior among sixth graders reported in current study is almost equal to the prevalence reported in study conducted in USA, that is, 29.9% (Nansel et al. 2001), while some studies reported either low bullying behavior (Nansel et al. 2001) or much higher, that is, 49.7 % in Ireland (Kumpulainen et al. 2001). A recent finding of cross-cultural study has also reported similar bullying prevalence rate like highest bullying in Egypt (34.2%) (Wilson et al.

Table 1: Prevalence and t –tests reflecting differences in bullying, victim and fight behavior between socio-economic status

Variables	Socio-economic Status (SES)						t	p
	Low SES		Average SES		Average SES			
	(n=294)	(n=541)	M	SD	M	SD		
Bullying	21.9%	23.6%	12.4	4.4	13.0	5.1	1.7	.07
Victim	20.5%	20.3%	7.2	2.8	7.6	3.1	1.6	.10
Fight	20.8%	22.7%	8.2	3.0	9.0	3.6	3.39	.001

Table 2: School-wise prevalence and mean differences in bullying, victimization and fight among sixth graders

Variables	Schools						t	p
	Private		Public		Public			
	(n=294)	(n=541)	M	SD	M	SD		
Bullying	23.8%	24.9%	12.1	4.8	13.0	4.7	2.68	.01
Victim	19.7%	18.9%	6.9	3.1	7.6	2.9	3.30	.001
Fight	20.4%	19.1%	8.3	3.9	8.8	3.1	2.0	.04

Table 3: Gender-wise prevalence and mean differences in bullying, victimization and fight among sixth graders

Variables	Boys (n=335)	Girls (n=501)	Boys		Girls		t
			M	SD	M	SD	
			Bullying	22%	22.3%	14.4	
Victim	24.9%	22.2%	8.4	3.2	6.7	2.7	7.9*
Fight	24.4%	22.1%	10.1	3.8	7.7	2.7	10.5*

* $p < .001$

2013). Prevalence of bullying others (23.2%) and being victimized 24.1% poses real threat to the children and schools. One of the major reasons may be imbalance of power or perception of level of dominance in bullies and victims. Becoming bully or victim may be associated with other potential factors like SES, types of schools or gender along with power imbalance. The researchers' finding reported equal prevalence of bullying and victimization in sixth graders but children belonging to average SES families were more aggressive than children of low SES families. These findings are contradictory with previous researches which claim that children from low SES families show more bullying behavior and being victimized than children from non-low socio-economic families (Whitney and Smith 1993). A potential reason of non-significant difference between these two economic classes may be similar level of psychological dissatisfaction and deprivation accompanied with perception of power imbalance. Children who perceive themselves powerful likely to bully others, no matter whether belong to low SES or average SES and determinant of becoming bully or being victimized would be deprivation and psychological dissatisfaction. Despite of similar level of economic deprivation, children who belong to average socio-economic status would be slightly better (less deprived) and powerful than children of low socio-economic status and show dominance over other and, in turn, more vulnerable to fight. Children's socialization experienc-

es and family atmosphere for example, socio-economic status play important role in development of aggressive behavior but power imbalance determines whether a child would become bully or victim (Maliki 2009). Another research reported that children belonging to economically disadvantaged family are more likely to become bully or bully victim (Jansen et al. 2012).

With reference to schools, a cross-cultural research reported that school climate has significant influence on perception of bullying and attitude towards bullying (Hanif 2008) but the researchers' focus of study was to find out prevalence of bullying, victimization and fight in public and private school. As expected, children of public schools showed more bullying, victimization and fight behavior compared to private school. As the researchers observed, there is clear difference between two types of school setups in terms of educational standards, strictness in following discipline, children attitude towards education, parental and teacher concern with child's personal, moral, and socio-emotional development. Children of public schools usually come from low socio-economic families and school atmosphere is less conducive to learning. Furthermore, parents and teachers are not concerned with child's development compared to children of private schools.

Although bullying was equally prevalent in boys and girls yet boys were higher on bullying others, victimizing others and fight behavior than girls and these findings are in line with previous research (Branwhite 1994; Charach et al. 1995). Especially, Pakistani society has been considered a male dominant society and boys mostly show aggressive acts to express their dominance over others. Other the other hand, girls are more empathetic and regard other's feelings, that's why, less prone to bullying, victimize others and engage in fight. Gender differences on bullying and victimization could have been more likely if forms of bullying were taken into consideration (Fig.1).

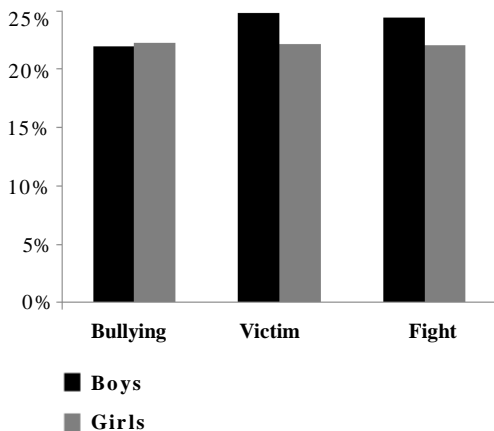


Fig.1. Graphical presentation reflecting gender-wise prevalence

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, overall prevalence of bullying, victimization and fight in sixth graders ranged 19.6% -24.1%. Children of low and average SES did not differ in bullying and victim behavior but children of average SES were significantly higher on fight that children with low SES. Simi-

larly, children of public schools were high on bullying others, being victimized by other students and fight compared to children of private schools. Finally, boys were more involved in bullying, being victimized and fight than girls and for prevalence of bullying, victim, and fight.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Identifying prevalence of bullying victim and fight with reference to socio-economic status, types of schools and gender among sixth graders is a pioneer work and findings of current study can be beneficial for teachers, parents and school counselors in perceiving bullying, victimization and fight a serious threat for physical and psychological health of children. These findings would provide deep insight in the bullying phenomenon and its adverse impact on school's atmosphere, academic performance of children, psychological and physical health. These findings highlight dire need of intervention programs to eradicate bullying, victimization and fight behaviors from our schools. This study provides new directions to prevalence researchers to use multi-method approach to investigate bullying behavior or one may design research to identify prevalence among ethnically or academically diverse population. This paper is focused on students of sixth grade and one may attempt to find prevalence across the grades or age groups using cross-sectional research design or one plan a longitudinal study to observe change in prevalence of bullying, victimization or bullying-victimization over time.

LIMITATIONS

This study included sample of sixth graders with age range 10-14 years and findings of current study should not be generalized beyond the age group and grade. Moreover, sample was drawn from different public and private school but this study did not include children of designated age who do not attend school.

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