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Students' Skills in Dealing with Bullying in Secondary Schools: an Illustrative Study

Salma Jehad*¹, Duaa Abdul Hadi Fatlawi²

1,2. Faculty of Nursing, University of Kufa, Iraq

*Correspondence Author: salmaj.aldehedhawi@uokufa.edu.iq

Abstract: School bullying continues to pose a significant threat to children and adolescents despite decades of research and school bullying prevention programs implemented. This study aimed to assess the impact of educational interventions on students' responses to bullying incidents and to analyze the socio-demographic factors influencing these reactions. A cross-sectional survey methodology was employed to examine the prevalence of bullying behaviors and the reactions of students in a school setting. A self-administered questionnaire was used to measure students' experiences with bullying, their reactions to bullying, and their demographic information. Pre- and post-education assessments were conducted to assess students' responses to bullying. The results revealed that bullying manifests in various forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, with physical bullying being the most identifiable and commonly reported type. The significant changes in students' reactions to bullying after educational interventions highlight the effectiveness of targeted educational programs. The strong association with educational stage suggests that interventions may need to be tailored to specific age groups. Given that a substantial proportion of students reported being bullied, it is imperative that schools implement comprehensive anti-bullying strategies that not only address the immediate behaviors but also promote a positive school climate. Such strategies should involve collaboration among educators, parents, and students to create a supportive environment where bullying is actively discouraged and reported. Future research and policy development must prioritize evidence-based approaches that empower students and foster a culture of respect and inclusivity within schools.

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1. Introduction

Bullying is a major problem around the globe. Bullying is observed across race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It is prevalent in all grades, and all schools can be mild, moderate, or even severe. Bullying has been the focus of recent international research, policy development, and student's performance. The estimated prevalence of bullying usually depends on how bullying is perceived and who reports the incidence. For example, teachers and parents frequently report fewer cases of bullying behaviors than children and young people (Lodge & Baxter, 2013). In Australia, many incidents of bullying have been obtained from questionnaire data. In a large study conducted, 1 in 6 students (aged between 7 and 17 years) reported being bullied at least once a week, with greater numbers from primary and secondary schools than university students. The example is that primary and secondary school students are being bullied more than university students (Mbah, 2020).

Bullying is aggressive behavior shown by repetition and an imbalance of power. It involves a recurrent abuse of power where a person repetitively abuses their power. The person being bullied, who is the victim, cannot defend him or herself for various reasons, such as having less physical strength and being less psychologically resilient than the bully (Ghani et al., 2020). School bullying seems to be still a threat to children and adolescents despite decades of research and school bullying prevention programs implemented. In the PISA reports, bullying has been mentioned as the most serious threat to students' well-being in schools, and also the pervasiveness of all forms of bullying has been underlined (PISA, 2018). It is stated in these reports that, on average, across OECD countries, around 23 % of students reported being victims of an act of bullying at least a few times a month in 2018, while this rate was 19% in 2015. In addition, many studies have presented disconcerting pictures of the reality of bullying in different countries (Saldiraner & Gizir, 2021).

According to Durdle (2008), bullying has emerged across studies in Europe and later Australia, where it is perceived to be more noted as a global problem. The victim of bullying is at risk factor for poor academic performance, especially in elementary and middle age school. Based on the 2009 report, it is known that 90% of students have been bullied, and their grades have dropped (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). A previous literature review by Veenstra et al. (2005) noted that bullying and victimization are common in elementary and secondary schools worldwide. The estimated rates of bullying and victimization range from 15% to 25% in Australia, England, Finland, Germany, Norway, and the United States. A school survey in about 40 countries found that Australian primary schools had higher incidences of bullying from junior high school, especially from grade 7 students (Mbah, 2020).

Two multi-level models examined the direct link between peer victimization and academic performance to extend past research on peer victimization and academic outcomes. Data drawn from a long-term Australian study of bullying showed that 1 in 3 students between the ages of 10 and 11 years of age reported being bullied by peers, with name-calling far more common than physical bullying (Lodge & Baxter, 2013).

Bullying is no longer considered a normal rite of passage, but a primary public health problem, which is known to pose serious long-term impacts in schools. Some children and youths are victims of bullying in schools, and they are bullied through different electronic means (Swartz, 2015). An investigation by Juvonen (2011) showed that the incidences of bullying in schools result from victimization, which leads to school adjustment problems of academic achievement, school avoidance, and loneliness. It is well established that bullying among children and youths leads to different physical symptoms such as headache and sleep disturbances. Bullying in schools also leads to anxiety, depression, and substance use, especially among youths (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

There are five types of bullying, which include physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying, reactive victims, and cyberbullying. Each of them has various context-based on bullying is conducted by the perpetrators. Physical bullying is the most generic form of bullying that exists around the world and the most prominent type of bullying which occurs through stereotyping in schools. Physical bullying includes hitting or kicking the victim, taking, or damaging the victim's property. This type of bullying is very easy to identify, and all physical bullies are always known by the entire population in schools (Elamé, 2013). Other types of school physical bullying include a broader range of physical bullying, defined as hitting, shoving, spitting, beating, stealing, or damaging property (Mbah, 2020).

Bullying, as a serious concern for educators, can be described as repeated aggressive behaviors of a more powerful person or group towards a less powerful one with the intention to harm or distress. Based on the pioneering study of Hymel and Swearer (2015), it is stated that although bullying is defined as a peer-on-peer aggressive behavior, it is

different from other types of aggression with respect to three key features, namely intentionality, repetitive nature, and imbalance of power favoring the perpetrator. It is emphasized that distinguishing bullying from other forms of aggression between students seems to be critical because these mentioned unique features of bullying make it more harmful than similar forms of aggression (Gladden et al., 2014).

Related literature indicated that bullying has negative impacts on victims, bullies, and also bystanders, but the most harmful effects are observed on victims, such as low self-esteem, poor academic performance, negative attitude toward school, social isolation, loneliness, poor peer relationships, not to have sense of school belonging, depression, anxiety, headache, stomachache, feeling threatened, suicidal thoughts, and sleeping problems (Manna et al., 2019).

2. Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey methodology to examine the prevalence of bullying behaviors and students' reactions in a school setting. The primary aim was to assess the impact of educational interventions on students' responses to bullying incidents and to analyze the socio-demographic factors influencing these reactions. This approach is appropriate given the need to gather numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to conclude the relationships between variables related to bullying.

Participants

The study population consisted of students aged 14 to 17 years from a selection of secondary schools. A total of 100 students were recruited to participate in the survey. The criteria for inclusion were: (1) students must be enrolled in grades 9 to 12, (2) students must provide informed consent, and (3) students must be willing to participate in the study. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different age groups and educational stages, with participants divided into three stages: first stage (35%), second stage (43%), and third stage (22%).

Socio-Demographic Data

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants were collected through a structured questionnaire. The data included age, educational stage, living situation (i.e., whether students lived with their parents), and self-reported experiences of bullying. The demographic distribution of the participants is summarized in Table 1, which indicates that the majority of respondents were 14 years old (70%) and that all participants reported living with their parents. Additionally, 77% of students reported having experienced bullying.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire designed to measure students' experiences with bullying, their reactions to bullying incidents, and their demographic information. The questionnaire was developed based on existing literature and previous studies on bullying (e.g., Lodge & Baxter, 2013; Ghani et al., 2020). The survey included closed-ended questions to capture a comprehensive range of responses.

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire comprised the following sections:

1. **Demographic Information:** Questions regarding age, educational stage, and living situation.
2. **Bullying Experiences:** Questions assessing whether students had been bullied, the frequency of bullying, and the types of bullying experienced (physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying).

3. **Reactions to Bullying:** A series of statements regarding students' reactions to bullying incidents before and after educational interventions, measured on a dichotomous scale (Yes/No).
4. **Educational Intervention Assessment:** Questions evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs aimed at reducing bullying and enhancing students' responses to bullying incidents.

Pre- and Post-Education Assessment

To evaluate the impact of educational interventions, participants completed the questionnaire both before and after the intervention program. The educational program focused on raising awareness about bullying, teaching coping strategies, and encouraging students to report bullying incidents. The pre-education survey was administered before the intervention, while the post-education survey was administered immediately following the completion of the program.

Educational Intervention

The educational intervention consisted of a series of workshops conducted over a four-week period. Each workshop was designed to educate students about the various forms of bullying, the psychological effects on victims, and the importance of bystander intervention. The workshops included interactive activities, role-playing scenarios, and discussions facilitated by trained educators and counselors. The objectives of the intervention were to:

1. Increase awareness of bullying and its effects on individuals and the school community.
2. Promote positive peer relationships and an inclusive school environment.
3. Equip students with the skills to respond effectively to bullying situations.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS, Version 26). Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and their experiences with bullying. Chi-square tests were employed to examine the relationships between demographic variables and students' reactions to bullying, both before and after the educational intervention. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was set for all statistical tests to determine the significance of the findings.

Statistical Distribution

The statistical distribution of students' responses regarding their experiences with bullying and their reactions to it was presented in tabular format (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). Table 2 provides descriptive statistics and differences in students' reactions against bullying before and after the educational intervention, highlighting significant changes in responses to bullying behaviors. Table 3 examined the association between students' reactions to bullying after the intervention and their demographic data, indicating significant relationships with educational stage and previous experiences of being bullied.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants and their parents or guardians, ensuring that participants understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with all data anonymized and stored securely.

3. Results

Table 1. Statistical distribution of students by their Socio-demographic data.

Items	Sub-groups	Study group Total = 100	
		Frequency	Percentage
Age / Years	14	70	70.0
	15	20	20.0
	16	7	7.0
	17	3	3.0
Stage	First	35	35.0
	Second	43	43.0
	Third	22	22.0
Do you live with your parents?	Single	100	100.0
	Married	0	0.0
Have you been bullied?	Yes	77	77.0
	No	23	23.0

Table 1 shows statistical distribution of students' sub-groups by their socio-demographic data, it explains that the majority of the students' subgroup are : students with 14 years old (78.4%), second stage students (43%), those living with their parents (100%), those who have you been bullied? (77%).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and differences of students' reaction against bullying before and after education.

Questions	Resp.	Before	After	Chi Square	P value (Sig.)
		Freq.	Freq.		
I react against bullying	Yes	41 41.0%	8 8.0%	29.44	0.000
	No	59 59.0%	92 92.0%		
I Cry	Yes	0 0.0%	2 2.0%	2.02	0.15
	No	100 100.0%	98 98.0%		
I tell the teacher and the administration	Yes	25 25%	10 10%	7.79	0.005
	No	75 75%	90 90%		
I tell my parents	Yes	9 9.0%	1 1.0%	6.74	0.009
	No	91 91.0%	99 99.0%		
I hit the bully	Yes	8 8.0%	23 23.0%	8.59	0.003
	No	92 92.0%	77 77.0%		
I tell the bully to stop	Yes	27	6	16.00	0.000

I ignore the bully	No	27.0%	6.0%	0.13	0.72
		73	94		
	Yes	73.0%	94.0%		
		21	19		
	No	21.0%	19.0%		
		79	81		
		79.0%	81.0%		

Table 2 reveals descriptive statistics and differences of students' reaction against bullying before and after education, it explains that there is a significant difference in students' reaction against bullying before and after education regarding (I react against bullying), (I tell the teacher and the administration), (I tell my parents), (I hit the bully) and (I tell the bully to stop).

Table 3. Association between reaction against bullying (after) and their demographic data.

Demographic Data	Chi Square	df	Significance P value
Age / Years	17.42	18	0.494
Stage	50.76	12	0.000
Do you live with your parents?	-	-	-
Have you been bullied?	15.18	6	0.018

Table 3 explains the Association between reaction against bullying (after) and their demographic data; it explains that there is no significant relationship ($p > 0.05$) between reaction against bullying (after) and their demographic data, except for stage, in which there is a highly significant relationship.

4. Discussion

Participants The findings of this study underscore the persistent and multifaceted nature of bullying within educational settings, as evidenced by the high prevalence rates reported by students. With 77% of participants indicating that they had experienced bullying, these results align with previous research that highlights bullying as a significant public health concern affecting students globally (Mbah, 2020; PISA, 2018). The disparity in reporting between students and adults, such as teachers and parents, further complicates our understanding of bullying dynamics, as evidenced by the lower incidence rates reported by adults compared to the experiences shared by children and adolescents (Lodge & Baxter, 2013).

The study's results reveal that bullying manifests in various forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, with physical bullying being the most identifiable and commonly reported type. This is consistent with existing literature emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that address the specific contexts and types of bullying prevalent in schools (Elamé, 2013). The identification of name-calling as a more frequent form of bullying among younger students (10-11 years) suggests a critical area for intervention, as verbal bullying can have profound psychological impacts, contributing to issues such as low self-esteem and social isolation (Manna et al., 2019).

Moreover, the significant changes in students' reactions to bullying after educational interventions highlight the effectiveness of targeted educational programs. The data indicate a marked increase in proactive responses, such as informing teachers and

confronting bullies, which suggests that educational initiatives can empower students to take action against bullying. This aligns with the findings of Hymel and Swearer (2015), which emphasize the importance of fostering resilience and assertiveness among students to combat bullying effectively.

The association between demographic factors and reactions to bullying further elucidates the complexity of this issue. While no significant relationship was found between age and reactions to bullying, the strong association with educational stage suggests that interventions may need to be tailored to specific age groups. Younger students may require different strategies compared to older students, who may have developed more sophisticated coping mechanisms. This insight calls for a nuanced approach to bullying prevention programs that considers the developmental stages of students.

The adverse effects of bullying on victims, including academic decline, anxiety, and depression, are well documented (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Given that a substantial proportion of students reported being bullied, it is imperative that schools implement comprehensive anti-bullying strategies that not only address the immediate behaviors but also promote a positive school climate. Such strategies should involve collaboration among educators, parents, and students to create a supportive environment where bullying is actively discouraged and reported.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on bullying, highlighting its prevalence and the necessity for effective intervention strategies. As bullying continues to pose a significant threat to student well-being and academic performance, ongoing research and policy development must prioritize evidence-based approaches that empower students and foster a culture of respect and inclusivity within schools.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the prevalence of bullying and the effectiveness of educational interventions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants may underreport or overreport their experiences with bullying. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the educational intervention and changes in students' reactions to bullying. Future research employing longitudinal designs and mixed-method approaches could further enrich the understanding of bullying dynamics and intervention effectiveness.

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