

Bullying among Adolescents

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Abstract: *The aim of the present study was to conduct a survey on bullying among adolescents in various schools in India. Bullying is not a new age problem, it has always been a part of life. Cases of bullying have been on the rise for the past few years, besides there are many cases that go unreported due to societal pressure and stigma. The researcher used a self prepared questionnaire to conduct a survey among the adolescent and young adult population of the Delhi NCR through random sampling. The data collected was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents believe that bullying is a serious and pertinent issue in their educational institution and needs immediate attention of the authorities.*

Keywords: Bullying, Adolescents, Societal pressure and stigma

1. Introduction

Bullying is the unwanted use of force, coercion and abuse to intimidate or dominate. It involves the perception of an imbalance of power which differentiates bullying from a conflict. Bullying is an aggressive behavior characterized by the following criteria: 1. Imbalance of power, 2. Repetition over time and 3. Hostile intent.

Generally bullying among adolescents manifests in three main types namely verbal bullying, social bullying and physical bullying. These are the most common forms of bullying in a high school setting. Verbal bullying includes acts of teasing, name calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting and threatening. Social bullying is referred to as relational bullying because it often leads to ruined reputations and relationships. Social bullying includes, but isn't limited to acts of excluding someone, spreading rumors and embarrassing someone in public. The most prominent type of bullying is physical bullying which is often portrayed in the media. Physical bullying, as the name suggests, includes physically assaulting someone, stealing or destroying their belongings etc.

The rising use of technology has introduced another type of bullying, cyber bullying. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms and gaming platforms. It manifests in acts of spreading lies, photos or videos of the victims on any social media platform. Sending threatening, hurtful and unsolicited messages and photos are also an act of cyber bullying along with impersonation and identity theft on social media. Cyber bullying is easily recordable and traceable compared to face-to-face bullying. Both the victim and the bully can have serious, lasting mental problems due to the act of bullying. It is a serious threat to the mental health of the people in the short run. It introduces problems like elevated anxiety, paranoia and depression and in many cases these problems are long lasting. Victims of bullying have lasting social consequences as well; they find it hard to confide in others thus making it tough for them to make friends. Kids who have been bullied find social relationships threatening (Louise Arseneault). Along with social, economic and psychological problems, victims of bullying face many health complications later in their life due to stress and chronic trauma.

1.1 Need

Bullying is not a new age problem, it has existed for a considerable amount of time. Cases of bullying are on the rise in schools and colleges in India along with many incidents that go unreported. With the increasing importance of social media in an adolescent's life, forms of bullying like cyber bullying have also made frequent appearances in the Indian context. Another problem that occurs quite often is that the victim is seldom aware of their rights and the trauma that is caused by being bullied. This mainly occurs because most forms of bullying are normalized and considered as 'joking around' by their peers. The researcher was thus prompted to conduct a survey and to create awareness among the authorities to take more action and provide more support to the students suffering in silence.

1.2 Objectives

- 1) To study the perceptions of bullying among adolescents
- 2) To study the experiences of bullying faced by adolescents
- 3) To study the actions taken to prevent and eliminate bullying in a school setting

1.3 Tools used

Self-prepared online questionnaire on bullying among adolescents

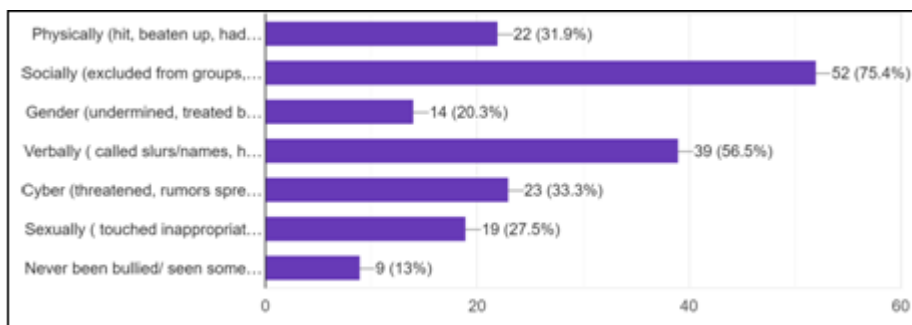
1.4 Sampling

The present study was conducted through an online survey on 70 adolescents and young adults in the national capital region (Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon). It was a random sample.

2. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The obtained data was analyzed to study the pattern of responses related to bullying and its various aspects. Bar graphs and pie charts were used to represent and analyze the data to understand the severity of the problem of bullying, how it impacts the individuals. The analysis also helped to understand the position of the various stakeholders which gives us the way forward to increase awareness and minimize the incidents of bullying in the society.

2.1 Experience of bullying among adolescents



The graphical representation of the question “Have you ever been bullied at school or in any other setting?” shows that the majority of the respondents (53.6%) have not been bullied. Whereas 37.7% of the respondents have been bullied sometimes and 8.7% have been bullied frequently.

The analysis of the responses to the question “Have you ever shared with anyone your experience of being bullied?” shows that the majority of the respondents have not been bullied. While 21.7% felt that it does not need to be shared, 10.1% felt that if they shared their experience, they would be judged or criticised. 21.7% of the respondents have talked about their experiences with their peers, 15.9% have talked to their parents, 5.8% have talked to their siblings, 4.3% of the respondents confided in a counselor and only 2.9% have shared about the same with their teachers.

The analysis of the responses to the question “How have you been bullied/ witnessed someone being bullied?” shows that social bullying is the most common form of bullying found in schools (75.4%) followed by verbal bullying (56.5%). The cases of cyberbullying have been rising day by day (33.3%). The age old practice of physical bullying is still imminent in schools followed by sexual exploitation (27.5%) and gender based bullying (20.3%). 13% of the respondents have never witnessed bullying or experienced the same.

The responses to the question “Have you ever bullied someone?” reveal that the majority of the respondents have never bullied someone (47.8%) closely followed by 43.5% of the respondents who believe they might have bullied someone unknowingly. 5.8% of the respondents may have bullied sometimes whereas 2.9% frequently bullied other people.

The responses to the question “What would you do when you see someone getting bullied?” show that the majority of the respondents would stop the bullying and help the victim (66.7%). 17.4% would inform an adult about the bullying and 13% of the respondents would ignore the same. In contrast to most of the responses, 2.9% of the respondents responded that they would join the act of bullying.

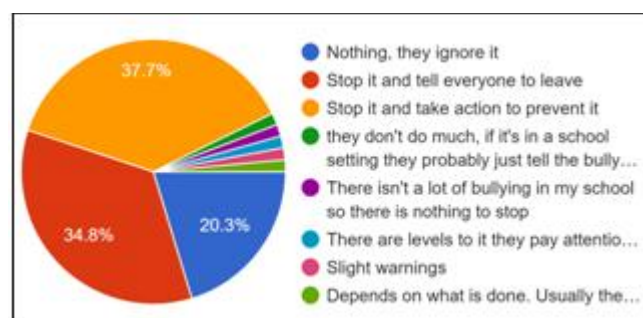
2.2 Taking Action against Bullying

The analysis of the responses to the question “Have your parents talked to you regarding bullying?” reveals that the majority (44.9%) responded that their parents have never talked to them about bullying. 33.3% responded that their

parents have mentioned it indirectly to them whereas 11.6% of the participants responded that their parents regularly talk about the issue of bullying. 10.1% responded that their parents choose not to talk about the same.

The data analysis of the question “Have the teachers in your school talked about bullying?” shows that the majority responded that their teachers have mentioned it indirectly and 27.5% responded that they regularly talked about bullying. 26.1% responded that their teachers have never talked about bullying whereas 10.1% stated that their teachers choose not to talk about the same.

The analysis of the graphical representation of the responses to the question “What actions do the teachers and school management take in your school; when they see any student getting bullied?” shows that in the majority of the cases they stop it and take action to prevent it (37.7%). 34.8% of the respondents reported that their school management stops it and doesn't take action to prevent it, rather they tell everyone to leave and go back to their respective classes. In some cases (20.3%) the teachers even ignore the bullying. Some respondents gave their opinions on the same, they said that their school doesn't have many instances of bullying thus nothing is done. One of the respondents even speculated that often the teachers are the bully and not other students.



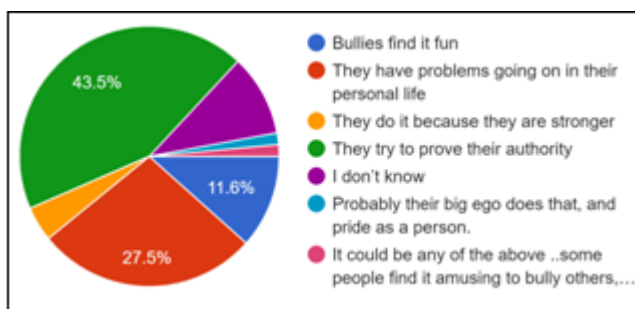
The data analysis shows that majority (55.1%) of the respondents believe that supervising the school and implementing strict anti bullying rules can help eliminate bullying. 40.6% of the respondents feel that regularly spreading awareness about bullying can reduce instances of the same. 4.3% of the respondents believe that nothing needs to be done as bullying isn't a problem in their school.

The data analysis of the question “What can be done at the school level to eliminate or minimize instances of bullying?” shows that most of the respondents believe that stricter rules

should be implemented and ‘bullies’ should be punished for their actions. Some of the implications and suggestions recorded through the survey are as follows-

- 1) “ I would say that spreading awareness frequently, addressing this issue, having meetings/assemblies about anti-bullying , should be a measure we should take. And we should assure them that there is absolutely nothing wrong and /or to be afraid of, for speaking up and asking for help.”
- 2) “I feel a lot of the times the people being bullied themselves don't realise it as everyone around them usually either supports the actions of the bully or avoids the situation completely. This probably allows the victim to believe that it's very normal, hence, awareness I think is the key here to minimize or eliminate bullying.”
- 3) “We need strict regulations, I've seen a lot of awareness campaigns but they add little to nothing towards protecting people from being bullied, stricter rules give birth to fear among the bullies, and I've seen multiple cases of this working out more than awareness campaigns.”
- 4) “There should be a strict anti-bullying policy similar to the anti-ragging policy in colleges. There should be an anti-bullying committee in schools consisting of staff, teachers and students who keep a check on the bullying taking place in school and take strict action against those violating the anti-bullying policy.”

2.3 Perceptions of bullying



The graphical representation of the question “ What is the reason behind bullying?” shows that the majority of the respondents (43.5%) feel that bullying occurs because the bullies try to prove their authority by doing so. The rest feel that bullies have problems going on in their personal lives which leads them to express their frustration on their classmates and peers (27.5%) or that they simply find the act of bullying a fun activity(11.6%). 10.1% of the respondents are unsure about the reasons behind bullying and 4.3% feel that some people indulge in bullying because they are physically stronger than the victims. One of the respondents conveyed that a bully's ego and pride is the reason, along with that another respondent felt that it could be any of the above reasons depending upon the individual.

The responses to the question “How can one face the challenges of being bullied?” shows that the majority of the respondents (44.9%) feel that talking to an adult helps face the challenges of being bullied. Being around friends whom the individual trusts is another way to combat the difficulties of bullying according to 40.9% of the respondents. Whereas, some respondents (7.2%) believe avoiding the bully is the

best way to face the challenges. A few of the survey participants provided their personal view and felt that the victim should “be independent enough to be able to fend for themselves” and “fight back physically”.

The respondents were asked to express their opinions and views on the practice of bullying in schools and other settings. Most of the respondents consider bullying to be a serious issue which requires the utmost attention of the respective authorities. The participants felt that adolescents tend to act recklessly as well as immaturely and think that bullying is a fun activity thus, eliminating instances of bullying is near impossible. Some of the views noted are as follows:

- 1) “You cannot control how everyone behaves, everyone has their own problems and outlets, some people have outlets that harm peers. In my opinion one cannot stop a bully externally, that person must look into themselves and ask themselves why they behave the way they do. They won't stop until they see what they are doing is wrong and affects others in a negative manner. Once they see the error in their ways and try to improve their character, that is when everyone benefits!!”
- 2) “I think bullying is a serious issue especially among adolescents as they are developing into different individuals and building their personality. Bullying can affect their mental health, can lower their confidence and can also make them not like themselves and we all know that loving ourselves should be our priority. Nobody should be allowed to take away your right of loving yourself and make you feel inferior.”
- 3) It is a major issue that every adolescent goes through/has been through. Many times teachers and parents have ignored such a situation. Bullying can cause long term effects of trauma as well. I am not sure how we can completely stop bullying from taking place but ensuring and talking to kids frequently and checking in on them is a step we should all take. The more we try to talk to them, to share their thoughts and feelings, the more we know about their problems and can help them.

3. Conclusions

The data analysis showed clearly that the majority of the respondents believed that bullying is a serious issue prevalent in their respective educational institutions. The survey observations show that ‘social bullying’ is the most pervasive form of bullying found in many schools followed by increasing cases of verbal bullying and cyberbullying. Majority of the respondents felt that implementation of strict rules and regulations is a necessity to eliminate instances of bullying. Many victims don't report their experiences, scared that they'll be judged. Although, they feel comfortable sharing the same with their peers. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants feel that talking to someone they trust is the best way for victims to face the challenges of bullying. They feel that teachers and parents often ignore bullying and overlook it thinking that it's not a serious issue, however bullying has long term effects on one's mental well being thus providing support to the victims is of utmost importance.

4. Implications

- More workshops and counseling sessions should be conducted in schools on a regular basis to create awareness about the seriousness of the issue. These sessions should be conducted by professionals and should be open to students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.
- Government helplines should be made to provide support to the victims in an effort to not let the students suffer in silence.
- Authorities should strive to provide a nurturing and safe environment so that students can seek support without feeling judged or misunderstood.

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