

A study of the problem of bullying in schools

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is widespread and perhaps the most under-reported safety problem on Indian school campuses. Contrary to popular belief, bullying occurs more often at school than on the way to and from there. Once thought of as simply a relatively harmless behavior that helps build young people's character, bullying is now known to have long-lasting harmful effects, for both the victim and the bully. Bullying is often mistakenly viewed as a narrow range of antisocial behavior confined to elementary school recess yards. In India, awareness of the problem is growing, because of violent attacks are taking place among the students; the attackers had previously been bullied. "In those cases, the experience of bullying appeared to play a major role in motivating the attacker. Present Study focuses on the same and tries to find solutions to overcome this hazardous anti-social behavior.

Key words : bullying in schools

INTRODUCTION

Every day thousands of students across the world wake up afraid to go to school. Bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences for the general school climate and for the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. Bullying can also have negative lifelong consequences--both for students who bully and for their victims. Bullying is a problem that affects millions of students, and it has everyone worried, not just the

kids on its receiving end. Parents, teachers, and other adults don't always see it; they may not understand how extreme bullying can get.

A number of researchers believe that bullying occurs due to a combination of social interactions with parents, peers and teachers. The history of the parent-child relationship may contribute to cultivating a bully, and low levels of peer and teacher intervention combine to

create opportunities for chronic bullies to thrive.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Bullying is the general term applied to a pattern of behavior whereby one person with a lot of internal anger, resentment, aggression and lacking interpersonal skills chooses to displace their aggression onto another person, chosen for their vulnerability with respect to the bully, using tactics of constant criticism, nit-picking, exclusion, isolation, teasing etc with verbal, psychological, emotional and (especially with children) physical violence. Child bullies are adept at manipulating the perceptions of adults, especially adults who are inexperienced or who have a low EQ.

It seems that children bully for a variety of reasons and when dealing with child bullying it's essential to identify who is the bully at the centre of the violence - there's usually one person who's the gang leader - and the reasons for bullying which include:

➤ Frustration - a child is impaired in some way and is frustrated and resentful because the source of their difficulty has not been identified -

problems can include deafness, dyslexia, autism, allergy, being left-handed, or some unidentified learning difficulty - nevertheless the child is expected to perform at the level required by the school and no attempt is made to identify the source of the frustration

- The child is being bullied, the responsible adults have repeatedly failed in their duty of care, so the child slowly and reluctantly starts to exhibit aggressive behaviors because that's the only way to survive in this bullying-entrenched climate
- Poor or no role model - the child has no role model at home, or a poor role model for one or both parents and has never had the opportunity to learn behavior skills
- Abuse at home - the child is being abused and is expressing their anger through bullying
- Neglect at home - similar to abuse as the child's emotional and behavioral development is being retarded
- Undue influence - the child has fallen in with the wrong crowd

Students who are victims of bullying are typically anxious, insecure, cautious, and suffer from low self-esteem, rarely defending themselves or retaliating when confronted by students who bully them. They may lack social skills and friends, and they are often socially isolated. Victims tend to be close to their parents and may have parents who can be described as overprotective. The major defining physical characteristic of victims is that they tend to be physically weaker than their peers—other physical characteristics such as weight, dress, or wearing eyeglasses do not appear to be significant factors that can be correlated with victimization.

On the above basis, the needs of the study are as follows:-

- Do students bully or get bullied?
- What sort of people are bullies/victims?
- What sort of bullying is going on?
- Where does bullying take place?
- What can we do about it?
- What should a school policy on bullying say?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:-

- To find out the percentage of bully and bullied students in the selected samples.
- To study the impact of bully on society.
- To suggest the program to reduce the problem of bullying to school.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study is that research on students has been conducted only in one school namely – V. J. Modi School, Rajkot. The sample size of the students for study is 48 in class VI.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this study, survey method with a specific set of questionnaire has been used.

STUDY SAMPLE

Random sampling has been used to choose the sample of 48 students of class VII from V. J. Modi School for conducting the research on bullying problem in schools.

Worldwide studies have shown that while boys typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are more apt to utilize these more subtle indirect strategies, such as spreading rumors and enforcing social isolation. In order to revalidate the fact, the sample of students for this survey was chosen as mix of boys and girls of class VI in the age group of 12 to 14.

The mix of sample students consists of 57% boys' students and 43% girls' students. This mix of gender ensured that data gathering for bullying was from both the genders and unbiased as general feeling has been that boys are more bullying in nature than girls.

Further, the sample students were in the age group of 12 to 14 with 43% students of age 12, 55% of age 13 and 2% of age 14. This shows that the class has uniform age group of students and possibility of an older age student becoming bully to younger age students is very less. It also gives the interpretation that mostly bullying is prevalent in same age group students comparing this result with the result of

number of students getting bullied or bullying others.

TOOLS OF RESEARCH

In this project study, a specific set of questionnaire to assess the indulgence of students, type, place of bullying etc as a tool of research has been used.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The responses to survey questionnaires by all the sample students were consolidated and analyzed. The analysis gave some interesting results from which many conclusions and interpretations can be drawn.

The survey results show that as many as 80% of students have been bullied once or many times whereas 65% of students have indulged in bullying other students. The disparity between these two sets of numbers makes us to interpret that the bully often does not perceive his/her actions as bullying.

TYPES OF BULLYING

Bullying can be done by direct behaviors such as physical abuse (hitting, kicking etc) or verbal abuse (teasing, taunting, threatening etc) that can be initiated by one or more students against

a victim. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be more indirect by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion. In the survey questionnaire, various types of bullying were tried to be identified.

The survey results showed that various types of bullying are prevalent amongst the students with “teasing” and “hitting” being the most used type of bullying. Physical abuse like hitting, biting or pushing is 37% of total used types of bullying which reflects the violent mindset of the students who bully others.

PLACES OF BULLYING

Various studies across the world have reflected that most of the bullying incidences take place in school campus rather than outside of it. The result of the questions asked from the students on place of bullying also strengthened that view.

The results showed that 79% cases of bullying takes place at the various locations within the school ranging from toilets, playground, and corridors or between the lessons when teachers are not present around. Outside

the school campus the highest place of bullying takes place while coming to school when student travel together from their homes to school.

WHO BULLIES

Bullying can be done by any student to other irrespective of their age and gender. The result of the questions asked on age and gender of the bullying students also gave the same interpretation.

The survey results shows that mostly same age students are involved in bullying others as compared to younger or older students. Mostly boys are engaged in bullying however girls are also involved in this activity.

WHOM STUDENTS TELL ABOUT BULLYING

Most of the students share their feeling of grief and frustration after being bullied either with their friends or elders. The result of the questions asked on whom they share being bullied showed the same patterns.

The survey result showed that there are only 3% students who do not tell about being bullied to anyone may be

due to thoughts of fear and shame running in their mind. Most of the students (60%) tell about bullying to their friends whereas only 26% share about that with their parents or someone at home. There are very few students (11%) who tell about bullying to their teachers. The interpretation of this result can be that most of the students are comfortable sharing their grief and frustration about bullying with their peer or friend rather than elders.

RESPONSES OF FRIENDS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

When a victim of bullying shares his/her experience and grief with friends, parents or teachers, their main duty is to hear them carefully and patiently and help them come out of the mindset of fear and anxiety. In the survey questionnaire researcher tried to find out the type of responses of friends, teachers and parents after being informed about bullying by the victim student.

The survey result showed that in more than 80% of cases Teachers, Parents and friends listen and provide support to the victim student of bullying. The results indicate that highest

percentage of listening and support comes from friends (94% of cases), which strengthens the finding of earlier question, why most of the bullied students share their feeling with friends instead of parents and teachers.

The finding of results of this question of teachers not listening or supporting in 18% of cases can be interpreted as lack of desired level of empathy in teachers towards student victims of bully that's why very few students come forward to share their feelings with teachers as seen in previous question of students telling about bullying.

The result of this question highlights the urgent need of creation of informal and conducive atmosphere in the class by teachers and gain confidence of students. This would enable them sharing their feelings with teachers without fear and look towards them for resolution as most of the bullying takes place in school.

WHY OTHERS BULLY ME

“Every action as an equal and opposite reaction” is a famous law of science but this works in many places in

human lives also. There are possibilities of instigations of giving reasons from the victim students before they get bullied by others. Many survey results done earlier have indicated that half the times the bullying occurs towards a student due to some provoking done by him towards the bullying student. In the survey questionnaire finding about any provocative activities done by victim student was tried.

The survey result showed that bullying occurs in 53% cases when reasons of bullying are given by the victim student. Victim student instigates the bullying student by doing provocative activities like calling names, insulting, hitting, kicking or making faces at them. Only 47% victim students admitted that they have not done anything which could have been a reason of bullying them.

FEELINGS OF BULLIED STUDENTS

The victim students of bullying always have feelings of fear and frustration which affects their morale, self-confidence and academic results. In the survey questionnaire finding out the feeling of the students while getting

bullied by others and while coming to school was tried.

The survey result showed that 60% students feel angry when they get bullied and 40% students feel sad. The higher percentage of students feeling angry can be interpreted as a beginning of feeling of retaliation among those students and them turning into bullying others whenever opportunity comes across. On the question of feeling while coming to school, results shows that most of the students (94%) feel frustrated which indicate that their internal feeling is that they are not able to respond to the students who are bullying them. This may be due to various social, physical or economic reasons around them.

FEELINGS OF BULLYING STUDENTS

The way victim students have a feeling of anger and frustration while getting bullied, the students bullying also have certain feelings. In the survey questionnaire finding out the feeling of the students who bully others was tried.

The survey result showed that 90% students feel bad or sad when they bully others which mean that they are

well aware of the activities of bullying being done by them towards others. These students can be easily counseled and guided to leave their bullying habits and be a good social citizen.

There are 10% students who feel good while bullying, these students need to be identified by the school teachers and counseled to become a good citizen of the country in future. If these types of students get away with their bullying habit without any correction in school, there's a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest they leave school and carry on their bullying in the workplace in future which is harmful for society at large.

With the results of questionnaire and its various interpretations It is becoming evident that bullying is taking place at very high level of indulgence of students in the school campus. This is a serious problem that can dramatically affect the ability of students to progress academically and socially. A comprehensive intervention plan that involves all students, parents, and school teachers is required to ensure that all students can learn in a safe and fear-free environment.

CONCLUSION

The survey results reveal that bullying is very rampant in schools in various age groups and classes. Our social system is perhaps the most sophisticated attempt at legitimizing bullying which quite simply, makes us a nation prone to bullying. Children learn to bully servants from a very early age. If we happen to occupy a position of authority or influence or wealth, we encourage our children to flout rules, and then flaunt our authority when they're caught in the act. We use bullying tactics by approaching friends and relatives in high places to secure admission in institutions, or even jobs for our kith and kin. The role of parents, therefore, has to be seriously evaluated. What kind of role-models are they at home? What is their reaction when their children do something horribly wrong? From the research the conclusion comes that the problem of bullying is increasing gradually in school campuses. The victims of bullying retort to bully others, resulting in increase of violent behavior in the students which is harmful for peaceful society in future. It's the non-

violent children who will go on to make the biggest contribution to society. Bullying is a large problem in schools, but with a suitable intervention program, it is possible to considerably reduce it.

SUGGESTIONS

There are few suggestions which can be implemented and School, class and Individual level to overcome problem of bullying.

➤ The school should create an environment whereby children understand from the moment they join the school that bullying, aggression and violence are not acceptable in the culture of the school. It is often the absence of such a policy that potential bullies perceive as acceptance of their aggressive behavior. A policy is a start, but it must be more than just words on paper. It has to be a proactive policy, not just a rule book which is dusted down in the head's study after aggression has resulted in injury.

➤ The school should not use physical punishment as a tool to reprimand the students. The use of physical punishment in schools reinforces the bullying child's view that

violence is an appropriate solution to any problem - if you don't like what someone else is doing, it's OK to hit them.

➤ School environments tend to be one of "exclusion" rather than "inclusion". Children are left to form their own groups, or gangs, and you are either "in" or "out". Children should be taught at the outset to show dignity and respect to other children regardless of whether they are "in" or "out", and to be proactive in their relationships to other children. Conformity is high in the list of children's priorities, and rejection, for whatever reason, is particularly painful. Sadly, many children do not learn the best interaction skills at home, and this is where schools can make a big difference.

➤ The schools need to understand that the bullying child needs support, supervision, and mentoring, whilst being helped to understand that violence is not acceptable. If the bullying child refuses to respond positively, then an escalating response is appropriate, including ultimately the removal of the child from the class in order to protect the rights of the majority of children who do choose to conform to the required social norms.

➤ Bullying prevents children from undertaking their studies and results in grades which are lower than they would otherwise be which means that the school appears lower on overall results than they otherwise would. Schools should go in deeper analysis of reasoning behind the poor results and work with victims of bullying to improve their performance.

➤ Schools can have a structured bullying prevention program, key components of the program are :-

MEASURES AT SCHOOL LEVEL

- Questionnaire survey
- School conference day
- Effective supervision during break times
- Educational teacher discussion groups
- Formation of coordinating group

MEASURES AT CLASS LEVEL

- Class rules against bullying

An effective anti-bullying program can be implemented relatively easily and without major cost in the school. It is

- Class meetings with students
- Meetings with parents of the class

MEASURES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Awareness and involvement on the part of adults
- Serious talks with bullies and victims
- Serious talks with parents of involved students

➤ School can have a concept of "Bully Box" in the school. A 'Bully Box' as an attempt to deal with the problem of victim children who are too nervous to tell someone about it. The box can be like a ballot box, with a lockable lid positioned in the school library. There can be supply of "incidence forms" beside it or student can write themselves on a piece of paper. Any student who is being bullied, but was too nervous to talk about it, can write down the details on a form or a piece of paper and put it in the box. At the end of each day, the box should be emptied and the forms can be passed to an appropriate member of staff for action.

primarily a question of changing attitudes, knowledge, behavior and routines in school life. Bullying is not

going to be eradicated by a Supreme Court edict or a Presidential decree. It will require the active cooperation and engagement of all segments of civil society, if this evil is to be wiped out.

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The ability to see beauty is the beginning of our moral sensibility. What we believe is beautiful we will not want only destroy.

- Reverend Sean Parker Dennison