

Unveiling Bullying Dynamics: Assessing The Phenomenon In An Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

In light of the accruing evidence, it has been established that Bullying is a diverse and complex phenomenon that affects millions of people each year. Research has been conducted by different researchers in multiple fields of studies regarding bullying over the years however; there is a lack of study regarding bullying in Indian context. The purpose of this study was to explore bullying in Indian context in order to understand the forms of bullying in India. To do so, the researcher conducted focus group interviews with a total of 17 people. First group consisted of five teachers teaching the students of age 13 to 18 years, second group consisted of six students Who were not actively participating in sports and the third group consisted of six students who are actively participating in sports. The age of the students was ranging from 13 to 18 years. The researchers then transcribed, coded and analyzed the interview with the help of NVivo (trial version). The results revealed that in Indian context social bullying is prevalent between students which include Body shaming and discriminatory remarks. The result also showed that the most common reason behind bullying is the attention seeking behavior of bully. When it comes to bystanders, it was revealed that their action during the occurrence of the phenomena can influence bully's behavior. It was also revealed that bystanders play an important role in order to prevent bullying. The researcher concluded that bullying is as big of a problem in India as the rest of the world and needs to be explored in for prevention.

Keywords: Bully, Bullying, Bystanders, Phenomena, Victim

Introduction

The idea that victims of bullying may suffer major health and psychological effects (Siddique, Khan, & Rauf, 2023) as a result of their persistent abuse is a major driving force behind the anti-bullying movement. These assertions at least stem from the 19th century, when the detrimental impacts of bullying in English public schools became the subject of public discussion after the release of Tom Brown's School Days. Nevertheless, until Professor Dan Olweus's series of studies on the causes and effects of bullying in Scandinavian schools in the 1970s, there had been little systematic research to investigate such allegations. Since then, a large number of research have been conducted worldwide on the immediate and long-term effects of bullying in school. Though their primary focus has been on the impact of bullying on its victims, they have also somewhat addressed the potential societal repercussions for bullies as well as the potential repercussions of engaging in bully-victim dynamics as both a bully and a victim (Rigby, K. 2003).

Adolescent bullying is a significant global issue with grave short- and long-term repercussions. Previous studies have indicated that those who experience bullying are more likely to miss school, perform worse academically, and experience a variety of negative mental and physical health consequences. These bullying can be of different types like physical, social, verbal, cyber and psychological (Antiri, 2016). Consequently,

parents, educators, legislators, and researchers alike now prioritize understanding and resolving teenage bullying victimization. Research on traditional bullying, which includes relational or social aggression, verbal teasing and mockery, and physical assault, has been ongoing for many years. Not only that but children and teenager's social cognitions can help us to explain why they behave as bullies or adopt various bystander roles in bullying situations, at least partially, and supplement to situational or contextual elements like social influence and reinforcements (Thornberg, & Knutsen, 2011). According to studies on bullying in schools it has been also suggested that bystanders may either act in a way that is supporting the victim and stopping the situation from getting worse or they may act in a way that encourages bullying. Mazzone, A. (2020). Showing that bystanders play a significant role in the phenomena. In recent times, the field of bullying victimization study has broadened to include particular types of discriminatory harassment, characterized by aggressive actions directed towards an individual's personal attributes (Salmon, Turner, Taillieu, Fortier, & Affifi, 2018).

In light of the accruing evidence, it has been established that Bullying is a diverse and complex phenomenon that affects millions of people each year. Research has been conducted by different researchers in multiple fields of studies regarding bullying over the years however, there is a lack of study regarding bullying in Indian context rather there is significantly low number of studies regarding bullying in India. The purpose of this study was to explore bullying in Indian context by understanding the concept of bullying, types of bullying, impact of bullying on individuals, reason of bullying and role of Bystanders in India.

Methodology

Participants: For the current research purposive sampling method was adapted as bullying is prevalent in schools (Kshirsagar, Agarwal, & Bavdekar, 2007) the researcher selected 17 subjects who were part of school (Teachers and students) for the focus group semi structured Interview. The study addressed ethical issues, ensuring voluntary participation with the right to refuse or withdraw at any time respected. Ethical approval was granted by the Board of Research Studies at the University of Delhi (Ref No: DPE/2023/1494), New Delhi, India. Participants were informed of their rights throughout the study. The study included Students and school teachers meeting health and physical readiness who were teaching different subjects from class 6th to 12th were selected, and to further include different perspectives the researcher selected different types of students (academically inclined and sports inclined). 5 Teachers who were teaching different subjects from class 6th to 12th were selected for the first group of interviews, 6 students from class 6th to 12th who were good in academics and were not actively participating in the sports were selected as the second group for the interviews and lastly 6 students from class 6th to 12th who were actively participating in sports were selected as the third group for the interview. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured, with the right to withdraw. Exclusion criteria encompassed individuals failing health and readiness checks, non-regular club members, withdrawals during data collection, and the exclusion of short-distance runners (Mola, D. W., & Shaw, D., 2024). The age of the students (who were taught by the selected teachers and who were selected for the interview) ranged from 13 years to 18 years old.

Measures: Keeping in mind the objective of the study 21 questions were prepared for the semi-structured interview with expert's advice and literature review to find out Understanding of bullying, Types of bullying, Impact of bullying on individuals, Reason of bullying and Role of Bystanders in India.

Procedure: The researcher took permission from the school to conduct the study and then arranged the interview in a lab to avoid outside noises. The interviews were scheduled in three groups, first group consisted of 5 teachers second group consisted of 6 students who were not actively participating in sports and third group consisted of 6 students who were actively participating in sports. The research first explained the objectives of the study and then told the subjects that the information provided by them will only be used for research purpose and will be strictly confidential. The researcher then asked questions one by one while modifying the questions if required. The interview was recorded using an electronic audio recording device.

Statistical Analysis: As the research was qualitative in nature no statistical analysis was employed on the data. The researchers transcribed the data which was obtained from the recorded interview. After the completion of transcription, the researcher created codes as per the objectives of the study. After the coding was completed, the researcher then analyzed the data in form of word cloud and word frequency tables with the help of NVivo (trial version). The researcher also used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which focuses on the convergence and divergence of experiences, together with its goal of analysing in-depth and subtle analyses of the lived experiences of a small number of participants. NVivo on the other hand is an application which analyses the transcribed interview following the grounded theory and presents results in form of word cloud and frequency tables.

Results

The researchers divided the results into six different categories that is understanding of bullying by the subjects, types of bullying, prevalence of bullying, impact of bullying on individuals, reasons of bullying and role of bystanders, with the help of NVivo (trial version) the researchers analyzed the transcribed data and result were obtained in form of word cloud and frequency table which is given below:

Understanding of bullying by the subjects: For understanding of bullying by the subjects, the researcher asked questions “how would you define bullying” and “what are the key characteristics of behaviours that differentiate bullying from other form of conflict or aggression” the word frequency table of the result is given below:

Table 1: word frequency table of understanding of bullying by the subjects

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Someone	7	8	6.30
Bullying	8	7	5.51
Making	6	5	3.94
Person	6	5	3.94
Advantage	9	4	3.15
Feel	4	4	3.15
Inferior	8	4	3.15
Fun	3	3	2.36
Make	4	3	2.36
Mental	6	3	2.36
Physical	8	3	2.36
Weakness	8	3	2.36
Continuously	12	2	1.57
Hurting	7	2	1.57

Table 1 reveals that the most used words were someone, bullying, making, person, advantage, feel, inferior, fun, mental, physical, continuously, and hurting which shows that bullying is when someone make a person feel inferior, make fun of them and continuously hurt them physically or mentally on the basis of their weakness.

Types of bullying: To check the types of bullying the researcher asked questions like can you think of different forms of bullying that you have experienced around you and what are some common types of bullying that you have come across or heard about the answer to these questions were then analyse in form of word cloud which is given below

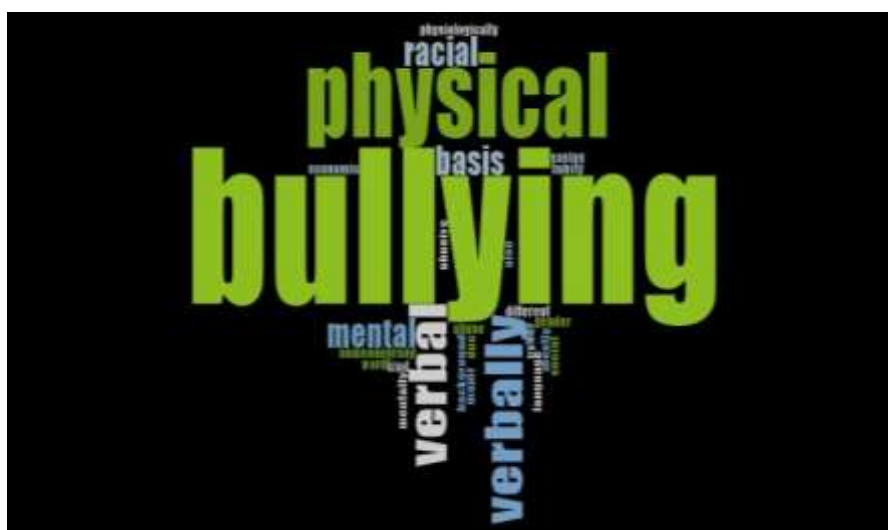


Figure 1: word cloud of types of bullying

Figure 1 revealed that the most prominent word which has been used multiple times were bullying, physical, verbal, mental, verbally, basis, racial, which means when talked about the types of bullying, the subjects have revealed bullying as physical bullying, verbal bullying, mental bullying and racial bullying in Indian context.

Prevalence of bullying: In order to understand the prevalence of bullying behaviour, subjects were asked if they can share any personal experience or observation related to bullying and how did it impact them or the individual involved. The result is shown in form of words frequency table.

Table 2: word frequency table of prevalence of bullying

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Bullying	8	5	3.16
Caste	5	3	1.90
Colour	6	3	1.90
Physical	8	3	1.90
Appearance	10	2	1.27
Back	4	2	1.27
Body	4	2	1.27
Different	9	2	1.27
Fat	3	2	1.27
Personality	11	2	1.27
Shaming	7	2	1.27
Weight	6	2	1.27

Table 2 revealed that the most commonly used words were bullying, caste, color, physical, appearance, back, body, different, fat, personality, shaming and weight which means that in case of India bullying is done on the basis of caste and color of the victim, it is also done on the basis of physical appearance of the victim body shaming, personality shaming and talking behind the back are the most common ways of bullying method used by the bullies. From statements like “I have heard people talk about me in my back about my personality and my physical appearance”, “if someone’s colour is dull then not talking to them” and “He had man boobs so they used to tease him” shows that social bullying is very prevalent in Indian context.

Impact of bullying on individuals: In order to understand the impact of bullying on individual questions like ‘how did bullying impact The individuals involved’, ‘how does bullying affect the well-being and mental health of individuals involved’ and ‘what are the long-term consequences or effects of bullying’ were asked the result of the data given in form of word cloud.



Figure 2: word cloud of impact of bullying on individuals

Figure 2 reveals that the most dominant words were mental, depression, health, introvert, change confidence, personality, socially etc. Which shows that bullying impacts the mental health of an individual, makes them depressed, changes confidence of the victim and makes the victim introvert.

Reasons of bullying: To understand the reason behind bullying subjects were asked what are the common motivations behind bullying and are there any specific factors that contribute to someone becoming a bully the data was analyzed and presented in form of word cloud figure.



Figure 3: word cloud of reason of bullying

The figure revealed that the most prominent words were attention, self, inferiority, cool, satisfaction complex, become, powerful etc. which means that a person bullies to get attention, due to inferiority complex, to look cool, for self-satisfaction and for feeling of power. It can also be seen in the figure that the most prominent word is attention, which means the most prominent reason behind bullying is attention seeking behaviour.

Role of bystanders: In order to understand the role of bystanders, the researcher asked ‘how does the role of bystander or witnesses influence bullying situation’ and ‘can bystander play a significant role in preventing the impact of bullying’ to which the subjects responded in various ways like “bystanders can stop the bully”, “they can help the victim”, “if you’re not doing anything to solve the problem then you are part of the problem”, “It aggravates bullying and it can diminish it too”, “If they are not intervening, obviously it will aggravate”, “They become the part here”, “Not standing against the bully is also like supporting them because he feels like he’s doing the right thing and he continues doing it”, “if a bystander intervenes automatically the bullying dies”, “the bully Gets the confidence” and “If the people don’t help the person out, the bully gets more confident”. The researcher used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which focuses on the convergence and divergence of experiences, together with its goal of analysing in-depth and subtle analyses of the lived experiences of a small number of participants (Tuffour, 2017). The analysis shows that bullying has a significant impact of bystander’s action if the bystander intervene then the bullying can stop but if they ignore the incident then it gives more confidence to bully and they continue bullying.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore bullying in Indian context by understanding the concept of bullying, types of bullying, impact of bullying on individuals, reason of bullying and role of Bystanders in India. To do so, the researcher conducted focus group interviews with a total of 17 people. The researchers then transcribed, coded and analyzed the interview with the help of NVivo (trial version). The results revealed that bullying is when someone make a person feel inferior, make fun of them and continuously hurt them physically or mentally on the basis of their weakness. There are different types of bullying which occurs in India like physical bullying, verbal bullying, mental bullying and racial bullying. Bullying is done on the basis of caste and color of the victim, it is also done on the basis of physical appearance of the victim body shaming, personality shaming and talking behind the back are the most common ways of bullying method used by the bullies. Social bullying is very prevalent in Indian context and it impacts the mental health of an individual, makes them depressed, changes confidence of the victim and makes the victim introvert and the reason to why a person becomes a bully is because they want to get attention, have inferiority complex. It can also be seen that the most prominent reason behind bullying is attention seeking behaviour. Bullying also has a significant impact of bystander’s action if the bystander intervene then the bullying can stop but if they ignore the incident then it gives more confidence to bully and they continue bullying.

When it comes to understanding of bullying by the subjects it was revealed that bullying is when someone make a person feel inferior, make fun of them and continuously hurt them physically or mentally on the basis of their weakness this definition aligns with the definition of bullying being goal oriented behaviour (Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014) and intentional harm doing (Vveinhardt, & Fominiene, 2020). There are different types of bullying such as physical bullying, verbal bullying, mental bullying and racial bullying in Indian context as Bullying in schools can take many different forms, including physical, social, verbal bullying (Antiri, 2016). In India risk factors for bullying at level of context particularly impact members of racial and ethnic minorities ((Mola, D. W., & Shaw, D., 2024; Xu, Macrynika, Waseem, & Miranda, 2020), it is also done on the basis of physical appearance (like color of the victim) of the victim as A lot of bullying is appearance-related (Magin, 2013) body shaming, personality shaming and talking behind the back are the most common ways of bullying method used by the bullies. Frisén, Jonsson, & Persson, (2007) also stated that individuals are bullied because of weight, BMI, different appearance and due to less attractiveness.

Social bullying is very prevalent in Indian context as position in society has been found to be essential component of the bullying process, attaining and retaining a high social position is the primary motivation for bullies (Thornberg, & Delby, 2019).

Bullying impacts the mental health of an individual, makes them depressed, changes confidence of the victim and makes the victim introvert as bullying can have serious negative effects which can have a detrimental psychological effect on the victim (Magin, 2013). A person bullies to get attention, due to inferiority complex, to look cool, for self-satisfaction and for feeling of power strengthening the fact that bullies have psychological factors underlying their behaviour in early childhood (van Dijk Poorthuis, & Malti, 2017). These factors indicate health problems, poor emotional, social and psychosocial adjustment that are direct problems which occurs due to involvement in Bullying (Vanderbilt, & Augustyn, 2010). It can also be seen that the most prominent reason behind bullying is attention seeking behaviour as the audience's feedback helps the person establish and preserve their reputation or preferred social identity within a reasonably stable group of people who are acquainted with one another (Houghton, Nathan, & Taylor, 2012).

Bullying has a significant impact of bystander's action if the bystander intervene then the bullying can stop (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2011) but if they ignore the incident then it gives more confidence to bully and they continue bullying. Bystanders can choose to ignore the bully or stand by idly, or they might actively support the aggressor and join the group of bullies because when the bystanders liked the victim, they were more likely to interfere directly (e.g., try to stop the bully, console the victim) than when they didn't know the victim or dislike them (Trach, & Hymel, 2020). Bullying can be fostered by bystanders who provide support by laughing or making favourable gestures or may choose to see from a distance and remain mute, which functions as granting unconscious consent (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2011). When bullying is disregarded or ignored, it spreads and affects even people who previously believed they could ignore it (Coloroso, 2003).

Limitations: The study's limitations include a small, geographically limited sample of 17 participants, restricting generalizability. It focuses only on ages 13 to 18 and relies on self-reported data, which may introduce bias and excludes other age groups. Additionally, it offers a short-term perspective without examining long-term effects of bullying.

Strengths: The study's strengths include its focus on the Indian context, addressing a research gap. It incorporates diverse perspectives from teachers and students, providing a comprehensive view of bullying dynamics. The qualitative approach allows for detailed insights, particularly on social bullying like body shaming and discriminatory remarks, and highlights the crucial role of bystanders.

Practical Implications: The study recommends implementing educational interventions and comprehensive anti-bullying programs in schools, targeting issues like body shaming and discriminatory remarks. It underscores the need for bystander training and awareness campaigns to shift attitudes and behaviors. Policymakers can leverage these findings to create stricter anti-bullying policies, and further research is suggested to investigate bullying across various regions and demographics in India.

Conclusions

The study concluded that bullying in India, characterized by actions that make someone feel inferior and cause consistent physical or mental harm, includes physical, verbal, mental, and racial forms. Among students, social bullying such as body shaming and discriminatory remarks is common. Bullying negatively impacts victims' mental health, causing depression and lowered confidence. Attention-seeking behavior is the primary motive behind bullying. Bystanders play a crucial role in preventing bullying by influencing the bully's behavior during incidents. It is recommended to raise awareness, implement anti-bullying programs, and encourage bystanders to intervene to effectively combat bullying.

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Author Contributions

ST contributed to the conception, design, data collection, and data analysis; he also prepared the tables and figures, drafted the manuscript, and revised and finalized it for publication. LS, M and DWS contributed to the conception, design, planning, and supervision of the research; They set the goals, provided substantive supervision, and finalized the manuscript for publication.

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Conflicts of interest : None

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