

Psychological Effects of Bullying On Students



What is Bullying?

Bullying is an action of repetitive unwanted aggressive behaviour towards the person who feels powerless (Gan, Zhong, Das, J. S Gan, Willis & Tully, 2014). Bullying includes physical actions such as hitting, kicking, or spitting and verbal actions such as threatening, name-calling, teasing or spreading rumors (Gan et al., 2014). Bullying has to be repetitive. Single one time incident of teasing or a physical action such as kicking does not meet the requirement of bullying. There are two kinds of bullying; traditional bullying (face to face) and cyber bullying (online bullying) (Coelho & Romão, 2018).

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Abstract:

Bullying is a significant problem in today's society because it is very prevalent and has serious psychological effects on its victims (Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013). Some people argue that bullying is not serious and that the victims of bullying just need to "toughen up" and some people argue that it is serious and leads to serious psychological problems. There is more research supporting that bullying is a serious problem as compare to bullying is not a serious problem; thus, making one viewpoint more valid than others. According to Bradley (2013) bullying is so common in school age children and has very serious effects that it has become a public health concern. Annually around 20% and 56% of young people are involved in bullying either as a victim, perpetrator or both, so in the classroom of 30 students around 6 and 17 students are involved in bullying (Hertz et al, 2013). According to one study conducted by World Health Organization, Canada is in 6th place out of 38 countries included in the study for the highest rate of bullying (Bradley, 2013). According to Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 1 in 3 adolescent reported being bullied (Bradley, 2013).

Misconceptions

Hypothesis:

Victims of traditional bullying in schools are more likely to experience psychological issues such as social anxiety (fear of being judged in a social situation), low self-esteem (lack of confidence), depression (feeling despondency and dejection) and suicidal ideations (thinking about ending one's own life) as compare to those who are not bullied.



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Misconception 1:

- There is a common misconception about bullying that bullying builds character (Graham, 2010). "Builds character" in this context means bullying makes an individual more confident and teaches them valuable life skills.
- Bullying does not build character; in fact, according to one study students who are bullied are significantly more likely to suffer from low self-esteem as compare to those who are not bullied (Rigby, 2003).
- According to Rigby (2003) there are number of studies done in the past that concluded that being a victim of bullying is related to having low self-esteem.
- If bullying builds character then it would not have any negative impact on one's self-esteem; but, instead it will increase one's self esteem. However, evidence suggests otherwise.



- Not only does bullying affect one's self-esteem; but, it also leads to social anxiety. In one study, it is stated that some previous studies and this study have seen a relationship between bullying victimizations and social anxiety (Coyle, Malecki, & Emmons, 2019).
- If bullying was building character then it would not make its victim anxious in public; rather, it would make them more confident and increase their self-esteem. However, there is no valid evidence that suggests that bullying builds confidence and increases one's self esteem; thus, it builds character.

- Evidence provided above suggests that bullying does not builds character as it leads to low self-esteem and more social anxiety.

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Misconception 2:

- Also, bullying is often seen as "child play" or as a "joke" by adults and they fail to realize traumatic effects of bullying (Tural, Meraler, & Ercan, 2018).



- Adults often see bullying as something not as serious and not worth worrying about.
- This is not a valid point of view as bullying leads to depression, suicidal ideations, lower self-esteem and social anxiety.

Consequently, it must be taken seriously if it has so many psychological effects.

- According to Tural et al (2018) there is a higher rate of depression in bullying victims as compare to those who were not the victims of bullying.
- Furthermore, study found that suicidal ideations were significantly higher in those who were bullied as compare to those who were not bullied.
- 30.4% of students who were bullied experienced suicidal thoughts (Tural et al., 2018).
- If bullying is a "joke" or a "child play" it would not have any psychological effects; but, according to research provided it does have serious psychological effects.
- Furthermore, there is not any valid research that suggests otherwise. Therefore, bullying must be taken seriously and not as a "joke" or a "child play" because of its detrimental effects.

Misconception 3:

- Another misconception around bullying is that general public seems to think that if bullying was such a serious problem they would hear about it more (The Society for Safe and Caring Schools, 2014).



- Just because one does not hear about bullying, it does not mean it does not exist. Bullying is still very prevalent.
- Annually around 20% and 56% of young people are involved in bullying either as a victim, perpetrator or both, so in the classroom of 30 students around 6 and 17 students are involved in bullying (Hertz et al., 2013).

- A high number of people are involved in bullying; but, general public tend not to hear much about bullying as a lot of bullying incidents goes unreported.
- Unreported incidents of bullying do not make it to statistics and reports. Thus, people do not hear about it as much.
- One study found that 79% of students who were bullied did not report being bullied and those who did report the incidents of bullying only 50% were taken seriously; thus, lack in reporting the incidents (Gan et al., 2014).
- Evidence suggests that bullying does exist; but, a lot of bullying incidents goes unreported. Thus, the misconception that bullying is not very prevalent. But, according to research provided above it is very prevalent

Photo: Man reading newspaper clipart on clipart-library.com

Key findings

Bullying leads to social anxiety and low self-esteem.
It is proven by research that there is a relationship between social anxiety and bullying.
According to one study, a high level of social anxiety in adolescence is associated with the victimization of bullying (Coelho & Romão, 2018).
Victims of bullying are more likely to feel socially anxious than those who are not involved (Coelho & Romão, 2018).
According to Coyle, Malecki, & Emmons (2019) studies done in the past and this recent study found that victims of bullying are more likely to experience higher rates of social anxiety as compare to those who are not bullied.
It is proven by research that there is a relationship between bullying and social anxiety. Bullying and social anxiety must have a strong relationship in order for multiple studies to find the same results.
Also, bullying leads to low self-esteem as discussed earlier.
According to Rigby (2003) there are number of studies done in the past that concluded that being a victim of bullying is related to having low self-esteem. Similar to social anxiety, low self-esteem and bullying must also have a strong relationship in order for multiple studies to find the same results.
Research has proven that people who are bullied are more likely to be more socially anxious and have low self-esteem than those who are not bullied.

Key findings

Depression and suicidal ideations are another effect of bullying victimization.
Research has shown that people who are victims of bullying are more likely to experience depression and suicidal ideations as compare to those who are not the victims of bullying.
According to one study, students who are bullied are significantly more likely to experience higher rates of depression and suicidal ideations as compare to those who are not bullied (Turner, Exum, Brame, & Holt, 2013).
Furthermore, in another research study, a strong relationship between bullying and suicidal ideations is seen (Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013). In middle school students suicidal ideation and attempts were three to five times higher for those who were the victim of bullying than those who were not bullied (Hertz et al., 2013).
In addition, number of people who experiences depression and suicidal ideations as a result of bullying is alarming.
According to one study, out of the 77% of young people who had experienced bullying, 68.9% had experienced suicidal ideations as a result of it (Alavi, Reshetukha, Prost, Antoniak, Patel, Sajid, & Groll, 2017). Only around 8% did not experience suicidal ideations as a result of bullying but 90% did.
Depression and suicidal ideation are one of the many effects of bullying and most detrimental ones because no one should be treated a way that makes them feel depressed and ultimately wants them to end their lives.

Bullying Intervention



Photo: Bullied Clipart on ya-webdesign.com

There are many intervention strategies that are put in place to minimize the incidents of bullying and its impact on students. It would be helpful to determine what the best intervention strategies are so schools and other institutes could focus more on those, as it is not possible to implement all intervention strategies. The best way of determining what the best intervention strategies are, is to ask those who may be or are impacted by bullying. In one study, 285 middle school students were surveyed to rate 15 most common bullying intervention strategies (Crothers et al., 2006). According to the study results, students tended to prefer strategies in which teachers were involved as compared to strategies that did not involve teaching staff (Crothers et al., 2006). Students preferred strategies like anti-bullying curriculums (teachers educating students about bullying) and classroom management techniques (teachers must be aware of what is going on in their classroom at all times), not a strategy that encourages students to reach out to their parents or any other trusted adult (Crothers et al., 2006). They believed that involvement of teachers in bullying situations is most helpful (Crothers et al., 2006). Middle school students wish to see teachers involved in bullying but evidence suggest that many teachers do not interfere in bullying incidents occurring in their classrooms (Crothers et al., 2006). It is important for teachers to be involved in bullying incidents as that is what students want to see. Photo by: Kretsu Nataliya on shutterstock



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To conclude, students want to see teachers' involved and taking action in bullying incidents. According to Carney & Merrell (2001) education and support are two very important components of effective intervention strategy. Students, and parents needs to be educated as to what bullying is and what are its impact and support must be available to students so they have someone to talk to if they are being bullied (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Therefore, the best intervention strategy would be the one in which teachers educate their classes on bullying; what it is and its impact. Also, teachers encourage students to reach out to them if they are being victimized or see someone else being victimized and make it clear that they have support available to them if needed. An intervention strategy like this could reduce the numbers of bullying incidents (Carney & Merrell, 2001) and minimize its impact on its victims. Also, a public awareness campaign addressing and correcting misconceptions about bullying and educating people would also be very affective in minimizing the bullying incidents and its impact on its victims. It is because, as discussed earlier there are a lot of misconceptions around bullying and those misconceptions are very damaging to their victims. The best intervention strategy mentioned above is only applicable in an institutional (school) setting and mainly would aware students not parents. But, a public awareness campaign would aware everyone; so, it is equally as important. Photo by: Claire Cody and Liz Ackerley on our-voices.org.uk

