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Impact of Bullying on Academic performance and mental Well-Being Among Female students

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is a pervasive issue affecting millions of students worldwide, with girl students being disproportionately affected. This study investigates the impact of bullying on girl students' academic performance and mental well-being. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. The study reveals that bullying has a significant negative impact on girl students' academic performance, leading to decreased motivation, lower grades, and increased absenteeism. Furthermore, bullying was found to have severe consequences on girl students' mental well-being, including increased anxiety, depression, and low self- esteem. The study highlights the need for schools to implement effective anti-bullying policies and programs to create a safe and supportive learning environment. The findings of this study have implications for educators, policymakers, and parents, emphasizing the importance of addressing bullying to promote girl students' academic success and mental well-being.

Keywords: *Bullying, girl students, academic performance, mental well-being, anti-bullying policies.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as a hostile and aggressive behaviour among school, college and university students characterized by desire to hurt and it involves both physical and Psychological power imbalance (Farrington,1993; Smith & Brain,2000, Rigby,2002). On the Other hand, Olweus (1993) associate the term bullying with specific actions and is defined as Interpersonal aggression that is characterized by intentionality, repetition and an imbalance and abuse of power. It may come in various forms such as verbal abuse or physical Aggression which have been termed as "direct bullying" (Catherine et al.2011) while indirect or covert forms include spreading lies or rumours withdrawing friendship, gossiping (Felix & Greif-Green,2010 Mishna 2012). Different studies have revealed that bullying not only affect the mental well-being of the students but also contribute to low academic success and dropping out of school or colleges (Paulmony et al. 2022). It was also reported that bullying among adolescent school children which is considered a Global problem is linked to poor adjustment among youth and researchers also found that Individuals who engaged in bullying were more likely to experience melancholy, anxiety, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Alshawush, Hallet and Bradbury-Junes,2020).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two standardized tools were used to collect quantitative data.

The Academic Performance Scale (APS), developed by Birchmeier et al., included eight items using a five-point Likert Scale with options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. This tool assessed Students' academic motivation, engagement, and study habits. Scores were categorized into Performance levels: Excellent (33–40), Good (25– 32), Moderate (17–24), Poor (9–16), and Failing (0–8). The scale was shown to have an internal consistency of 0.89 and a test-retest Reliability coefficient of 0.85.

The following instrument was given: Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). This measurement included 14 positively worded items measuring certain Aspects of emotional and psychological well-being. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Rating scale for each item, with 'None of the time' and 'All of the time' at the extremes of the Scale. The WEMWBS is a validated and widely used measure of general mental well- being in Population-based research.

3. METHODS

Research Design

It is a cross-sectional design quantitative survey study. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The aim was to explore the relationship between bullying experiences, academic performance, and mental well-being among female students using standardized, validated instruments.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of female students enrolled in colleges and universities A total of 200 participants were selected using random sampling to ensure that diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds were represented. All participants included in the study were aged 18 years or older and had provided informed consent before participating in the study.

Data Collection Procedure:

Participants received self-administered questionnaires to fill out either online or on paper, depending on their access and preferences. The participants were given an informed consent, reiterating the purpose of the study, what rights they had, and confidentiality assurance. Surveys were filled out anonymously without collecting any identifiable information.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis No.	Hypothesis Statement	Statistical Test	Result	Significant ?	Interpretation Summary
H1	There was a statistically significant negative correlation between bullying frequency and academic performance.	Pearson Correlation	r = .48, p< .001	P✓ Yes	Contrary to the hypothesis, a moderate positive correlation was found.
H2	There was a statistically significant negative correlation between bullying frequency and mental well-being.	Pearson Correlation	r = .08, p = .41	✗ No	No significant relationship was found.

H3	Students who experienced cyberbullying reported lower well-being than those who experienced their forms.	Pearson Correlation	Cyber: r = .09, p = .34	✗ No	No significant differences in well-being based on bullying type.
H4	There were significant differences in bullying frequency based on socioeconomic status.	One- way ANOVA	F(2, 92) = 0.69, p = .50	✗ No	Bullying was experienced similarly, across SES groups.
H5	Academic	One-way ANOVA	APS: p = .085;	✗ No	No statistically significant
	performance and well-being differed significantly based on bullying type.		WEMWBS: p = .403		differences observed based on bullying type.

The overall findings from the study reveal complex and, at times, unexpected patterns in the relationships between bullying experiences, academic performance, and mental well-being among female students. The only statistically significant result

was found in Hypothesis 1, which indicated a moderate positive correlation between bullying frequency and academic performance. This contradicts the original expectation of a negative relationship and suggests that students who are academically engaged or high achieving may also be more exposed to bullying or perhaps use academic performance as a coping mechanism. No significant associations were found between bullying and mental well-being (H2), nor were there any significant differences in well-being based on the type of bullying experienced (H3). These results imply that the psychological effects of bullying may be more nuanced and influenced by factors not directly measured in this study, such as personal resilience, peer support, or the severity and duration of bullying. Additionally, bullying frequency did not significantly vary by socioeconomic status (H4), suggesting that bullying may be a widespread issue affecting students regardless of their economic background. Lastly, while some variation was observed in academic performance across bullying types (H5), these differences were not statistically significant. Collectively, the results highlight the need for further research into the contextual and individual factors that shape how students experience and respond to bullying. The findings call for nuanced, multidimensional prevention and intervention strategies that address both academic and emotional outcomes in diverse student populations.

5. DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: A statistically significant negative correlation existed between the frequency of bullying and performance in academics among female students. In contrast to the hypothesis, the study finds a moderate positive correlation between bullying frequency and academic achievement ($r(198) = .48$, $p < .001$). This means that female students who indicated higher levels of bullying also reported higher academic achievement. This finding thereby unexpected have many possible reasons. One of the possibilities may be that academically high-performing students are bullied due to envy and the differences that are perceived. Research shows that, to a greater extent, successful students are visible and more likely to experience peer victimization (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010). Another hypothesis might be that, for some students, accomplishment might be a means of counteracting the effects of bullying in their lives. Compas et al. (2001) report that among adolescents distressed by situations such students might try problem-focused coping-most probably as increased academic involvement-aiming to regain an idea of control. It is, however, significant to point out that the relationship between academic performances and bullying is complex. Some researchers have been carrying a negative correlation between bullying and academic achievement (Glew et al., 2005), while others claim that it hardly or hardly ever exerts an influence on academic performance (Tukeshova, 2022). These contradictions underline the need for a more considerable discourse on the factors that shape the relationship.

Hypothesis 2: A statistically significant negative correlation existed between the frequency of being bullied and mental well-being. The analysis did not corroborate this hypothesis, showing a weak and non-significant relationship between the frequency of bullying and mental well-being ($r(198) = .08$, $p = .41$). This implies that participants drawing on their personal experiences do not have an associative tendency between bullying frequencies and their reported mental well-being. Present study support findings by Reiss (2013), who investigated the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health among children and adolescents. The study found a slight association between levels of socioeconomic status (low) and risk for mental health, but this overall association remains somewhat murky and is influenced by a multitude of mediating factors. The findings herein, however, are in contrast with the literature on the impacts of bullying on mental health. A study from Stockholm reported that adolescents experiencing bullying had much greater odds of having mental health problems where bullied girls were 2.4 times more likely to report issues when compared to their non-bullied counterparts (Sundqvist et al., 2021). Insignificant correlation absence in this study might be caused by several predispositions. Differences in coping styles, social support systems, and resilience may potentially buffer the psychological impact of bullying individuals. Cultural factors and the stigma attached to mental health issues could also deter under-reporting or misrepresentation concerning the mental well-being of participants. As with the above, a longitudinal study by Costello et al. (2003) found that changes in family income show a relation with changes in children's mental health. This fact leads to the conclusion that economic factors could be positive or negative depending on circumstances. In addition, the cross-sectional approach to the study does not allow the long- term effects of bullying on mental health to be assessed. Longitudinal research indicates that the negative psychological implications of bullying may extend into early adulthood, resulting in conditions such as depression and anxiety (Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014).

Hypothesis 3: Students who experienced cyberbullying reported significantly lower levels of mental well-being compared to those who experienced other forms of bullying. Hypothesis 3 proposed that students who were victims of cyberbullying would report much lower levels of mental well-being than students who were victims of other types of bullying. However, the current study did not find support for this assumption. Statistical analysis did not show any significant relationship between any type of bullying: verbal, social, or cyber- on students' reporting of mental well-being. In fact, contrary to the literature and generally held expectations, a weak and statistically non-significant positive correlation was found between cyberbullying and mental well-being ($r = .09$, $p = .34$). This study contrasts with earlier studies indicating the negative effect of cyberbullying on mental health. For instance, Kowalski et al. (2014) analyse that the incidence of cyberbullying victimization is associated with the experience of greater levels of depression and anxiety than traditional bullying. The significant influence of cyberbullying on increased understanding-related mental health problems has also been established

by Nixon (2014). Several factors might account for the divergence between the present study and previous studies. Individual differences in resilience, methods of coping, and social support may affect how students perceive and respond to bullying. In addition, cultural factors as well as the stigma attached to mental issues may also encourage the under-reporting and misrepresentation of the mental well-being of respondents.

Hypothesis 4: There were significant differences in bullying frequency based on students' socioeconomic status. Underlining the negation of this hypothesis, the analysis showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the frequency of bullying for students in the lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic groups ($F(2, 92) = 0.69$, $p = .50$). This suggests that socioeconomic status does not determine whether a student is likely to engage in bullying, either by being a victim or a perpetrator.The present finding concurs with the results of a meta-analysis by Tippett and Wolke (2014), which investigated the association between socioeconomic status (SES) and bullying involvement. The study found a slight association between low SES and victims or bullying victims but asserted that the overall relationship is weak. Their researchers concluded that SES does not provide sufficient guidance for targeted intervention, implying that bullying is a more systemic issue, not significantly modified by economic background. Correspondingly, Due et al. (2009) described a 35-country study in which adolescents from families of poor affluence reported higher prevalence rates of being bullied. However, this study did find that differences in affluence at the school level and greater economic inequality at the national level were associated with an increase in the prevalence of exposure to bullying rather than individual SES. Consequently, interventions for reducing bullying should be inclusive rather than tackling only socioeconomic factors. School-wide programs creating a positive environment and dealing with bullying across all groups may yield better results.

Hypothesis 5: Academic performance and mental well-being significantly differed according to the type of bullying experienced. In favour of Hypothesis 5, the participants' academic performance and mental well-being differed greatly depending on the type of bullying they experienced. This bears evidence found in literature, pointing toward differences in the impact different forms of bullying make on psychological and academic outcomes. For example, Ragusa et al. (2024) were able to demonstrate that while cyberbullying had a significant impact on psychosocial well-being among students in Italy, there was little effect of cyberbullying on academic performance. This suggests that any academic repercussions due to cyberbullying are negligible in comparison to the psychological repercussions. Similarly, a research conducted by Zhao et al. (2024) in China reported a strong association between school bullying and various psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The severity associated with bullying was directly correlated with the chances of these psychological disorders occurring. Besides, it was found from the cross-sectional study in Saudi Arabia conducted by AlBuhairan et al. (2019) that the exposure to bullying and physical violence correlated with the odds of being most likely symptomatic to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety and poorer academic performance. This shows how widespread the effects of bullying are in terms of mental health and educational outcomes. Taken together, these studies indicate that although the mode does not directly affect academic performance, the psychological effects may greatly influence students' educational experiences. The lack of significance in this study may relate to sample size, cultural context, as well as possible mediating variables such as resilience and social support.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the complicated interrelationship of bullying experiences, academic performance, and mental health of female higher learning students. The research provided a quantitative, cross-sectional account through the use of standardized instruments, through which different types and frequencies of bullying were correlated with academic and mental health outcomes. Some hypotheses were not statistically supported; however, some unexpected findings were given credence—which indicated that perhaps those students that are high achievers, in fact, do get bullied more frequently; thus, opening a brand-new avenue of inquiry into the social structures of academic environments. It is manifested in a wider spectrum concerning whether there can be bullying in post-secondary education. It argues for interventions that consider nuanced responses and not superficial solutions. While it is often considered the most psychologically damaging, cyberbullying was not associated in this study with significant difference in mental well-being across different bullying types, suggesting that contextual factors, perception, and support systems may mediate outcomes more powerfully than the form of bullying itself. In addition, the lack of noteworthy distinctions across socioeconomic groups shows that the phenomenon of bullying does not infinitely link itself to economic status-it may be more of an all-encompassing phenomenon that cuts through class lines. Most importantly, the study emphasizes the individual experience of bullying again reminding educators, administrators, and policymakers that interventions must be flexible, inclusive, and evidence based.

7. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Findings highlight the pressing need for an integrated preventive approach to bullying intervention. Institutions should incorporate the gender dimension into their anti-bullying programs aimed at emotional and psychological support for female students. Policies and practices that promote resilience, peer support, and mental health literacy can moderate the long-term effects of bullying.

Future research should take a longitudinal approach to ascertain the long-term effects of bullying and whether different forms

of victimization translate into delayed academic or emotional consequences. Qualitative research could additionally broaden the understanding of the interplay of perception and coping mechanisms among students regarding bullying across different cultural or regional contexts.

8. LIMITATIONS

- This investigation is limited to a single point of study; hence no cause-effect relationship can be established between variables.
- All data were based on the participants' self-reports, which are somewhat prone to recall errors or social desirability bias.
- Although an indirect alternative measure was used for measuring bullying frequency, a validated bullying-specific scale might have offered greater reliability and depth.
- The limitation of findings to females excludes consideration of males or non-binary individuals.
- The study focused on a diverse sample of participants; it, however, did not take into account the role of cultural beliefs and norms shaping bullying experiences.
- Bullying was measured for frequency but not severity or duration that can substantially affect academic and mental health outcomes.

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