

Prevalence and Prevention of School Bullying - A Case Study of Coimbatore City, Tamilnadu India

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ABSTRACT: Bullying is the most common form of violence in our society. Studies have found that approximately 30 percent of students in grades 6-10 are involved in bullying, as a perpetrator, victim, or both (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2003*). Nowadays the public attention in India is concentrated growingly on School Bullying, a major issue in our schools which has come to the fore due to active reporting by news papers and electronic media. In fact, it is general perception and considered view of all stakeholders, including that of law enforcing agencies and social workers that school bullying adversely impacts on conducive climate in schools and on pupil's right to study without fear in a secure environment.

The present study has been conducted to understand the extent of the problem of bullying among the school children in urban centres as well as to know the opinion of the stakeholders including the students and teachers about effective preventive strategies to be adopted.

I. INTRODUCTION

Broadminded people who once considered bullying or like behaviours as harmless and helpful in building social relationship among the students now view it as to have long-term physical, emotional and academic effects on both the victim and the bully. In general, bullying is known as happening when a child studying in a school is subjected to abuse and continued to be harassed by one or more fellow students who need not be his classmates or seniors alone.

However, nowadays the Bullying is considered as the most common form of violence in the little world. According to a study, approximately 30 percent of students in grades 6-10 are involved in bullying, as a perpetrator, victim, or both (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2003*). Nowadays the public attention in India is concentrated growingly on School Bullying, a major issue in our schools which has come to the fore due to active reporting by news papers and electronic media. In fact, it is general perception and considered view of all stakeholders, including that of law enforcing agencies and social workers that school bullying adversely impacts on conducive climate in schools and on pupil's right to study without fear in a secure environment.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

a. The act and forms of 'Bullying'

A study entitled 'Mobbing Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys' was the pioneering one in this kind undertaken by Dan Olweus' in 1978. According to Olweus, 'a student is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time to abuse or harassment by one or more other students (Olweus, 1996). The psychology behind the school bullying is a simple construct that those who indulge in bullying desire to dominate and gain power over fellow students.

As observed by authors like Cohn and Canter, and Koki, there are three forms of bullying:

physical - including hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, stealing and destruction of property, verbal taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, and making threats; psychological - spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, exclusion from a peer group, extortion, and intimidation

- Cohn and Canter, (2003)

As indicated by U.S. Department of Justice (2004), Bullying has two key components: one is physical intimidation and the other is psychological intimidation. . . . However, it has been made clear from time to time that fighting teasing, and taunting, are usually not considered as bullying if the two persons involved (i.e., bully and bullied) belong to approximately the same physical or psychological strength. Further, it has been established that bullies engage in undesirable and hurtful behavior against those who can't defend themselves because of size or strength, or because the victim is outnumbered or less psychologically resilient (Olweus, 1993).

b. Components of Bullying

Alana James (2010) has found five essential components that constitute this general aggressive behavior, namely:

- i. Intention to harm: Bullying is deliberate, with the intention to cause harm. For example, friends teasing each other in a good-natured way are not bullying, but a person teasing another to upset them is bullying.
- ii. Harmful outcome: One or more persons are hurt physically or emotionally.
- iii. Direct or indirect acts: bullying can involve direct aggression, such as hitting someone, as well as indirect acts, such as spreading rumours.
- iv. Repetition: bullying involves repeated acts of aggression: an isolated aggressive act, like a fight, is not bullying.
- v. Unequal Power: bullying involves the abuse of power by one or several persons who are (perceived as) more powerful, often due to their age, physical strength, or psychological resilience.

c. Peaceful Schooling

According to Peaceful School International, a voluntary organization working in this field, "peaceful schooling is a coordinated effort made together by students, staff and parents to ensure that everyone feels safe, valued, and respected".

It further identifies six essential ingredients in creating a peaceful school:

- collaborative approach to decision making and develop a climate of cooperation, support and understanding
- curricular and/or extracurricular peace education initiatives
- teaching methods stress participation, cooperation, problem solving and respect for differences
- student and community centered conflict resolution strategies such as peer mediation are available
- Involvement in community service projects
- Opportunities for professional development on creating a positive school climate are available to all staff – including training in crisis response, dealing with bullying, peer mediation, anti-racism or anti-sexism programs, or cooperative learning strategies.

d. Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Author Olweus Dan has developed a School Bullying Prevention Program which was refined in Norway in the 1980s has been adjudged to be the best known prevention programme to check bullying events in schools (American Federation of Teachers, 2000; Starr, 2000). This programme involves school staff, teachers, parents, members of the community, bullies, victims, and the silent majority of students and helps to improve awareness level, peer relationship, stop intimidation, establishing rules against bullying behavior, and supporting victims. Further this programme keeps the adult components available in the school responsible for solving the problems. The salient feature of the this programme is that it targets not just a few problem students but the entire school population with both individual-oriented and systems-oriented components as a permanent component of the school environment with schools, class rooms and individual as the three major components

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Smith, one form of bullying involves older pupils victimising younger children, largely by physical and verbal means (Smith, 2004) and other form of bullying is done through social exclusion by large groups such as the victim's entire class, or year (Morita et al, 1999; Kanetsuna and Smith, 2002; Koo et al, 2008).

As identified by Boulton, and Craig and Pepler, whenever, school bullying occurs, it is easily identified and recognized by the fellow student/s or victims than the teachers (Boulton, 1997; Craig and Pepler). Further, Smith and Levan has found that bullying is in its wider forms prevails in schools whereas it becomes narrower with age (Smith and Levan, 1995).

It has been found that those who are smaller or less able to defend themselves become victims of bullies who regularly engage in hurtful teasing, name calling, or intimidation, etc. The fundamental reason for

their behavior is that these bullies believe and convince themselves that they are superior to other students, or blame others for being weak or different. The bullies assert their domination by frequently fighting with others (*Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001*).

As found by *McCartney (2005)* usually the bullied children do not complain about the incidents to teachers believing that they can not do anything about it.

They may desire power and control and get satisfaction from inflicting suffering. Despite common perceptions of bullies, they generally have average to high levels of self-esteem, may be popular with both teachers and classmates, and may also do well in school (*Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001*). *Shellard* has found that bullies display positive approach towards violence, are impulsive, like to dominate others, have little empathy with their victims, and unusually low levels of anxiety or insecurity and also derive power and control of bullied by inflicting suffering (*Shellard, 2002*).

Further, it is interesting to know that what motivates bullies to indulge in action? Because of the signals given by the bullied that 'they are insecure, passive, and won't retaliate if attacked' and this leads the bullies to believe that their target are physically or emotionally weak (*Cohn and Canter, 2003*).

Another annoying fact is that it appears the bullied have low level of socialization skills. This means they have *few or no close friends at school and are socially isolated (Olweus, 1993.)*

Moreover, studies have proved the negative impact of bullying on the children subjected to this kind of violence. *Hoover and Oliver (1996)* and *Weinhold and Weinhold, (1998)* have found that a considerable number are *severely traumatized or distressed (15%), another bunch of victims report having difficulties they attribute to mistreatment by their peers (20%) and some are dropping out of schools due to bullying (10%)*.

IV. METHODOLOGY

a. Title of the Study

Prevalence and prevention of School Bullying: A case study of Coimbatore City, Tamilnadu, India

b. Physical Area

Coimbatore City, Tamilnadu, India is the physical area where the study was conducted. This area was particularly selected as the authors are much interested in knowing the forms and practices related to school bullying is prevailing in Coimbatore region which is otherwise considered as a city of peace with its multi-cultural and ethnicity background.

c. Population

For the purpose of the present study only government run middle schools, high schools and higher secondary schools were taken up for consideration. The Coimbatore corporation has been made into four zones, namely, North Zone, South Zone and East Zone Central Zone

d. Sampling size

For the present study, each one school from all four zones have been selected. A total of 300 respondents were chosen.

e. Multi Stage Sampling procedure

Multi Stage Sampling Procedure was adopted for the present study. Thus sampling procedure was adopted in three stages.

Stage – I:

At the outset all the schools were grouped into four indigenous groups namely Group - 1, Group – 2, Group – 3 and Group – 4 to represent North Zone, South Zone, East Zone and Central Zone respectively.

Stage – II:

Then, one school from each group was selected adopting lottery method.

Stage – III:

From each of the schools 75 students were drawn with 25 respondents each from three different age group, viz., 11-13 age group (6th – 8th class students or middle school students, 14-16 age group (9th – 10th class students or high school students), 17-18 (11th & 12th class students or higher secondary students). The students were selected randomly.

f. Data Collection

Data collection was done adopting a structured questionnaire to collect information from the student respondents, apart from conducting Focused Group Discussions (FGD).

V. FINDINGS

a. What is conceived as an act of Bullying

A vast majority of the respondent students (68%) have acknowledged that any action that hurt their feelings, lowered their morale and made them comedian in the eyes of the fellow students. However, another significant number of respondents who constitute 1/4th of the total respondents (25%) stated that any physical or verbal abuse that ultimately resulted in bodily injury or lowering of their self esteem.

b. What is not an act of bullying – students perspective

A more significant number of respondents (81%) have acknowledged that occasional wordy duals, petty fights, quarrels between peers due to academic competitiveness were occurring which not always between senior and junior, not between strong and feeble, not a regular occurrence.

c. Who bullied whom

It has been found that about 56% of the respondents had been bullied by their own peers / class mates and another 37% had been bullied by both class mates as well as the senior students.

d. Forms of bullying

When asked, nearly 84% of the respondents have informed that they had been subjected to multiple acts of bullying. Majority of the respondents (59%) have reported that they had been subjected to more than three forms - Teasing, Intimidating, Excluding from group & Rumors and lies against them by others. This is followed by Excluding from group and Ganging up (14%), and Ganging up & Striking, pushing and punching (11%).

Further, only a handful of respondents (9%) have stated that they had experienced bullying in the form of Wounding SMS received from their bullies.

Table – 1: Forms of Bullying

Forms of Bullying	% of Respondents			None	Total
	Physical	Verbal	Psychlgl		
Teasing, Intimidating, Excluding from group & Rumors and lies	-	37%	22%	-	59%
Excluding from group and Ganging up	-	-	14%	-	14%
Ganging up & Striking, pushing and punching	11%	-	-	-	11%
Wounding SMS	-	9%	-	-	9%
Hurtful email	-	-	-	-	-
None of the above	-	-	-	7%	7%
Total	11%	46%	36%	7%	100%

Here, it is noteworthy to mention that 7% of the respondents had stated that they have not been subjected to bullying in any form.

e. Subject Matter for Bullying

Again here the respondents were asked to pick more than one answer as long as they are related / concerned / applicable to them. Accordingly most of the respondents have marked more than one response.

Table – 2: Subject Matter for Bullying

Type and kind of Bullying	% of Respondents
Over the poor performance in studies	67%
My appearance	43%
My skin colour / complexion	36%
About my caste / community	13%
My economic class / poverty	31%
Matters related to my family members / family issues	5%
Jealous over my upper / high class status / richness	2%
None	7%

Note: The % of respondents in each row is calculated to 100%; It effectively means that a respondent may have chosen more than one response.

It is significant to note that nearly 2/3rd of the respondents have been subjected to school bullying over their poor performance in studies. However, two other factors, namely appearance and skin colour / complexion, when put together, accounts for a majority (79%) and constitute an overwhelming majority of a nearly 4/5th of the total respondents. This has out numbered the previous factor (poor performance in studies – 67%)

f. Performance in studies and victimization through bullying

It is also understood from their responses that the bullies have seized the opportunity to bully their victims based on their poor performance. Further, it was also stated that the prominence and importance given to bright and intelligent students by the class teacher and fellow students make the victims feel weak and inferior.

Out of the total respondents, who stated that they had been bullied by their peers because of their poor performance in studies, a vast majority (79%) informed that their chance for being bullied is very high whenever they were pulled up by their teachers for the same reason.

g. Place of verbal abuse

The verbal abuse by bullies mostly happen both within the school campus (86%) and outside the school campus (73%) [*responses were recorded separately for both responses and percentages were calculated for each of the item out of total figure*].

h. Time of verbal abuse

The verbal abuse has been reported to have happened both within the class room during a lecture / demonstration is in progress (36%) and after class hour (59%).

Likewise outside the school campus, bullying reportedly occurs prominently after the school hour was over and when the bullies mingle with the majority of their peers / class mates found en-route their bus stop / house (69%). However, a meager number of respondents (4%) had reported that bullying happened whenever they confront a chance meeting with their bullies.

i. Kind of physical attack

Only 11% of the victims have reported that physical abuse / man handling was mode through which they were bullied. Out of these, 5% have stated that , and % and % have told that they were subjected to and respectively.

j. Severity of physical Attack

Even though physical abuse was reported no one has stated that it was severe enough to get injuries.

k. Place of physical Attack

Almost all had reported the physical abuse happened outside the class room or out side the campus, but 2 respondents who stated it occurred inside the school and within the class room but no class teacher was available at that time and no report was made to the teachers.

l. The peers reaction

Only a meager number of the respondents (17%) had stated that their peers were reacted to this inhumane and unjustifiable act of bullying done on them. Another significant number of respondents stated that their peers / classmates were either enjoying the events (34%) or remained mere spectators without any reaction on their faces (29%).

m. Reasons for being bullied

A vast majority of the respondents believed that they were bullied by the dominant students in the class rooms because they wanted to establish their dominance (34%), prove their physical might (22%), to show that they are the heroes of the class room (16%), due to past quarrels (12%), for petty issues crop up then and there (9%).

n. Effects of being bullied

A majority of the respondents have stated that they had multiple effects due to school bullying which include poor concentration in education (56%), felt self-esteem being damaged, tearful (41%), and don't want to live (27%). However a significant number of respondents which included the above mentioned category tried to retaliate with teasing the bullies back.

o. The Impact

56% of the respondents reported that the poor performance in their education was due to the continued humiliation by the peers / fellow students in the guise of friendly teasing / bullying. Other impacts reported include lack interest in moving / mingling with others (23%), feeling lonely (4%).

p. Teachers knowledge

Nearly 2/3 of the respondents (61%) stated that they never take up this matter up to class teacher level since they feel that these are petty matters to be solved at their level itself (42%) or fearing that they will be found faulty (19%) since the given prominence, and brilliance of the bullies. However, another 32% have stated that they have

q. Reaction of the teachers

About 70% of the respondents who reported that they had been bullied and taken up the matter with their respective class teachers (32%) had stated that their teachers were positive in hearing their grievances and warned the reported bullies. But the remaining respondent students were not positive about their class teachers who were reportedly lenient towards those who involve in bullying activities.

r. Punishment

It is surprising to see the magnanimous state of mind as majority of them were looking forward for peace with the bullies (61%), and simple and token punishments (17%). However relatively a small number of respondents who desired and suggested exemplary and severe punishment for those involving in bullying.

s. Preventive steps

For this part, respondents studying only high school (9th - 10th standards) and higher secondary classes (11th - 12th standards) were asked to answer. The lower class students that is, those who study 6-8 standard have been excluded. Further, the respondents were asked to participate in a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) before which they were educated about essential components of effective bullying prevention programs as observed by the following authors through their studies. These suggestions were put forth for discussions and deliberations by the participants of the focused group discussion who were asked to identify and prioritize the components based on the perceived significance.

❖ **Comprehensive school wide program**

According to *Cohn and Canter* the members of the school community participate in a comprehensive approach to promoting a positive school climate as it has been held that such a comprehensive programme would build an environment where children feel cared for and respected..... (*Cohn and Canter, 2003*), because isolated lessons are unlikely to produce significant behavioral improvement (*Pirozzi, 2001*) apart from renewed effort to reinforce already established anti-bullying policies..... (*U.S. Department of Justice, 2004*).

❖ **Early Intervention**

Ballard et al., and *Stevens et al.*, suggested that bullying incidents could be significantly decreased in numbers if early interventions are made as they are especially effective at the early grade levels (*Ballard et al., 1999; Stevens et al., 2000*).

❖ **Assessing the extent of the problem**

Shellard and others have proposed that "... students, teachers, and parents should be surveyed about the occurrence of bullying in the school so as to collect information on where, when, and between whom bullying occurs and also allow school staff to examine disparities between student, teacher, and parent perceptions (*American Federation of Teachers, 2000; Shellard, 2002*).

❖ **Principal provides leadership**

Farrington advocated that "the principal's commitment and involvement in preventing and controlling bullying contributes to lower rates of bullying (*Farrington, 1993*) and he be taking the initiative in actively promoting anti-bullying behaviors..... and educating staff about bullies and victims and the immediate and long-term consequences of bullying (*Garrity et al., 1996*).

❖ **Conduct staff training**

Rigby and others have rightly quoted that the members of the staff in the school could intervene and make the students feel that they are valued and respected. This can be done by creating chances to learn to work together (*Rigby, 1995*). According to *U.S. Department of Justice, (2004)* teachers, administrators, and other school staff

apart from cafeteria workers, custodial staff, bus drivers, and playground monitors, etc., are the persons who could recognize and respond to bullying and learn intervention strategies if they are provided with effective training programmes.

❖ **Establish clear anti-bullying rules and policies**

It has been found that, when consistent anti bullying policies are framed and implemented bullying incidents are significantly lower. Further, it is found that where easily understood rules of conduct and fair disciplinary practices are existing, those schools report less violence (Cohn and Canter, 2003).

❖ **Integrate anti-bullying themes into the curriculum**

It is the responsibility of the teachers who effectively present and deliver bullying policies and programs to students as it has been integrated with curriculum thus making these intervention help the students learn how to stand up to bullies and assist victims (Shellard, 2002, Fried and Fried, 1996; Kreidler, 1996).

❖ **Work individually with students**

A conducive atmosphere in the school where students develop courage to report bullying is a must to counter the bullying in school campuses (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001) as the teachers build trusting relationships with students (Harris and Willoughby, 2003). It further envisages that the teachers and administrators ensure that students know they don't condone harassment or mistreatment of others (Kreidler, 1996).

❖ **Create a safe physical environment**

a. Schools can providing increased adult supervision in areas where bullying tends to occur (Shellard and Turner, 2004)

b. As much bullying occurs during less supervised time, it is necessary to reduce the amount of time students spend in activities with minimal supervision (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

c. Under a confidential reporting system, students shall be enabled to report bullying (Kreidler, 1996).

d. A log can be used to identify pattern of bullying behavior / types of best interventions (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

❖ **Involve and educate parents.**

School staff must educate and involve parents so they understand the bullying problem, recognize its signs, and intervene appropriately. Research has shown that anti-bullying programs are more effective when parents understand its underlying principles and know that the school will not tolerate bullying (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

❖ **Be aware of bullying prevention approaches that don't work**

Schools that have struggled to implement anti-bullying programs frequently cite lack of time, lack of support, and inadequate training as the main obstacles to building an effective program (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

❖ **Training students in conflict resolution and peer mediation.**

Conflict resolution is usually not effective in reducing bullying, since bullying is not a conflict between peers of equal status, but continued abuse of power. Peer mediation often further victimizes students who have been bullied (Nansel et al., 2001).

❖ **Adopting a "zero tolerance" policy**

These policies rely on exclusionary measures (such as suspension and expulsion) that can have long-term negative consequences. They don't solve the problem of the bully, who typically spends more unsupervised time at home or in the community if he or she is suspended or expelled. Furthermore, this approach can result in a high level of suspensions without full comprehension of how the behavior needs to and can be changed (Cohn and Canter, 2003).

❖ **Implementing reactive measures**

Reactive measures, such as increased security presence in the hallways or installation of metal detectors or surveillance cameras, have not been shown to produce any tangible positive results (Cohn and Canter, 2003).

❖ **Providing self-esteem training for bullies**

Since research suggests most bullies don't lack self-esteem, providing them with self-esteem training may be a misdirected approach (*U.S. Department of Justice, 2004*).

❖ **Encouraging victims to simply “stand up” to bullies.**

Without adequate support or adult involvement, this strategy may be harmful and physically dangerous for victims (*U.S. Department of Justice, 2004*).

The following table shows the outcome of focused Group Discussion (FGD):

Table – 3: Order & Priority of the Preventive Actions

Order & Priority of the Preventive Action
Assessing the extent of the problem & Implement a comprehensive school wide program
Intervene early
Integrate anti-bullying themes into the curriculum
Create a safe physical environment
Principal provides leadership
Conduct staff training
Establish clear anti-bullying rules and policies
Work individually with students

As a result of the deliberations held in the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) a majority of the respondents have given priority for

- i. assessment of the extent of the problem and implementing a school wide comprehensive bullying prevention programme;
- ii. The participants also upheld the importance of early intervention as it has been seen as a potential initiative in the formative stage of a child and could boost the psychological capacity to stand firmly against any form of bullying by their fellow students / seniors and improve their morality not to hurt the feelings of other;
- iii. The participants further expressed their views that
 - a. a teachers role in monitoring and preventing micro incidents are vital since these incidents are undetectable to naked eyes and are usually not made known to teachers. For this the teachers need to be very much vigilant, caring and closely in touch with the students and adopt necessary tactics to find out any such small incidents.
 - b. the class teachers and all the staff members of the school must monitor in specific places inside the campus, namely play ground, canteen, rest rooms, verandas, libraries, laboratories, hostel rooms, etc,
- iv. It was the opinion of the participants that all the notorious bullies in the school campus must be kept under continuous monitoring so as to prevent before any untoward / undesirable incident takes place. However, this kind of policing must be done with much care and precaution as to not hurt the feelings of the persons being watched and they must confirm the established anti bullying policies, procedures and norm.
- v. The items identified and prioritised by the participants include:
 - a. Establishment of Policies / Procedures / Norms confirming the national and international standards
 - b. Training the staff members in anti bullying activities
 - c. Making anti bullying themes a part of the curriculum

VI. CONCLUSIONS

From this study it has been established that a majority of the school children are facing the threat of bullying either by their seniors or from their peers. The reasons for being bullied vary from being fable minded, weak, less intelligent and backward student in class room studies. It was also found that most of the victims lack socialization skills which force them to live within a small world without a friend circle.

The subject matter for bullying included poor performance in studies, poor appearance, skin colour / complexion, caste / community, economic class / poverty, matters related to my family members / family issues, jealous over richness, etc. It has also been revealed that most of the victims never take the matters to their teachers notice fearing that these are petty issues over which the teachers might not give proper attention to sort out the problem.

When asked to participate in a Focused Group Discussion (FGD), the participants deliberated over different prevention options and it was the opinion of the majority that assessment and identification of the extent of the problem in each of the school by the administrators and implementing the school wide comprehensive anti bullying prevention programme shall be the only solution. They also suggested that establishment of clear cut anti bullying policies ad procedures, training the teachers in anti bullying activities, monitoring the notorious bullies, making the anti bullying policies / procedures / activities a part of the curriculum.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Researchers shall strive to identify the causes for continued bullying in class-rooms specific to Indian context.
2. Why Teachers fail to recognize the different forms of bullying which ultimately leads the victims being fearful about making a complaint.
3. Defining suitable strategy that will be effective on the lines of prevention of ragging in Indian college campuses.
4. Why parents did not take into cognition of school bullying that taunt the progress of the children in social and academic spheres.

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