

## Bullying in Schools " A Review of the Concept, Causes, and Consequences"

التنمر في البيئة المدرسية" قراءة في المفهوم، الأسباب والآثار الناتجة عنه"

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### Abstract:

Bullying is a recent and severe phenomenon that negatively impacts the objectives of the educational system. This problem has notably increased in schools, which have become grounds for such behaviours, rather than spaces for reform and correction. This research aims to uncover the factors of this malpractice, including students' developmental characteristics at different educational stages. It also explores its impacts on both perpetrators and victims. The latter suffer from psychological problems, lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, and difficulties in making friendships.

**Keywords:** Bullying; Schools; Concept; Causes; Consequences..

**الملخص:** تعد ظاهرة التنمر من أخطر الظواهر السلبية التي ظهرت في الآونة الأخيرة وأثرت بشكل مباشر على أهداف النظام التربوي. لقد لاقت تفشيا ملحوظا في البيئة المدرسية التي أصبحت بيئة خصبة لتطبيق هذه السلوكيات بشكل واضح وصريح بدلا أن تكون بيئة إصلاح وتعديل. لذلك جاءت هذه الورقة البحثية لتبين الكثير من المسببات منها الخصائص النمائية التي تميز التلاميذ في المراحل المختلفة وآثار السلبية على المتنمر وضحيته، إذ يعاني كل منهما تدنيا في الصحة النفسية، وفقدانا للثقة بالنفس، وتدنيا في تقدير الذات، ومشكلات كذلك في تكوين الصداقات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التنمر؛ البيئة المدرسية؛ المفهوم؛ الأسباب؛ الآثار.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The rapid digital transformation and the evolution of social media platforms in the last decade have brought a new phenomenon to schools: bullying. It is a challenging behaviour that can take the form of harmful text messages, negative comments on social networks, dissemination of photos or videos, phone calls, chat rooms, or emails, and deliberately and repeatedly occurs to humiliate others. These behaviours lead to severe psychological, social, and educational consequences, including suicide, depression, and school dropout. Consequently, an unsafe educational environment emerges, and low academic achievement and violence are increased.

These challenges are considered a major concern for educational counsellors and headmasters, who are responsible for providing a safe and respectful educational environment. Solving the problem of bullying requires a comprehensive understanding of its dimensions and consequences. It also involves developing effective strategies to address its root causes rather than diagnosing its symptoms.

School bullying may stem from weak coordination between the educational and family systems, students' insufficient awareness of the use of the internet and social media platforms, and inadequate parental and institutional supervision. This phenomenon involves a thorough analysis, intervention, and efficient models that assist educational specialists in addressing bullying inside and outside schools. If specialists do not urgently intervene to tackle the problem of bullying, its negative consequences will increase over time.

### ➤ **Statement of the Problem:**

Bullying means the persistent and deliberate misuse of power within relationships to harm the target person. It is a form of abuse that violates social norms and makes students break the school rules.<sup>1</sup> Bullying includes

harassment, abuse, social exclusion, or harmful actions. It is characterised by repeated and prolonged mistreatment and deliberate hostile behaviours.<sup>2</sup>

Bullying stems from a lack of protective support (protecting and assisting the targets) and emotional support (listening and showing empathy) for both the victim and the bully.<sup>3</sup> This lack of effective support often drives the bully to target weaker peers and engage in morally disengaged behaviours to satisfy their personal needs<sup>4</sup>. Moral disengagement can be reinforced by peer encouragement, whether through laughter, cheering, or silent approval.

The rate of bullying can be increased twice or three times a day when there are differences between adolescents and youth with disabilities<sup>5</sup>. A study conducted by Ferguson (2010) confirmed that bullying is a psychological phenomenon that needs researchers' attention due to its increasing prevalence, particularly in schools, where it disrupts the classroom atmosphere and hinders academic performance.

Based on what has been mentioned, this research asks the following questions:

- What are the causes of school bullying?
- What are the psychological, social, and academic consequences of school bullying?

➤ **Aims of the Study:**

The present research aims to:

- Explore the factors leading to school bullying.
- Identify the psychological, social, and academic effects of school bullying.

### ➤ **Significance of the Study:**

This research is significant because it addresses a dangerous phenomenon in our schools: bullying. It helps school staff recognise the aspects of bullying, its causes, and its effects on learners. Thus, it is important to focus on schools by raising awareness and preparing their members psychologically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially. Additionally, equipping them with the necessary skills, experiences, and values that shape societal attitudes is essential to eradicate this harmful behaviour.

## **2. Definition of Key Concepts:**

### **2.1 Bullying:**

The concept of bullying was first studied and named by Olweus. Based on empirical research conducted by Olweus and Solberg, bullying is defined as the act of harming one or more individuals physically, psychologically, emotionally, or verbally. It includes actions, such as threats with weapons, extortion, violations of civil rights, assault and beating, gang activity, attempted murder, and sexual harassment.<sup>6</sup>

Bullying refers to deliberate and repeated harm inflicted by an individual or group against a person who is unable to defend themselves, due to an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim<sup>7</sup>. It is deliberate negative physical actions, such as hitting, pushing, or kicking, repeated consistently over time, and carried out by one or more individuals to harm their peer. It includes threats, reprimands, teasing, insults, grimacing, or inappropriate gestures, with the intent of isolating the individual from the group or disregarding their wishes.<sup>8</sup>

Metaphorically, bullying resembles a tiger. This emphasises that the individual seeks to frighten peers by imitating the tiger's ferocity<sup>9</sup>. It involves the domination of an individual or group over a peer in the

neighbourhood, classroom, or school, where the peer is subjected to physical or psychological harassment.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, bullying encompasses any misuse of real or perceived power among students, manifested repeatedly and persistently, to subjugate others to harmful behaviours. It occurs when one or more students target another student or group of students due to a power imbalance.

## **2.2 School Bullying:**

School bullying is a persistent and violent behaviour perpetrated by the bullying student against another student to assert control over them. It leads to physical, psychological, or emotional harm.<sup>11</sup>

## **3. Forms of School Bullying:**

Bullying is a systematic process involving extortion and violations of rights. It is often based on a manipulative moral dimension and frequently uses insults masked as humour to cause suffering or humiliation to the victim. Bullying ranges from verbal abuse to social exclusion and is characterised by three features: the deliberate intent to harm the victim physically, socially, or emotionally; an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim; and the repetition of such behaviour over time. Ball et al. (2022) found that 90.9% of individuals with disabilities experience verbal bullying, 81.9% face relational or social bullying, and 50% encounter physical bullying, due to physical differences that undermine social competence and self-esteem. The forms of bullying can be classified as follows:

### **Relational Bullying:**

Relational bullying is a form of humour used particularly among girls. It is an aggression that can take the form of social exclusion or online attacks.<sup>12</sup> It may also involve persuading someone to harm, deceive, or gossip about others.

## **B. Traditional Bullying:**

As documented in clinical studies, traditional bullying often causes psychosomatic harm as a result of the negative emotions that the victim experience and unable to cope with them.<sup>13</sup> It includes physical violence, such as hitting, kicking, and pushing,<sup>14</sup> as well as verbal aggression, including harassment, threats, belittling, obscene gestures, insults, criticism, ridicule, and shouting. This category of bullying also encompasses physical intimidation, torture, humiliation, or extortion.

## **4. Elements of Bullying:**

### **A. The Bully:**

The bully has three main traits: failure to achieve positive goals, loss of positive stimuli, such as the death of a relative, and exposure to negative stimuli, such as physical assault<sup>15</sup>. These factors drive the bully toward deviant behaviours, either as a reaction to unfair circumstances or as a form of maladaptive coping.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the bully may exhibit external symptoms, including deviant behaviours, substance abuse, impulsivity, and poor anger control.<sup>17</sup>

### **B. The Victim:**

The victim is an individual who experiences conflict and difficulties in self-defence due to a power imbalance with the bully.<sup>18</sup> Victims are often unable to form social relationships and communicate effectively. They have poor judgment skills, which encourages the bully to target them because they cannot show a clear response or resistance.<sup>19</sup>

Victims with disabilities may develop suicidal ideas as a form of self-harm due to repeated exposure to morally violating behaviours.<sup>20</sup> This psychological distress can make the victim a harmful individual as a consequence of emotional strain and a loss of life's meaning<sup>21</sup> Female students are among victims who exhibit internal symptoms, such as

depression and suicidal thoughts, as well as external manifestations, including post-traumatic stress.<sup>22</sup>

### **C.The Bystanders:**

A bystander is an individual or group who is indirectly involved in bullying. They play various roles during bullying as part of the social context.<sup>23</sup> Bystanders are classified into two types: Positive bystanders intervene to stop bullying, particularly when students with disabilities are targeted. Negative bystanders may worsen the situation by encouraging the bully to continue targeting the victim<sup>24</sup>. They can motivate the bully to seek admiration or assert dominance, especially if the bully is a narcissist. The bully's actions include exploiting the victim, engaging in harassment, and inflicting harm.

The bystander's response is influenced by many factors, including prior experience with bullying, their level of hostility toward society, the severity of the harm inflicted, their relationship with the victim, social popularity, degree of empathy, and perceived control<sup>25</sup>. In sum, bystanders can be categorised as assistants, reinforcers, outsiders, or defenders based on their responses to bullying.<sup>26</sup>

### **5. Characteristics of Bullied Students :**

School bullying victims often experience poor academic performance, deficient social skills, low self-concept, lack of trust in peers, and feelings of insecurity toward themselves. Younger victims tend to be more sensitive to these experiences compared to older students. They have low self-esteem, few friendships, feelings of failure, negativity, anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence. Physical weakness increases their vulnerability to bullies' attacks. Their difficulties in forming peer relationships frequently cause social isolation at school and foster feelings of loneliness and neglect. Many victims fear attending school, which impairs their concentration and

leads to poor academic performance. The persistent violence makes them feel insecure, manifesting in both psychological and physical symptoms.<sup>27</sup>

Bullied children commonly exhibit loneliness, poor psychological and social adjustment, shyness, weak social relationships, and low self-esteem. Based on these observations, the characteristics of bullied students can be summarised as follows:

- Intense fear, especially when going or coming back from school.
- Extreme introversion and having few friends.
- Persistent absenteeism and frequent school dropout.
- Low academic achievement.
- Persistent depression and reluctant participation in school activities
- Lack of self-belonging.
- Back home with torn clothes, scratches, or damaged materials.

## **6. Causes of School Bullying:**

Violence in schools is not a new phenomenon; it is a natural part of human societies, one that can be managed and addressed. The current issue has two aspects: Bullying is a widespread and pathological behaviour with serious consequences. There is a lack of effective educational interventions that can identify its causes and reduce its effects. Therefore, it is essential to examine the factors leading to this phenomenon.

### **A. Violent Electronic Games:**

Many children spend too much time playing violent and immoral electronic games on computers or mobile phones. These games focus on concepts, such as supernatural powers and defeating opponents. Children use different means to obtain the highest scores without educational objectives or parental control to address their psychological well-being.

Consequently, they may perceive life as an extension of these virtual competitions. They develop aggressive behaviours reflected in schools and society. Both families and legal authorities should prevent these harmful games, as they threaten generational development in the same way drug abuse does.<sup>28</sup>

### **B. Violent Films:**

Analysing the content of films viewed by children and adults reveals that they contain violent scenes, as both groups often watch movies with extreme violence, such as vampire or impunity killings. This habit has increased dramatically and requires urgent attention. As a consequence, children and youth become desensitised to bloodshed and believe that individuals who commit such acts are courageous heroes deserving imitation. They may emulate those heroes by wearing similar masks and clothes, using their images as social media profiles, and decorating their rooms with their images. Many parents are unable to address this imitation, which, in turn, increases violent behaviours in schools and universities.

### **C. Violent Cartoons:**

Violence is not limited to films; it has also extended to animated cartoons, which take up much of children's viewing time. Most parents think that cartoon content is safe for their children, yet they ignore its negative impact when transmitting violent messages. They often depict imaginary superhuman powers that encourage violence in interactions. In addition, they deal with the themes of magic, annihilating opponents in a single move, relying on stimulants, or seeking powerful allies during conflicts. Thus, children exposed to such content perceive violence as the only method to secure their rights and assert dominance.

#### **D. Family Educational Shortcomings:**

Some families cannot control their children's behaviour because they assume that satisfying their needs for food, clothing, and housing, enrolling them in prestigious schools, providing academic support, allowances, or recreational outings, are sufficient for their parental role. Many parents tend to shift responsibility onto teachers or household caregivers, which may lead to a child's behavioural problems or psychological disturbances due to a lack of proper guidance.<sup>29</sup>

#### **E. Domestic and Societal Violence:**

Children shaped their behaviour from the immediate environment, including family interactions and societal practices. A child who observes or is exposed to parental, family, or societal violence may perceive violence as an effective means of obtaining or infringing on others' rights without fear of punishment. This exposure inevitably influences them and leads to violent behaviours when opportunities are available.

The family and societal environment can negatively affect children, as parents may unintentionally encourage them to adopt observed violent behaviours. Families with limited social power and financial resources, or children with insufficient physical strength, are particularly vulnerable. Conversely, some parents actively instil values, such as rejecting injustice and oppression, even when retaliation is possible.

Therefore, parents must carefully reassess their role and closely monitor their children's behaviour at school, in clubs, and in other settings to ensure they are not engaging in inappropriate practices. Educators, in turn, must address this phenomenon using effective, practical, and deliberate strategies that consider both the aggressor and the victim.

Families should intervene if they notice abnormal behaviours in their children, such as reluctance to attend school, a drop in academic performance, unexplained physical pain, damaged belongings, diminished self-esteem, or withdrawal and social isolation. Parents should provide a supportive and comfortable environment and carefully investigate the reasons behind these behaviours to uncover possible school bullying or peer oppression. They should guide their children with understanding rather than blame or distress. Therefore, parental responsibility should extend beyond monitoring exam grades.

### **7. Teachers' Role in the Bullying of Students with Disabilities:**

Bullying is a complex phenomenon that stems from the interaction of several factors, including individual characteristics (such as personality traits, habits, and behaviours), family dynamics (like family and parent-child relationships, and parental attitudes), peer attributes (such as peers' personality traits, behaviours, and academic performance), school factors (including school management and environment), and classroom aspects (as class size, atmosphere, discipline, and teaching quality).<sup>30</sup>

A teacher's negative attitude toward a bullied student may unintentionally encourage harassment and abuse.<sup>31</sup> This phenomenon is mostly common among students with special needs, who often feel inferior to their peers. Moreover, teachers' responses to bullying incidents during punitive measures are affected by the gender of the bully or the victim. Male students may engage in physical violence, which can reinforce the perception that bullying is typical male behaviour.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, a teacher's negative stance may embolden the bully to continue abusive behaviours.

Authoritative parents play an important role in physical violence and bullying. Children may respond to others' behaviour with aggression as a way to compensate for a distorted self-image or poor emotional regulation. Teachers, often preoccupied with instruction, may fail to address such behaviour, allowing violence to increase and prompting students to intimidate their peers.<sup>33</sup>

Schools play a significant role in shaping students' beliefs and behaviours. When teachers and peers tolerate bullying, students may assume that the school is unable to regulate behaviour. In this context, Jenkins et al. (2022) confirmed that students may engage in increasingly violent bullying. Furthermore, they argued that students with disabilities may adopt bullying as a reaction against peers who have previously bullied them, particularly in schools where violence is permissible.

Parents who are reluctant to contact the school for support regarding their child with disabilities may impede efforts to prevent attacks directed at them. Research shows that teachers' moral orientation influences the types of responses they classify as bullying. Students can assess their teachers' conflict-resolution abilities; if they perceive these skills as inadequate or inconsistent, they may encourage engaging in bullying.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, students with disabilities often rank the lowest positions in the social hierarchy of schools.<sup>35</sup>

## **8. Consequences of School Bullying:**

Bullying can cause negative social, psychological, and academic consequences that affect the victim, the bully, and the school. The short-and long-term effects can be summarised as follows:

### **A. On Schools:**

Bullying disrupts the security, psychological stability, and social structure of the school. Thus, school administrations should create a conducive environment for students and teachers, promote educational

objectives, and support student aspirations. However, the school can facilitate bullying when much attention is paid to academic and pedagogical concerns, while behavioural management and bullying prevention are ignored. School bullying threatens educational and pedagogical processes, creates an anxious and fearful atmosphere, and fosters behaviours that oppose the norms of the school community.<sup>36</sup>

### **B. On the Bully:**

The bully is the primary instigator in the school bullying process, using aggression to discharge feelings of weakness and to attain a sense of power. However, this negative behaviour ultimately harms them, often resulting in school expulsion and, consequently, loss of access to educational programs and lower academic achievement. Bullies may also engage in frequent fighting, theft, vandalism, and alcohol use. Recent studies show that, in adulthood, bullies face early sexual activity, criminal involvement, traffic violations, and develop an antisocial personality disorder.<sup>37</sup>

### **C. On the Victim:**

Victims of school bullying experience many negative effects. Psychologically, they may suffer from anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, and fear of attending school, using the restroom and the school bus. Physically, they may exhibit headaches, eating disorders, insomnia, persistent fatigue, and enuresis.<sup>38</sup>

Over time, some victims may adopt aggressive behaviours, become bullies themselves, and develop aggressive personality traits. They may suffer from poor academic performance, difficulty with social adjustment, lack of trust in others, feelings of insecurity, and suicidal ideas. These effects may persist into adulthood and impact their professional and

family lives. Victims may also appear incapable of protecting themselves, rendering them vulnerable to further victimisation and diminishing their ability to assert themselves or defend against bullying.

## 9. CONCLUSION:

Bullying is an observable and pervasive phenomenon that prompts many students to understand it and find strategies to fight it. Addressing this issue requires designing an educational approach free from violence, discrimination, and prejudice, while fostering respect for others. It also needs to build children's self-confidence, monitor their behaviour, create an atmosphere full of care and affection, and encourage strong relationships between children and their parents. In addition, families, schools, and communities must work collaboratively to eliminate bullying. Such success can be achieved by integrating curricula that teach negotiation skills, promote social competence, and develop problem-solving strategies. Finally, we should prioritise both curricular and extracurricular activities that foster participation, cooperation, and teamwork.

Educators, teachers, and peers play a vital role in raising awareness and combating bullying. Also, families are considered the initial source of narcissism that later manifests in peer bullying experiences.

Based on what has been mentioned, we recommend the following actions:

- Raising school staff's awareness about the necessity of timely intervention and social support to victims, while implementing measures that deter the bullies.
- Integrating moral behaviours, such as cooperation, empathy, and peaceful conflict resolution, into school curricula.
- Developing group counselling programs based on psychological and therapeutic theories to address the effects of bullying on both victims and perpetrators.

- Addressing school-related issues through the study of behavioural problems.
- Designing cognitive-behavioural educational plans to reduce bullying, while implementing practical strategies in schools, including punitive measures for bullies and restitution for victims.
- Establishing therapeutic plans that involve family therapy is crucial in supporting both victims and bullies to manage and overcome daily challenges.
- Providing a supportive family for the bully by understanding their feelings and problems, listening to them attentively, accepting them as they are, and reducing their exposure to school violence and corporal punishment, recognising that peer support alone is insufficient to eradicate bullying.
- Increasing attention and monitoring behaviours and indicators that may signal bullying among students.

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