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PREVALENCE AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH BULLYING AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN PUNJAB, INDIA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT **Introduction:** Bullying has become a pervasive global issue, particularly affecting approximately 30% adolescents, mainly who are at a crucial stage of emotional and social development. It is no longer viewed as a minor or isolated problem occurring only within school boundaries. In India, 20% to 40% of school-going adolescents are exposed to bullying and in Punjab recent data suggests that about 35% of adolescents experience bullying. The study was intended to assess the prevalence and factors associated with bullying among adolescents. **Methodology:** A quantitative research approach with cross-sectional descriptive design was adopted. Three hundred thirty adolescents residing in villages of Punjab, India were recruited by using convenience sampling technique. The standardized Multidimensional Bullying Victimization, Deliberate Self harm, Rosenberg Self-esteem and Suicidal ideation questionnaire tools were used for collecting the data. **Results:** Majority of adolescents (91.8%) were having no bullying and only (8.1%) were found with bullying. All of the adolescents who faced bullying, 27 (8.1%) fall in the category of mild bullying with mean score 3.37 ± 1.77. None of the adolescents was having self-harm, maximum adolescents 189 (57.2%) were having high self-esteem with mean score 0.57±2.04. Only three adolescents (0.90%) having mild suicidal ideations with mean score (03±01). There was an inverse correlation (r= -0.29, p= 0.001) between bullying and self-esteem. Bullying score among adolescents was independent of selected variables except gender, Qualification of father, Qualification of mother, Father's occupation, Mother's occupation. Self-esteem score among adolescents was independent of selected variables. **Conclusion:** Adolescents were having moderate and high self-esteem, no suicidal ideations and no self-harm. Adolescents who faced bullying were having low self-esteem and parental educational status and occupation affects bullying among adolescents.

KEYWORDS : Bullying, Self harm, Self-esteem, Suicidal ideation, Adolescents, Community areas

1 INTRODUCTION

Bullying has become a pervasive global issue, particularly among adolescents, who are at a crucial stage of emotional and social development. Globally, approximately 30% of adolescents are affected by bullying in one form or another.[1][2] Bullying now encompasses a range of behaviors including physical aggression, verbal abuse, relational exclusion, and the increasingly prevalent cyber bullying, each with its own unique psychological and social consequences.[3]

Bullying refers to the any repetitive behavior whether verbal, physical that intended to harm to the individuals. With the advent of technology and the proliferation of social media, the nature and scope of bullying have changed dramatically.[3][4] The other main platform for bullying now days is social media websites that is referred as "Cyber Bullying". In the overall prevalence in a study done by Enamul Kabir and Rasheda Khanam 25.6% adolescent were bullying victims and 12% were cyber bullying victims. The percentage suicidality (34.4%- 21.6%) and self-harm (32.8%-22.3%) were higher in cyber bullying victims than in offline bullying victims.[6]

In the Indian context, the issue of bullying is equally alarming. National studies report that 20% to 40% of school-going adolescents in India are exposed to some form of bullying.[6][7] Adolescents in India face a unique set of challenges shaped by socio cultural norms, traditional family structures, academic competition, and gender expectations.[8][9][10]

Recent data suggests that about 35% of adolescents in Punjab experience bullying in various forms.[11][12] This figure is significant and reflects a growing crisis among youth in the region. Boys are often encouraged, either implicitly or explicitly, to display physical strength and dominance, leading to an increased tendency for physical bullying.[13] In contrast, girls are more likely to engage in relational aggression, such as exclusion, spreading rumors, and verbal insults, which, while less visible, can be equally damaging.[13]

The region's education system, known for its competitiveness and pressure to perform, contributes to heightened anxiety among adolescents.[14] Adolescents from low-income families or dysfunctional households are often more vulnerable, both as victims and perpetrators.[15][16] The mental health consequences of bullying in Punjab align with global and national patterns. Adolescents report experiencing anxiety, depression, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm tendencies after prolonged exposure to bullying.[17]

Adolescents are often discouraged from expressing vulnerability or seeking counselling, while schools lack adequate psychological services or trained personnel to manage behavioral and emotional issues. Particular concern is the rise of cyber bullying in Punjab, driven by increased smart phone penetration, internet access, and social media usage among adolescents.[11][12][18]

Adolescents are increasingly subjected to harassment, defamation, and threats through digital platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat. The psychological effects are amplified due to the public nature of online humiliation, the permanence of digital records, and the difficulty in escaping such abuse, especially when the bullying is persistent and relentless.[18] Despite these pressing challenges, research on cyber bullying in Punjab remains limited.[19]

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative research approach with descriptive cross sectional was adopted for present study to assess the prevalence and factors asso-ciated with bullying among adolescents in selected community areas of Punjab, India. The study was conducted at selected community areas i.e., village Jhansla, village Kalomajra and Rajpura, Punjab, India. The study included adolescents who were aged between 14-17 years, willing to participate in the study and able to understand and write English. total of 330 adolescents from selected community areas were selected using convenience sampling technique. The sample size was calculated by Cochran's formula found 298 and with 10 % attrition rate, yielded a sample of 330 adolescents. Socio demographic variables include 13 items about the personal information of the adolescents. Bullying was assessed using Multidimensional Bullying Victimization scale that consisted of 26 items related to Bullying. The rating scale ranged from 0 - 3 (never, sometimes, often and very often). Deliberate Self harm scale was used to assess self-harm which consisted of 16 items regarding self-harm in which the participants were asked to respond on items listed on the rating scale. The rating scale ranged from 0 - 3 (never, once, more than once and many times). For assessing self-esteem, Rosenberg self-esteem scale was used that consisted of 10 items regarding self-esteem and the participants has to response in the rating scale ranging from 1-4 (strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. Suicidal ideation was

assessed by Suicidal ideation questionnaire contains 15 items regarding suicidal ideation and the participants has to response in the rating scale from 0- 6 (never had this thought, had this thought before but not in the past month, about once a month, couple times a month, about once a month, couples of times a week, almost every day. Internal consistencies of all tools were measured by Cronbach's alpha and valued as Multidimensional bullying Victimization scale (0.85), Deliberate self-harm scale (0.79), Rosenberg self-esteem scale (0.92) and Suicidal ideation questionnaire (0.91).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Socio-demographic variables of adolescents:

Majority of participants (60.3%) were females. Most of the (38.2%) adolescents were studying in class 11. In terms of family structure, more than half (55.8%) of the adolescents were from nuclear families. Similarly, more than half (56.4%) of the adolescents had two siblings. Further, most of the (44.5%) of fathers' and (33.9%) of mother's educational status was matriculation. In terms of occupation of father, nearly half of the fathers (53.0%) of adolescents were labour and the majority of mothers (84.2%) of adolescents were homemakers. All adolescents (100%) reported having personal access to a mobile phone. Most (98.2%) of the adolescents accessed the internet via mobile data. Regarding screen time for academic and social media purposes, more than two third (67%) of adolescents spent less than 2 hours daily on screen. None (100%) of the adolescents reported any use of substances.

3.2 Prevalence of Bullying among adolescents:

The adolescents were identified into two categories with bullying and without bullying. A total of 330 adolescents were screened for bullying and the table shows that that majority of adolescents (91.8%) were having no bullying and only (8.1%) were found with bullying. The findings are depicted in Figure 1:

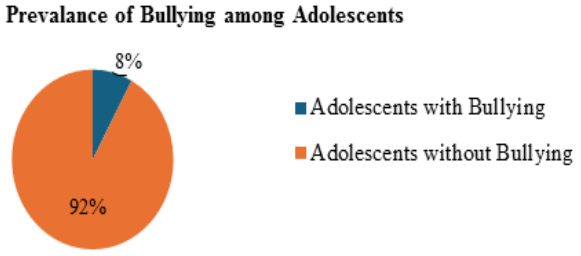

Figure 1: Prevalence of Bullying among adolescents

3.3 Descriptive Statistics of factors associated with bullying among adolescents

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of factors associated with bullying among adolescents (N = 330)

Factors	Category	Frequency	Mean ± SD
Bullying	Mild Bullying	27 (8.1%)	3.37 ± 1.77
	No Bullying	303 (91.8%)	-
Self-Harm	No self-harm	330 (100%)	-
Self-Esteem	Moderate self esteem	141 (42.7%)	0.42 ± 1.09
	High self esteem	189 (57.2%)	0.57 ± 2.04
Suicidal Ideations	Mild suicidal ideations	3 (0.90%)	03 ± 01
	No suicidal ideations	227 9%)	-

Out of 330 adolescents, maximum adolescents 189 (57.2%) having high self-esteem with mean score 0.57±2.04 and 141 (42.7%) adolescents' moderate self-esteem. There is no adolescent having low self-esteem, which means that none of the adolescents scored 0 (no self-esteem) on the given scale. The finding is demonstrated in Figure 2:

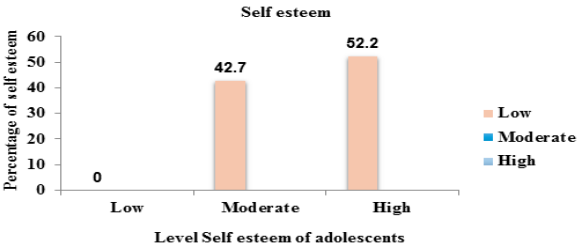

Figure 2: Level of Self-esteem among adolescents

3.4 Relationship between bullying and factors associated with bullying

Based on the Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient, there was an inverse correlation between bullying and self-esteem. This means that as bullying increases, self-esteem tends to decrease, and vice versa.

Table 2: Correlation between bullying and factors associated among adolescents (N = 330)

	Factors	Bullying	Self esteem
r (p value)	Bullying	-	-0.29 (0.001)*
	Self esteem	-0.29 (0.001)*	-

Statistically significance *p ≤ 0.05

3.5 Association of factors associated with bullying among adolescents with selected demographic variables

The association was calculated using ANOVA and $\chi 2$. Value between bullying and Age ($\chi 2$=5.73, p=0.54), Class (F=32.52, p=0.11), Family background ($\chi 2$=0.83, p=0.40), Number of siblings (F=2.71, p=0.84), Availability of network (F=20.3, p=0.25), Time of mobile usage per day and purpose (F=54.29, p=0.25) was found to be statistically non-significant except Gender ($\chi 2$=3.04, p=0.02), Qualification of father (F=59.34 p=0.00), Qualification of mother (F=16.25, p=0.01), Father's occupation (F=21.75 p=0.00), Mother's occupation (F=18.21, p=0.00) was found statistically significant at 0.05 level. It infers that bullying score among adolescents was independent of selected variables except gender, Qualification of father, Qualification of mother, Father's occupation, Mother's occupation.

4 DISCUSSION

In the present study the prevalence of bullying among adolescents it was found that majority of females (60.3%) than males (39.7%) were faced bullying. The findings of this study was similar to the study conducted by Al Buhairan et al. (2017)[21] in which majority (64.5%) of adolescent girls faced emotional or verbal bullying, while less number of boys than girls (48.2%) of boys reported the same. Both studies suggest that girls are more often targeted through non-physical forms of bullying, such as verbal abuse or social exclusion.

In the present study, a total of 189 adolescents (57.2%) had high self-esteem and 141 adolescents (42.7%) exhibited moderate self-esteem and no adolescents were identified with low self-esteem. The findings of this study was similar to the study conducted by United Arab Emirates by Al−Zahrani et al. (2023)[22] in which researcher found that 228 students (61.7%) had high self-esteem, 99 (26.8%) had moderate self-esteem, and less number of students i.e., 42 (11.4%) had low self-esteem.

The present study revealed there was a statistically significant negative (inverse) correlation between bullying and self-esteem among adolescents (r= –0.29, p= 0.001). These findings are similar to the findings of the study conducted by Ebrahim and Elrefaey (2018)[23] among nursing students in Egypt which shows a significant inverse relationship between bullying and self-esteem (r = –0.41) suggesting that students who experienced bullying reported diminished self-worth and heightened emotional distress.

6. Ethical approval & Consent

- The study was accorded Institutional Human and Ethical committee vide Ethics Committee (No. (EC/NEW/INST/2024/ 531/274) dated 06.04.2024
- Permission obtained from Sarpanch and MC of selected areas for conducting a study in the selected community areas. Written Informed assent was taken from parents of all the participants.

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