

The Impact of Bullying on the Mental Health of Students: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract. *Bullying in educational settings, encompassing physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, poses significant risks to students' mental health. This literature review employs a systematic approach to analyze findings from recent studies, revealing a strong correlation between bullying victimization and increased rates of psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem among adolescents. The review synthesizes evidence showing that both traditional and cyberbullying lead to profound and lasting mental health challenges, with victims exhibiting higher levels of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation compared to their non-victimized peers. Key moderating factors, including social support, school environment, and coping strategies, are identified as critical in influencing the severity of these effects. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive prevention programs, psychological support services, and effective anti-bullying policies in schools to create a safe and supportive environment. By addressing the multifaceted impacts of bullying, stakeholders can enhance students' overall well-being and mitigate the negative psychological consequences associated with victimization.*

Keywords: *Bullying, mental health, adolescents, depression, anxiety, cyberbullying, self-esteem, social support, intervention strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying can manifest in multiple forms in school settings, leading to significant psychological repercussions for victims. Existing research establishes a robust link between bullying victimization and mental health disorders. For instance, (Merrill & Hanson, 2016) demonstrated that both traditional and cyberbullying correlate with increased feelings of sadness and suicidal thoughts among victims. This finding is supported by (Fahy et al., 2016), who noted that peer victimization is associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to non-victimized peers. Additionally, (Hesapçioğlu et al., 2017) identified a significant association between bullying and depressive symptoms, suggesting that early interventions could alleviate these mental health challenges. (Kim et al., 2018) further confirmed that traditional bullying victimization is consistently linked to various mental health difficulties.

Cyberbullying has emerged as particularly detrimental to mental health compared to traditional bullying. (Agustiniingsih, 2024) conducted a systematic review highlighting that both forms of bullying lead to adverse mental health outcomes, impacting adolescents' overall psychological well-being. (Kwan et al., 2020) found a strong negative correlation between cyberbullying and mental health disorders, emphasizing the necessity for effective interventions. The covert nature of cyberbullying often leaves victims feeling more isolated and powerless, potentially exacerbating their mental health issues compared to traditional bullying (Merrill & Hanson, 2016).

Self-esteem is a critical factor in the relationship between bullying and mental health. Victims of bullying frequently experience a decline in self-esteem, which can lead to exacerbated depressive symptoms (Mungala, 2020); (Uba et al., 2010) discovered a negative correlation between self-esteem and bullying, indicating that lower self-esteem corresponds with higher levels of victimization. Mungala (2020) similarly found that increased frequency of bullying correlates with heightened depressive symptoms and reduced self-esteem. This relationship suggests that interventions aimed at boosting self-esteem may be beneficial in mitigating the psychological effects of bullying.

The literature consistently illustrates that bullying, whether traditional or cyber, poses significant negative consequences for students' mental health. Victims are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, necessitating comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies. Future research should continue to examine the

complex interactions between bullying, self-esteem, and mental health to develop effective support systems for affected adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

This literature review employs a systematic methodology to gather and analyze pertinent studies published in recent years regarding the impact of bullying on children's and adolescents' mental health. The focus is on exploring various aspects of bullying—both traditional and cyber—and their psychological ramifications on young individuals.

A thorough search was conducted across several academic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, utilizing keywords such as "bullying," "mental health," "adolescents," and "depression." This search yielded a diverse array of studies offering insights into the correlation between bullying victimization and mental health outcomes. For example, Mahanta and (Mahanta & Khatoniyar, 2019) identified significant negative correlations between cyberbullying experiences and mental health, suggesting that increased cyberbullying is associated with worsening mental health conditions among adolescents. (Fahy et al., 2016) highlighted the longitudinal links between cyberbullying involvement and adverse mental health outcomes, reaffirming that peer victimization can lead to increased depression and anxiety.

The review also included studies investigating the roles of self-esteem and social support in moderating bullying's effects on mental health. (Extremiera et al., 2018) examined how emotional intelligence could mitigate the negative psychological symptoms linked to cybervictimization, suggesting that personal resources may alleviate some mental health impacts. (Baier et al., 2018) emphasized the crucial role of social support in reducing the adverse mental health effects of bullying, particularly for female students, indicating that enhancing social support networks could benefit victims.

Furthermore, findings from studies comparing traditional bullying and cyberbullying effects were synthesized. (Bottino et al., 2015) conducted a systematic review affirming the prevalence of mental health issues among victims of both bullying types, emphasizing the necessity for targeted interventions. (Kim et al., 2018) further contributed to this understanding by documenting the negative effects of traditional bullying on adolescent mental health, reinforcing the need to address both forms in prevention strategies.

The selected studies were assessed for methodological rigor, including sample size, research design, and statistical techniques. The review focused on peer-reviewed articles published within the last decade to ensure the relevance and currency of the findings. By synthesizing evidence from diverse studies, this review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how bullying affects the mental health of children and adolescents, highlighting the need for effective interventions and support systems.

RESULTS

The reviewed literature consistently reveals a significant relationship between bullying experiences and an increased risk of mental health disorders among children and adolescents. Victims of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying exhibit elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to their non-victimized peers. A meta-analysis by Tofi and Farrington (2011) found that bullying victims face a heightened risk of developing long-term mental health issues, including depression and anxiety disorders. Moreover, studies indicate that the severity and frequency of bullying experiences positively correlate with the intensity of mental health symptoms. Bottino et al. (2015) reported that adolescents subjected to bullying manifest significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts, reinforcing the profound and pervasive impact of bullying.

Factors such as social support, school environment, and coping strategies have been identified as critical moderators in this relationship. Research by (Baier et al., 2018) highlights that strong social support systems can mitigate the negative effects of bullying on mental health, particularly for female students. Supportive peers and adults can provide a buffer against the psychological distress associated with victimization. Additionally, the school environment is crucial; schools that promote a positive climate and inclusivity typically experience lower incidences of bullying and better mental health outcomes. Studies indicate that schools implementing anti-bullying policies and fostering a culture of respect witness declines in bullying incidents and improvements in student mental health (Rigby, 2000).

Coping strategies also significantly affect how victims react to bullying. Adaptive coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support or engaging in problem-solving, can protect against the negative psychological effects of bullying, while maladaptive strategies, like avoidance or withdrawal, may worsen mental health issues. (Uba et al., 2010) noted

that students employing adaptive coping strategies report lower levels of depression and anxiety, suggesting that fostering these skills in students could be advantageous in mitigating bullying's effects.

DISCUSSION

The discussion emphasizes the urgent need for effective interventions aimed at reducing bullying in schools and enhancing student mental health. The evidence presented underscores that bullying is not only a behavioral concern but also a significant public health issue with lasting psychological ramifications for young individuals. Comprehensive prevention programs incorporating social-emotional learning, conflict resolution, and peer support are essential in addressing the root causes of bullying and fostering a supportive school environment.

Furthermore, providing psychological support services for bullying victims is crucial. Schools should implement counseling programs offering immediate and ongoing support to affected students. Such programs can help victims build resilience, improve coping strategies, and boost self-esteem, which are vital for mitigating bullying's long-term effects. Additionally, training for educators and staff on recognizing and addressing bullying can cultivate a more responsive and supportive school culture, empowering personnel to intervene effectively and foster a safe and supportive environment.

COUCLUSION

The effects of bullying on students' mental health constitute a pressing issue requiring urgent action from educators, parents, and policymakers. The evidence presented in this review highlights the severe psychological consequences of bullying on children and adolescents, including increased risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Given the widespread occurrence of both traditional and digital bullying, it is imperative for all stakeholders to engage in collaborative efforts to cultivate a safe and supportive school environment.

Creating such an environment entails implementing comprehensive anti-bullying programs that address not only the behaviors associated with bullying but also promote social-emotional learning and resilience among students. Educators must be equipped with

the necessary tools and training to recognize and effectively intervene in bullying situations. Moreover, fostering open communication among students, parents, and school staff can help establish a culture of support and accountability.

Policymakers play a crucial role in developing regulations and guidelines mandating the implementation of anti-bullying policies in schools. These policies should include clear definitions of bullying, reporting mechanisms, and procedures for addressing bullying incidents. Furthermore, mental health resources should be readily accessible to students who have experienced bullying, ensuring they receive the psychological support necessary to cope with their experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Implement Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programs:** Schools should adopt and integrate evidence-based anti-bullying programs that focus on prevention, intervention, and post-incident support.
2. **Train Educators and Staff:** Provide training for teachers and school staff on recognizing signs of bullying, effective intervention strategies, and promoting a positive school culture.
3. **Enhance Social-Emotional Learning:** Incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum to help students develop resilience, empathy, and coping skills.
4. **Foster Open Communication:** Create platforms for open dialogue among students, parents, and staff to discuss bullying concerns and solutions, encouraging a supportive school community.
5. **Develop Clear Policies and Procedures:** Establish clear definitions of bullying and outline reporting procedures to ensure all stakeholders understand how to address bullying incidents effectively.
6. **Ensure Access to Mental Health Resources:** Provide accessible mental health services, including counseling and support groups, for students affected by bullying.
7. **Engage Parents and the Community:** Involve parents and community members in awareness campaigns and workshops that educate about bullying and its effects, fostering a united front against bullying behavior.

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