

Bullying Victimization and its Associated Factors among Adolescent Students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Bullying is a common type of school violence and is a major source of maladjustment with undue effect on health and academic performance among adolescents. This study aimed to identify the prevalence of bullying victimization among adolescent students and its association with socio-demographic, family and school characteristics.

Methods: Descriptive survey design was used. A total of 568 adolescents studying in Grade Seven to 11 of 10 public and 10 private schools of Kathmandu municipality were selected through multi-stage stratified cluster sampling technique. Nepali version of modified revised Olweus Bully Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) was used for data collection through Google Survey Tool after taking informed consent.

Results: Prevalence of bullying victimization was 20.4% among 568 respondents. In regards types of bullying, prevalence of verbal bullying was 75.8%, relational bullying was 57.7%, physical bullying was 23.2% and cyber bullying was 23.2%. Male respondents were more victimized (63.8%) than female (36.2%). The highest proportion (23.6%) of bullied respondents was from 15 to 19 years aged group. About one-third (34.0%) of bullied students had family problem. Higher proportion of respondents who disliked school and who were afraid of being bullying, were bully victimized (40.9% and 33.3% respectively).

Conclusion: Prevalence of bullying victimization tends to be an issue among adolescent students. Bullying victimization is likely to be high in 15 to 19 years aged group and in male adolescents. Prevalence of verbal bullying tends to be commonest types of bullying.

Key words: Associated factors of harassment; Bullying in adolescents; Influencing factors of harassment; Victimization of harassment

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is intentional repeated act over a period of time to cause fear, distress, or harm related to real or perceived imbalance of power between bully and victim.¹ Bullying can be physical (hitting, punching), verbal (name-calling, teasing), psychological / relational (rumors, social exclusion) and cyber bullying (hurtful information on internet, email or text messaging). Typically, individuals involved with bullying are classified as bullies, bully-victims, victims or bystanders.^{1,2} Cyber bullying is an increasing problem due to advancement in electronics and social media.³

A nationwide survey shows high prevalence of bullying victimization among adolescent students in Nepal.⁴ A meta-analysis study on bullying pointed out various risk factors of bullying as socio demographic characteristics (like age, sex, ethnicity, religion), family characteristics (like socio-economic status, parental characteristics and family disharmony), school characteristics {like school and social factors (media)}.⁵

Bullying is a social health issue and by preventing its negative consequences such as psychosocial problems, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder and even suicidal tendencies among the bully, it can help to achieve the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG)^{3,4} of the nation. Bullying that goes unnoticed or unreported to health or other authorities can result in youth violence.⁶ However, school surveys relating to bullying are lacking for most countries and regions and bullied students hesitate to report to others about bullying^{7,8}. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the prevalence of bullying victimization among adolescent students and its association with their socio-demographic, family and school characteristics. The obtained information from this study would help the school authority to lunch measures to prevent bullying in the school and its negative consequences on physical and mental health of the students.

METHODS

This was a descriptive survey study. Study population included the students of grade Seven to 11 of public and private schools of Kathmandu metropolitan city. Estimated number of students in grade Seven to 11 were approximately 24,623.⁹ With prevalence of bullying of 50.74 the required sample size of 598 was calculated using Cochran formula.¹⁰ Multi-stage cluster random sampling technique was used to select in first stage, 10

public schools from among 96 public schools and 10 private schools from among 494 private schools of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Then, in second stage, one grade from Seven to 11 grades was randomly selected from each of the selected 10 public and 10 private schools. All students aged 10 to 19 years of randomly selected 20 grades of these 20 schools were included as study subjects. From among these, students who were not willing to participate were excluded. With a response rate of 86.7%, out of total 655 students, 568 returned the filled questionnaire.

Nepali Version Google Survey Questionnaire consisting of 4 parts i.e. Part I: Socio demographic characteristics, Part II: Family characteristics, Part III: School characteristics, and Part IV: Modified version of Revised Olweus Victim Bully Questionnaire(OBVQ)¹¹ was used to obtain the data about bullying. Part I-III questions were developed based on conceptual framework of study where as OBVQ was a freely available tool.⁴ Content validity of questionnaire was established by consultation with content experts. Then the questionnaire was translated into Nepali version and back translated in English version by two independent bilingual persons to ensure that original meaning was retained in translated version of instrument. Nepali version questionnaire was changed into Google Survey Form to collect data virtually due to COVID-19 Pandemic. Pre-testing was done in 87 students (40 private school and 47 public school students not included in data collection) for clarity and sequencing. Based on pretesting, questionnaire was finalized for data collection.

Research proposal was approved from the institutional review board of National Academy of Medical Sciences, Bir Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal. Permission from the selected school Principals for data collection were obtained through submission of written request letter. Written informed consent was taken from adolescent students aged 18 years and above. In younger students, informed consent was taken from parents / guardian and assent from the students. Participation of all students were voluntary. Confidentiality was assured by asking them to write their grade, section and roll number (instead of their names) in order to identify respondents requiring counseling and referral treatment regarding bullying consequences if any. Students filled Google Survey Form in virtual classroom setting in presence of the principal researcher to prevent information contamination. They took about 20 minutes to complete

the questionnaire. Data was collected from 22 December 2020 to 8 January 2021. Obtained data were entered in MS EXCEL 2007 and exported to SPSS version 22.0 for analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

Among the 568 respondents, majority (61.8%) belonged to 15 to 19 years age group and 55.5% were female. More than half (51.4%) of respondents belonged to Brahmin / Chhetri ethnicity and majority (86.3%) followed Hinduism. More than half (51.8%) belonged to nuclear family and 37.5% of the respondents' fathers were engaged in business and about half (50.5%) of the mothers were homemakers. Most (75.2%) respondents' had their family income enough for the day-to-day family expenses. Less than two-fifth (17.8%) had family problems during past one year. Majorities (60.7%) of the respondents were from public school and remaining 39.3% were from private schools. Less than half (46.1%) had achieved Grade A / A+. Most (81.7%) of the respondents liked their school and most (88.9%) of them had more than one friend. Most (84.7%) of them were clear about rule of discipline and most (82.6%) were not afraid of being bullied by other students. Findings related to prevalence of bullying victimization and characteristics of bullying victimization are presented in tables 1 and 2 respectively and association of the socio-demographic, family and school characteristics of the respondents with the prevalence of bullying victimization are presented in tables 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

Table 1. Prevalence of Bullying Victimization among the Respondents

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Prevalence of bullying victimization during the previous one-year period (n = 568)		
Yes	116	20.4
No	452	79.6
Categories of victimization*(n = 116)		
Verbal bullying	88	75.8
Relational bullying	67	57.7
Physical bullying	27	23.2
Cyber bullying	27	23.2
*Multiple Responses		

Table 2. Characteristics of Bullying Victimization among the Respondents

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender of bully perpetrators (n = 116)		
Boy	50	43.1
Girl	18	15.5
Both sex	48	41.4
Number of bully perpetrators (n = 116)		
One bully victim by one perpetrator	37	31.9
One bully victim by group perpetrators	79	68.1
Grades of perpetrators (n = 116)		
Same grade	74	63.8
Different grade	42	36.2
Place of bullying in school* (n = 116)		
Classroom when teacher not present	57	49.1
Classroom in presence of teacher	26	22.4
Play ground	41	35.3
Lunch room	26	22.4
School bus	11	9.5
Sharing about bullying (n = 116)		
Yes	52	44.8
No	64	55.2
Person to whom shared* (n = 52)		
Friends	37	71.2
Parents / guardian	28	53.8
Sibling	22	42.3
Class teacher	5	9.6
*Multiple responses		

DISCUSSION

Bullying victimization is one of the serious public health problem. Present study revealed that one fifth (20.4%) of school adolescents were bully victimized. Similar findings were reported in northeastern Brazil (21.7%),¹² India (25.8%),¹³ Iran (25.8%)¹⁴ and in Indonesia 20.7%.¹⁵ Higher prevalence was reported in studies done in Nepal i.e. Mishra¹⁶ found 58.0%, a nationwide survey showed 50.7%⁴ and a survey of Mental Health Status by WHO showed 51% bullying victimization in Nepal.¹⁵ In comparison to previous study in Nepal, prevalence of bullying victimization

Table 3. Association of Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents with Prevalence of Bullying Victimization

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Bullying victimization		Chi-square value	p-value
	Present (n = 116) No. (%)	Absent (n = 452) No. (%)		
Age category in completed years				
10 - 14	33 (15.2)	184 (84.8)	5.87	.01
15 - 19	83 (23.6)	268 (76.4)		
Sex				
Male	61 (24.2)	191 (75.8)	3.99	.04
Female	55 (17.4)	261 (82.6)		
Caste and Ethnicity				
Brahmin/Chhetri	60 (20.5)	232 (79.5)	94	.81
Janajati	37 (18.9)	159 (81.1)		
Madhesi	15 (24.6)	46 (75.4)		
Other	4 (21.1)	15 (78.9)		
Religion				
Hinduism	102 (20.8)	388 (79.2)	2.33	.31
Buddhism	8 (14.0)	49 (86.0)		
Others	6 (28.6)	15 (71.4)		

Table 4. Association of Family-related Characteristics of the Respondents with Prevalence of Bullying Victimization

Family Characteristics	Bullying victimization		Chi-square value	p-value
	Present (n = 116)No. (%)	Absent (n = 452)No. (%)		
Type of family				
Nuclear	52 (17.7)	242 (82.3)	2.8	.09
Joint	64 (23.4)	210 (76.6)		
Father's education				
Illiterate / literate / primary	50 (20.0)	199 (80.0)	1.04	.59
Secondary	27 (18.4)	121 (81.6)		
Above Secondary	39 (22.8)	132 (77.2)		
Mother's education				
Illiterate / literate / primary	62 (21.6)	225 (79.4)	2.20	.33
Secondary	28 (25.4)	82 (74.6)		
Above Secondary	26 (18.4)	115 (81.6)		
Father's occupation Status				
Business	51 (23.9)	162 (76.1)	2.6	.10
Other than business	65 (18.3)	290 (81.7)		
Mother's occupation Status				
Home maker	57 (19.8)	230 (81.2)	.11	.70
Other than home maker	59 (20.9)	222 (79.1)		
Average family income per month				

Less than enough	16 (23.9)	51 (76.1)	.70	.70
Enough	84 (19.7)	343 (80.3)		
Surplus	16 (21.6)	58 (78.4)		
Hour spent with parents/day				
None	12 (26.0)	34 (74.0)	10.67	.005
Less than 3 hours	25 (33.3)	50 (66.7)		
More than 3 hours	79 (17.6)	368 (82.4)		
Presence of Family Problem				
Yes	33(34.0)	64(66.0)	13.30	.001
No	83(17.6)	388(82.4)		

Table 5. Association of School-related Characteristics of the Respondents with the Prevalence of Bullying Victimization

Characteristics	Bullying victimization		Chi-square value	p-value
	Present (n = 116) No. (%)	Absent (n = 452) No. (%)		
Type of school				
Public	76 (22.0)	269 (78.0)	1.39	.23
Private	40 (17.9)	183 (82.1)		
Level of education				
Basic (Upto class 8)	19 (16.9)	93 (83.1)	1.02	.31
Secondary (Class 9 or above)	97 (21.2)	359 (78.8)		
Academic Achievement (Grade)				
Grade A / A+	60 (22.9)	202 (77.1)	1.86	.39
Grade B / B+	47 (18.1)	212 (81.9)		
Grade C / C+	9 (19.1)	38 (80.9)		
School liking				
Dislike	18 (40.9)	26 (59.1)	23.39	.001
Undecided	21 (35.0)	39 (65.0)		
Like	77 (16.5)	387 (83.5)		
Having friend (Peer connectedness)				
None	7 (41.1)	10 (58.9)	5.17	.07
Having one friend	11 (23.9)	35 (67.1)		
Having more than one friend	98 (19.4)	407 (80.6)		
Rule clarity of school				
Yes	93 (19.3)	388 (80.7)	2.28	.13
No	23 (26.4)	64 (73.6)		
Fear of being bullied				
Yes	33 (33.3)	66 (66.7)	12.29	.001
No	83 (21.5)	386 (78.5)		

was low in this study that may probably because classes were conducted virtually during the period of COVID 19 pandemic.

Present study revealed that prevalence of verbal bullying was 75.8%, relational bullying was 57.7%, physical bullying was 23.2% and cyber bullying was 23.2%. Similar findings was found in Northern Brazil¹² and in Pyuthan, Nepal.¹⁶ Present study revealed that cyber bullying victimization was least than other type of bullying which was similar to studies done in China,¹⁷ New York¹⁸ and Taiwan.¹⁹ In contrast, one study done in Nepal showed that the most common type of bullying was physical (40.09%).⁴ In this study, prevalence of verbal bullying was high and physical bullying was low, it may be probably because all respondents were in virtual class. Prevalence of cyber bullying was also low, it may be due to more hours spent on online classes and homework submissions virtually there by limiting time spend on cyber programs.

This study found association between age and bullying victimization ($P = 0.01$). Present study found bullying victimization was higher in 15 - 19 years age group (23.6%) than in 10 - 14 years age group (15.2%). In contrast, other studies pointed bullying victimization to be in decreasing trend with increasing age, such as in Korea.²⁰ In this study, significantly higher proportion of male respondents were bully victimized than female respondents. Similar finding was reported in Tunisia,⁸ in Iran.¹⁴ and in a survey of Mental Health Status in Nepal.¹⁵ In contrast to this finding, a study done in Korea found low bullying victimization in boys than in girls.²⁰ In this study, sex is associated with the bullying victimization ($P = 0.04$) this was similar to a study done in Iran.¹⁴ In contract, there was no significant association between sex and bullying victimization ($P = 0.06$) in Pyuthan, Nepal.¹⁶ No significant associations between bullying and socio-demographic factors (sex, age and race) were also found in Northeastern Brazil.¹² There was no significant association between (caste/ethnicity, religion) in present study.

This study showed no significant association of family characteristics (type of family and parental education and occupation) with bullying victimization. These findings are supported by studies done in Jordan and China.^{21,22} In present study, there was no significant association between family income and bullying victimization. Studies done in China²¹ and India¹³ also reported similar findings. In contrast, a study done in Greece found

prevalence of bullying victimization was associated with poor family economic status ($P = 0.032$)²³.

This study showed a significant association between hours spent with parent and bullying victimization ($P = 0.005$). The adolescents who spent their time less than three hours per day with their parents were at higher risk to be bully victimized. Similarly, a study in Iceland showed that parental support and time spent with parents were protective against group bullying victimization ($P < 0.01$).²⁴ In this study, a significant association was found between bullying victimization and family problem ($P = 0.001$). Bullying victimization was higher among students who had family problem. Similar findings were reported in studies done in Greece ($p=0.016$)²³ and in China.²¹

Bullying victimization was not associated with school type in this study. In contrast, a study done in Pyuthan, Nepal, reported significant association of bully victimization with school type ($p=0.0001$).¹⁶ There was no significant association between class and bullying victimization. In contrast, a study done in New York revealed that rates of bullying victimization were significantly higher in 8th class than in 9th class or above ($p < .001$).¹⁸

Bullying victimization was associated with liking of school ($P = 0.001$). In this study, bullying victimization was found to be higher among those who disliked their school. In contrast, a study done in Tunisia found majority of victimized students liked their school ($p < 0.001$).⁸ This study showed no significant association between academic achievement and peer connectedness. Similar finding was reported in a study done in Iceland.²⁴

Findings of this study showed no association between rule clarity and bullying victimization. In contrast, Aldridge²⁵ found that rule clarity were negatively associated with bully victimization ($P < 0.05$) in Australia. In this study, bullying victimization was high among students who feared of being bullied.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that bullying victimization tends to be higher among older adolescent students of 15 - 19 years age group than among younger adolescents of 10 - 14 years age group. Male adolescents tend to be more vulnerable to bullying victimization than the female adolescents. Among the different forms of

bullying, verbal bullying tends to be commonest type of bullying. Adolescent students who spent less time with their parent, who dislike their school, who have family problem and who are afraid of bullying are likely to have higher prevalence of bullying.

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