Perceived School Bullying Situation in Nepal

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores school bullying experiences in Nepal, focusing on teachers' and students' awareness and understanding at a private school in Kathmandu Valley. Utilizing narrative inquiry, the research unveils challenges and identifies effective strategies to mitigate bullying behaviors. Key findings reveal that teachers' understanding of bullying ranges from recognition of overt acts to a comprehensive grasp of psychosocial impacts, while students' awareness varies widely. The school environment significantly influences bullying prevalence and reporting tendencies, with supportive teacher responses encouraging reporting. Peer dynamics play a crucial role in both perpetuating and combating bullying. The study highlights a disconnect between educational policies and actual practices, exemplified by the principal's endorsement of corporal punishment. Victims report severe emotional turmoil, social ostracization, and physical symptoms. The research concludes that addressing school bullying in Nepal requires a multi-faceted approach considering cultural norms, school climate, and individual perceptions. Implications include developing comprehensive anti-bullying policies, fostering positive school climates, enhancing stakeholder awareness, and implementing culturally appropriate intervention programs. This study calls for a unified approach to create bullying-free school environments and ensure student well-being in Nepal.
Keywords: combating bullying, prevalence, school bullying, students' awareness

Introduction

School bullying is a pervasive issue with significant implications for student well-being and academic achievement. In Nepal, recent studies indicate that 51% of school adolescents experience bullying (Neupane et al., 2020), highlighting the urgency of addressing this

problem. While research has explored the prevalence and impacts of bullying in Nepal, there remains a critical gap in understanding the lived experiences of those directly affected by this phenomenon.

Bullying in schools manifests in various forms, from overt physical aggression to subtle social exclusion. Its effects can be far-reaching, impacting victims' psychological health, social relationships, and academic performance (Arhin et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022). The role of teachers in preventing and addressing bullying is crucial (Tucker & Maunder, 2015), yet their perspectives and experiences often remain unexplored. Recent policy initiatives in Nepal, such as the Children's Act of 2018, aim to protect children from bullying and other forms of abuse. However, the effectiveness of these policies and their implementation in school settings require further investigation.

Despite increased awareness and policy efforts, school bullying in Nepal persists, often normalized or dismissed by both educators and students. This normalization can lead to severe consequences, including social isolation, academic decline, and in extreme cases, suicidal ideation (UNESCO, 2019). The disconnect between policy intentions and on-ground realities highlights the need for a deeper understanding of bullying experiences from the perspectives of both teachers and students.

This study aims to explore the experiences and understanding of school teachers and students regarding bullying in Nepal. By examining these perspectives, we seek to inform more effective prevention and intervention strategies. The research is guided by two primary questions:

1. What experiences do school teachers narrate about school bullying?
2. How do school students experience school bullying?

This research addresses a critical gap in the literature by providing in-depth qualitative insights into bullying experiences within the Nepalese educational context. By capturing the narratives of both teachers and students, this study offers a comprehensive view of the bullying phenomenon, its impacts, and potential intervention points.

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational policy and practice in Nepal. They can inform the development of more effective anti-bullying strategies, support programs for affected students, and professional development for educators. Ultimately, this research contributes to the creation of safer, more supportive learning environments that promote student well-being and academic success.

The study focuses on the experiences of teachers and students in selected schools in Nepal. It encompasses participants' responses to bullying, challenges faced, and the impact on students' well-being, academic performance, and social interactions. The research also explores participants' suggestions for preventing and effectively addressing bullying within the school context.

Related Literature

School bullying is broadly defined as intentional, repeated acts of aggression or harm towards others in a school environment (UNICEF, 2018; Olweus, 1994; Rigby, 2007). These acts can

be physical, verbal, relational, or cyber-mediated, often involving an imbalance of power between the perpetrator(s) and the victim (UNESCO, 2019).

Research indicates a disparity between students' experiences of bullying and their perceptions of being bullied (Connell et al., 2019). Teachers' confidence in addressing bullying as a team correlates with fewer reported incidents (Reyes-Rodríguez et al., 2021). Moreover, studies highlight the influence of teacher perceptions on bullying prevention and intervention strategies (Tucker & Maunder, 2015; Wachs et al., 2018; Ha & El-Shafei, 2021).

Bullying has adverse implications for students' well-being (Arhin et al., 2019), including increased risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Chen & Huang, 2015; Lucas et al., 2019). It also impacts academic achievement and future economic productivity (Wang et al., 2022). The role of bystanders in either perpetuating or interrupting bullying is significant (Salmivalli et al., 2011). Teacher-related factors also play a critical role in addressing bullying. Duong et al., (2013) utilized systematic equation modeling to examine how teachers' perceived efficacy and threat perception influenced their likelihood of intervening in bullying incidents. The findings emphasized the need to enhance teachers' confidence and understanding of bullying's risks, tailoring interventions to their experience levels. Similarly, Fischer et al., (2021) found that teachers with higher self-assurance were more likely to intervene, though the correlation between their confidence and students' experiences of bullying remained inconclusive.

Research in Nepal highlights the pervasive nature of school bullying and its adverse impacts on students' well-being. Prajapati et al., (2022) conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study among secondary public school students in Kathmandu, revealing that bullying is a common issue. The study found that 87% of students experienced verbal bullying, alongside physical, social, relational, and cyberbullying. Many students believed they were targeted due to a perceived lack of physical strength. Further, Regmi et al., (2019) explored the status of bullying among secondary-level students in Kathmandu. Their findings indicated that 65.8% of students experienced bullying in physical, verbal, or sexual forms, while 45% admitted to bullying others. Half of the bullied students confided in friends, followed by siblings, teachers, and parents. The study called for collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders to implement effective anti-bullying interventions.

Gender-based differences in bullying experiences were identified by Neupane (2014), who found boys were more prone to direct forms of bullying, such as physical and verbal abuse, while girls experienced indirect bullying, including social exclusion and rumor-spreading.

These studies collectively underline the critical need to address school bullying in Nepal. Bullying affects both victims and perpetrators, impacting their academic achievement and overall well-being. Teachers play a pivotal role in mitigating bullying, and their active intervention can foster a safer and more supportive school environment. Collaborative efforts among parents, teachers, and students are essential to create secure and inclusive educational settings.

Policy Related to School Bullying in Nepal

Nepal lacks specific legislation exclusively addressing school bullying. However, provisions in the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and related legal frameworks emphasize protecting children from harmful practices. Article 39 of the Constitution states that "no child shall be subjected to physical, mental, or any other form of torture in home, school, or other places and situations whatsoever" (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2015).

The Children's Act (2018) further highlights bullying as a significant concern. Clause 7(5) prohibits discrimination, exploitation, abuse, physical punishment, and bullying by parents, family members, guardians, teachers, or others. Despite these legal safeguards, bullying persists in familial, educational, and communal settings, with most cases going unreported. Only severe instances occasionally gain media attention, as noted in the *State of Children in Nepal* report (2019), which documented the lasting developmental and psychological impact of such incidents on victims. To alleviate bullying and violence in schools, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has implemented several measures. These include policy initiatives, guidelines, and the introduction of "Suggestion Boxes" in secondary schools to encourage reporting of violence, including corporal punishment and peer bullying (Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens, 2018). Additionally, the Complaint Response Mechanism (CRM) Guidelines (2073) require secondary schools to appoint a female teacher as a gender-focal person and establish a suggestion box (UNICEF, 2022).

Despite these measures, bullying remains prevalent, underscoring the challenges in creating safer school environments. Addressing this issue demands more robust implementation of policies, increased awareness, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to protect children from the adverse effects of bullying, particularly within schools and communities.

Theoretical Lens: Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory
The theory explains how humans' learning and behavior are shaped by observation, modeling, and imitating others, through social interaction and environmental context. This theory insists on the role of social factors in shaping personality, cognition, and development. In the context of aggressive behavior, "imitation" refers to learning through copying someone else's behavior. "Observation" means learning by watching others, while "modeling" involves using someone else's actions as a guide for forming new behaviors. For instance, if a parent consistently reacts angrily to new situations, the child may learn to exhibit similar reactions (Allan, 2017).

Bullying, as a form of aggressive behavior, can be understood through the lens of Social Learning Theory. Students often learn bullying behaviors and the responses to such behaviors by observing and modeling the actions of peers and teachers. Teachers' perceptions of bullying, shaped by their experiences and societal norms, influence their intervention strategies and the support they provide to victims. Similarly, students' responses—whether they intervene, retaliate, or remain passive—are influenced by the perceived consequences of such actions and

their internalized beliefs about the acceptability of bullying.

This theoretical framework is instrumental in understanding how bullying is perceived differently by students and teachers. It highlights the importance of examining the social dynamics and observational learning processes that contribute to varied responses to bullying. The theory's application is particularly valuable in developing study tools aimed at exploring these perceptions and responses, offering insights into the interplay between social learning and bullying behavior in school settings.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach rooted in the interpretive paradigm to explore teachers' and students' perceptions and responses to school bullying in Nepal. The research design was guided by narrative inquiry, focusing on capturing and analyzing personal stories and experiences.

The study's ontological stance was constructivist, acknowledging multiple, socially constructed realities of bullying experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Epistemologically, knowledge was viewed as subjectively constructed through social interactions and personal interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Axiologically, the research recognized the influence of both researcher and participant values in constructing meaning from narratives.

Narrative inquiry was chosen as the primary research approach, aligning with the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methodology. This approach emphasized understanding individual perspectives through detailed descriptions and explanations (Muzari et al., 2022; Kutsyuruba & Stasel, 2023). The research was conducted in a private school in the Kathmandu Valley. Four participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure rich, detailed narratives about bullying experiences (Lopez, 2023).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method. Open-ended questions were designed to facilitate reflective storytelling and capture the depth of participants' narratives (Milena et al., 2008; Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Data analysis involved careful transcription, including verbal and non-verbal cues. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and present patterns within the data (Knott et al., 2022). The interpretation process incorporated empathy, thematic analysis, and a sensible approach to capture essential features of narrative research (Dewi, 2021; Rademaker & Polush, 2021).

The study's credibility was enhanced by employing Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry approach: temporality, sociability, and spatiality. Member checking was also utilized to validate findings and respect the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry (Motulsky, 2021).

Ethical practices were prioritized throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their autonomy and understanding of the study (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; Arifin, 2018). Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and cultural sensitivity was observed. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines provided by Kathmandu University. This methodology aimed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced

exploration of school bullying perceptions and responses in Nepal, emphasizing the richness of individual experiences and the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry.

Results

This study employed qualitative narrative inquiry to explore teachers' and students' perceptions and responses to school bullying in Nepal. Four participants (two teachers and two students) were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. Two main themes emerged: "Awareness and Perception of Bullying" and "School Environment and Response to Bullying."

Teachers' Awareness and Perception

Teachers demonstrated varying levels of awareness and understanding of bullying. Teacher Juna provided a straightforward definition: "Bullying is dominating others, like speaking ill words, pushing, etc." She viewed bullying as more prevalent among older students (12 years and above) and recognized physical and verbal forms. However, her perspective on psychosocial impacts appeared limited.

In contrast, Teacher Pooja exhibited a more comprehensive understanding: "Bullying generally means one group mentally torturing, harassing, and causing pain to another, causing victims to feel anxious, inferior, and extremely stressed." She recognized both overt and subtle forms of bullying, including social exclusion.

Students' Awareness and Perception

Students also showed varying levels of awareness. Bhumika, who had experienced bullying, defined it as "dominating (Hepnu) others," but was less aware of specific forms. Binayak, however, stated, "I don't know about bullying," indicating a lack of awareness.

Both students shared personal experiences of bullying. Bhumika recounted social exclusion and verbal harassment by female classmates, while Binayak described physical bullying in earlier grades.

Impact of Bullying on Students

Students reported significant emotional and psychological impacts. Bhumika experienced severe distress: "At first my head started aching and spinning badly, I used to wonder why they were acting up to me. Due to that, I was about to leave my school." Binayak expressed feeling "Bad" when bullied.

School Environment and Response to Bullying

Teachers employed various intervention strategies, including:

1. One-on-one counseling with bullies and victims
2. Promoting empathy and perspective-taking
3. Positive reinforcement of bullied students in class
4. Creating a supportive classroom environment

Challenges in Stakeholder Collaboration

Teachers reported frustration with the lack of parental involvement and support from the school administration. Cultural attitudes, such as dismissing bullying as normal "boys'

behavior," hindered effective intervention. The school principal's endorsement of corporal punishment ("beat and teach") contradicted effective anti-bullying practices.

Students' Reporting and Response

Students' experiences in reporting bullying varied significantly. Bhumika felt comfortable approaching teachers, while Binayak feared punishment and avoided reporting incidents.

Peer Influence and Coping Mechanisms

Peer relationships played a significant role in both perpetuating and combating bullying. Bhumika's experience highlighted how influential peers can shape group dynamics and exclusionary behavior. Binayak's narrative demonstrated the adoption of aggressive coping mechanisms influenced by peer advice.

Discussion

The findings align with Social Learning Theory, demonstrating how bullying behaviors, perceptions, and interventions are shaped through observation, modeling, and social reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). The disparity in awareness and understanding among teachers and students reflects previous research highlighting divergences between experienced and recognized bullying (Connell et al., 2019; Reyes-Rodríguez et al., 2021).

The school environment's crucial role in shaping responses to bullying aligns with Farley's (2018) emphasis on teacher peers and school culture influence. The challenges in stakeholder collaboration underscore the need for comprehensive school-wide approaches to bullying prevention. Peer influence emerged as a powerful factor, consistent with Stankovic et al.'s (2022) findings on the correlation between bullying engagement and perceptions of teachers and peers. The contrasting experiences of students in reporting bullying incidents align with Waasdorp et al.'s (2011) research on the multi-layered nature of bullying climate. Cultural and social context, including caste discrimination, was found to influence bullying behaviors, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions. The observational data strongly supported the application of Social Learning Theory, demonstrating how the school environment significantly influenced students' behavior and social interactions through observational learning and modeling.

These findings underscore the complex interplay of factors influencing school bullying in Nepal and emphasize the need for comprehensive, culturally sensitive approaches to bullying prevention and intervention.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of teachers and students regarding school bullying in Nepal through in-depth interviews with two teachers and two students from the same school. The research aimed to answer two key questions: (1) What experiences do school teachers narrate about school bullying? and (2) How do school students experience school bullying?

Key Findings

1. Teachers' experiences and perceptions of school bullying varied significantly, ranging from straightforward understandings focused on overt behaviors to more comprehensive awareness including subtle forms like social exclusion.

2. Teachers employed various intervention strategies but faced significant challenges due to lack of support from school administration and parents. The principal's endorsement of corporal punishment contradicted effective anti-bullying practices, highlighting a disconnect between educational policies and actual practices.

3. Students' experiences and understanding of bullying varied, with some feeling comfortable reporting incidents while others lacked awareness or feared punishment for reporting.

4. Peer influence emerged as a powerful factor in both perpetuating and combating bullying. Students developed various coping mechanisms, from meditation to aggressive retaliation, influenced by their social environments.

5. The school climate significantly impacted students' willingness to report bullying, demonstrating the importance of a supportive environment.

Reflections

The research process uncovered several unexpected and thought-provoking findings. One of the most striking was the significant variability in participants' awareness and understanding of bullying within the same school, revealing stark gaps in education and training on this issue. Equally unsettling was the normalization of bullying behaviors, including the open endorsement of physical punishment by school authorities. These findings point to deep-rooted cultural and systemic issues that perpetuate such practices, making it clear that addressing bullying requires more than just targeting individual behaviors.

Another surprising discovery was the resilience demonstrated by some students, who had developed coping mechanisms such as meditation to navigate their challenging environments. This highlights the potential for fostering positive mental health strategies within schools. However, the lack of effective implementation of government policies, such as the suggestion box intervention strategy, underscores the complexity of translating policy into practice. These observations emphasize the urgent need for context-specific interventions that address not only individual and interpersonal dynamics but also the broader systemic and cultural factors that shape the school environment in Nepal.

Implications

Implications for School Leaders

School leaders play a pivotal role in creating an environment that prevents and addresses bullying effectively. Developing and implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies is essential to establish clear guidelines and expectations for behavior. Fostering a positive school climate where respect and inclusivity are prioritized can help mitigate the prevalence of bullying. Leaders should invest in professional development for staff to equip them with the skills and knowledge to recognize, prevent, and respond to bullying incidents. Additionally, engaging parents and the wider community in anti-bullying efforts is crucial to ensure a holistic

approach to the issue. Implementing culturally appropriate, evidence-based intervention programs tailored to the specific needs of the school community can further enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives. Finally, regular evaluation of anti-bullying programs will help assess their impact and identify areas for improvement.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers are at the frontline of identifying and addressing bullying behaviors in schools. It is essential for them to enhance their awareness of all forms of bullying, including subtle and indirect behaviors, to ensure no incident goes unnoticed. Developing effective, non-punitive intervention strategies can help address bullying while fostering a supportive and safe environment. Teachers should also create safe and accessible mechanisms for students to report bullying without fear of retaliation. Incorporating social-emotional learning into the curriculum can empower students with the skills to manage emotions, build empathy, and develop healthier relationships. Leveraging positive peer influence can further support anti-bullying efforts by encouraging students to stand against bullying behaviors collectively.

Implications for Students

Empowering students with the knowledge and skills to combat bullying is crucial for creating a safer school environment. Providing education on recognizing different forms of bullying and understanding its impacts can raise awareness among students and encourage proactive action. Offering resources and training on healthy coping strategies, such as resilience-building techniques, can help students manage the emotional toll of bullying. Encouraging students to report bullying incidents is vital for early intervention and ensuring accountability. Promoting positive peer relationships can foster a sense of community and reduce the likelihood of bullying behaviors. By building resilience among students, schools can equip them with the confidence and emotional strength to navigate challenges effectively.

Future Directions

This research highlights the need for:
1. Better implementation of existing anti-bullying policies in Nepal
2. A cultural shift in attitudes towards bullying
3. Further research to fully understand the dynamics of school bullying in Nepal
4. Incorporation of anti-bullying training into teacher education programs
5. Increased mental health support in schools

In conclusion, addressing school bullying in Nepal requires a multi-faceted approach involving education, policy implementation, and cultural shifts. This study contributes to the understanding of the complex dynamics of school bullying in the Nepalese context and provides a foundation for future research and intervention strategies.

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