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Peer Victimization and Its Psychological Correlates Among School Children

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Abstract

Bullying is usually taken to be a subset of aggressive behavior, characterized by repetition and an imbalance of power. The behavior is repetitive, that is a victim is targeted a number of times. Also, the victims cannot define themselves easily, for one or more reason: they may be outnumbered, be smaller or less physically strong, or be less psychologically resilient, than the person doing the bullying. The present study focused on the menace of bullying in the form of peer victimization and its psychological correlates (loneliness and depression) emphatically. The sample consisted of 200 school students, 100 (50 male and 50 female) from government schools and other 100 (50 male and 50 female) from private schools. The age range was 10 to 14 years and children were taken from some schools of Jammu region.

All the participants were selected using purposive sampling technique and the assessment tools were, The Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale (Mpv) developed and validated by Mynard and Joseph (2000), Loneliness and social Dissatisfaction Scale by Asher and Wheeler's (1985) and The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (Ces-Dc) developed by Weissman ,Orvaschel ,& Padian (1980). Mean, S.D, t-test and Correlation were used for statistical analysis. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between Government and Private school children in terms of total scores obtained on the peer victimization, loneliness and depression. As far as gender is concerned, no significant results were found on any of the scales or sub scales to be gender specific.

Keywords: Bullying, Peer victimization, School children.

Introduction

To succeed in school, children must perceive their environment as being safe, secure, and comfortable. Yet, for many children, bullying and teasing begins as soon as children first form peer groups. For some children, this is a time when patterns of victimizing and victimization become established. Consequently, the victims perceive school as a threatening place and experience adjustment difficulties, feelings of loneliness, and a desire to avoid school (Olweus ,1991).

Victims of bullying often experience anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, physical and psychosomatic complaints (Williams, Chambers & Logan, 1996). In fact, longitudinal studies suggest strongly that adults who had prolonged victimization in childhood can have long – term effects (Kaltiala – Heino, Rimpela&Marttunen, 1999).

Complimentary factors may increase the risk of being a victim for certain pupils. At an interpersonal level, the attitudes of the main peer groups in the school, as well as the nature and quality of friendships that a child has, are amongst the most important risk factors for victimization (Mishna, 2003).

The majority of victims can be described as passive. Risk factors that have been identified for victimization include peer rejection, finding social situations difficult, and experiencing loneliness (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). Victims may understandably have poor self-esteem, and a greater tendency towards depression and anxiety (Craig, 1998; Hawker and Boulton, 2000; Carney and Merrell, 2001).

Research suggests some victims may be more likely to have overprotective families (Smith, 2000) and to have experienced bullying from siblings (Duncan, 1999). Children with disabilities are also at increased risk of victimization (Mishna, 2003)

Friendships act as a protective factor having a number of meaningful friendships reduces the risk of victimization (Hodges & Perry,

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1999). Other protective factors include high social competence, low aggression and low anxiety (Goldbaum, Craig, Pepler et al., 2003). The impact of bullying in childhood can be long term. Some adult victims of childhood bullying report experiencing depression, poor self-esteem and interpersonal difficulties in adulthood (Hugh-Jones and Smith, 1999). They may also be more prone to suicidal thoughts, attempt suicide or carry out acts of retribution (Carney and Merrell, 2001). Peer victimization as an important aspect of school violence which makes the students to be fearful of school and inhibits their learning potentials. It is a serious problem for school age children and for which they receive limited adult help. Researchers have shown that violence is used in response to conflicts and it is common among adolescents (Coloroso, 2002). Violence in whatever form usually results in problems like student's protest or unrest.

Bullies and victims are both at risk for negative future outcomes. Kaiser and Rasminsky (2003) reported that as bullies go through adolescence they are more at risk for severe problems such as delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, and dropping out of school. In addition, both bullies and victims have been found to be more depressed than students who are not involved in bullying (Seals & Young, 2003). Depression associated with bullying and victimization can lead to academic problems, self-defeating behaviors, and interpersonal problems (Seals & Young, 2003). Roland, (2002) conducted a study that revealed both bullies and victims had significantly higher mean scores than neutral pupils on both depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts.

Victims had a significantly higher mean score on depressive thoughts than the bullies. On suicidal thoughts, the mean score for bullies was above that of the victims, but this difference was not significant. Research indicates that bullying has serious long-term negative effects on bullies, victims, and victims who turn to bullying as a coping strategy. Longitudinal relationships between childhood bullying and victimization and adult mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression were also outlined (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Finally, victims are particularly at risk if there is no emotional support provided or if the bullying behavior is severe and prolonged.

These victims are more likely to suffer from academic problems, absenteeism, loneliness, and loss of friends (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). Fleming & Jacobsen, (2010) examined that students who reported being bullied in the preceding months were more likely than non-bullied students to report feelings of sadness and hopelessness, loneliness, insomnia and suicidal ideation. A study was conducted by Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick in (2004) to assess the association between bullying behavior in a wide variety of psychosomatic health complaints and depression.

The results revealed that bully victims had significantly higher chances for depression and psychosomatic symptoms compared with children not involved in bullying behavior and conclude that being

bullied is strongly associated with a wide range of psychosomatic symptoms and depression. Loneliness is a common condition that whilst being experienced is neglected as a focus for research. Perceived by many as a problem experienced by the elderly, scant attention has been paid to the preponderance and several of this condition amongst other population groups, such as children (Pearl, 1992; Marglit & Ben Dov, 1995). Kochenderfer & Ladd, (1996) conducted a study that supported the hypothesis that victimization is a precursor of children's loneliness and school avoidance. Empirical research has shown that certain types of maladjustment (such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem) are positively associated with such peer relationship difficulties as submissiveness, social withdrawal, and un-popularity with peers. These peer relationship difficulties are themselves positively related to peer victimization (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Methodology

Variables

Independent Variables

1. Schools (Government and Private)
2. Gender (Male and Female)

Dependent Variables

1. Peer victimization
2. Loneliness
3. Depression

Objectives

1. To assess the levels of Peer Victimization, Loneliness and Depression among Government and Private School Students.
2. To assess the levels of Peer Victimization, Loneliness and Depression among male and female School Students.
3. To assess the interrelationship among Peer Victimization, Loneliness and Depression of School Students.

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference in the levels of Peer Victimization, Loneliness and depression between Government and Private school students.
2. There will be no significant difference in the levels of Peer Victimization, Loneliness and depression between male and female School Students.
3. There will be no significant difference in the interrelationship among the levels of Peer victimization, Loneliness and Depression of School Students.

Experimental Design

A 2x2 factorial design consisting of two independent variables (Type of schools and gender) and three dependent variables (Peer victimization, loneliness and depression) was used in the study.

Data collection

The present study consisted of 200 school students, 100 (50 male and 50 female) from government schools and other 100 (50 male and 50 female) from private schools. The age range was 10 to 14 years and children were taken from some schools of Jammu region.

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Tools

1. The Multidimensional Peer-Victimisation Scale (Mpv) developed and validated by (Mynard and Joseph ,2000). was used to collect data for the study. The scale is a 16-item self-report instrument consisting of items intended to find out the extent to which students were victimised by their peers. The items possess satisfactory internal reliability with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.85, 0.75, 0.77 and 0.73 for physical victimisation, verbal victimisation, social manipulation and attack on property subscales respectively.

2. Loneliness and social Dissatisfaction Scale:Children's feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction were assessed by using (Asher and

Wheeler's,1985).This questionnaire has been used in several studies with elementary school-age children's and has proved to have excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's >.90;see Asheretal.,1990).The internal reliability in the present sample was comparable ($\alpha=.91$).

3. The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (Ces-Dc) developed by (Weissman ,Orvaschel ,&Padian,1980). The cut off score of 15 as being suggestive of depressive symptoms in children and adolescents.

Results and Discussion

After the collection of data , scoring and statistical analysis was done to test theformulated hypotheses of the study. The results have been discussed below.

Table-1 Mean,S.D and Independent t-test comparing dimensions on peer victimization among (Govt. & Pvt.)

Variables/ Dimensions	Government/ Private	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Physical Victimization	Government	100	5.17	2.165	5.620	.000
	Private	100	3.53	1.956	5.620	.000
Verbal Victimization	Government	100	4.84	2.432	2.394	.018
	Private	100	4.02	2.412	2.394	.018
Social Manipulation	Government	100	4.86	2.225	4.608	.000
	Private	100	3.45	2.100	4.608	.000
Attack on Property	Government	100	4.93	2.430	5.984	.000
	Private	100	3.02	2.069	5.984	.000
Total	Government	100	19.80	7.745	5.708	.000
	Private	100	13.98	6.633	5.708	.000

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, t-values and p-values on the dimensions of Peer Victimization for the two groups (Government school children and private school children). Mean and standard deviation on the dimension of physical victimization for the Government school children are 5.17 and 2.165 and the mean and standard deviation on the same dimension for the Private school children are 3.53 and 1.956. The t-value was found to be (5.620). The p-value (.000) is lesser than .05 which indicates that the outcome is significant at 0.05 level. On the second dimension, verbal victimization, the t-value was found to be (2.394) and the p-value (.018)

which indicates that the outcome is non-significant at 0.05 levels.

On the dimension of social manipulation, the t-value was found to be 4.608, and the p-value .000 which again indicates that the outcome is significant at 0.05 level. On the last dimension, Attack on Property the t-value was found to be 5.984, indicating that the outcome is significant at 0.05 levels. On the full-scale, the mean and standard deviation for the Government school children are 19.80 and 7.745 and for the Private school children these values are 13.98 and 6.633. The t-value was found to be 5.708 which indicate a significant difference in the levels of peer victimization among Government and Private school children.

Table-2. Mean S.D and Independent t-test comparing dimensions on peer victimization across gender.

Variables		N	Mean	S. D.	t-value	p-value
Physical victimization	male	100	4.56	2.027	1.343	.181
	female	100	4.14	2.383	1.343	.181
Verbal victimization	male	100	4.65	2.222	1.272	.205
	female	100	4.21	2.653	1.272	.205
Social manipulation	male	100	4.17	2.261	.93	.926
	female	100	4.14	2.292	.93	.926

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Attacks on property	male	100	4.15	2.409	1.012	.313
	female	100	3.80	2.482	1.012	.313
Total	male	100	17.43	7.047	.984	.326
	female	100	16.35	8.416	.984	.326

Table-2 shows the mean, standard deviation, the t-values and the p-values of male and female participants on the dimensions of Peer Victimization. Mean and standard deviation of males on the dimension of physical victimization are 4.56 and 2.027 and the mean and standard deviation on the same dimension of the females are 4.14 and 2.383, t-value was found to be (1.343). The p-value (.181) which indicates that the outcome is non-significant at 0.05 levels. On the second dimension, verbal victimization, the t-value was found to be (1.272) and the p-value (.205) which indicates that the outcome is non-

significant at 0.05 levels. On the dimension of social manipulation, the t-value was found to be .93, and the p-value .926 which again indicates that the outcome is non-significant at 0.05 level. On the last dimension, Attack on Property the t-value was found to be 1.012, indicating that the value is non-significant at 0.05 levels. On the full-scale, the mean and standard deviation for the males are 17.43 and 7.047 and for the females these values are 16.35 and 8.416. The t-value was found to be .984 which indicates there is a non-significant difference in the levels of peer victimization across gender.

Table-3. Mean, S.D and Independent t-test comparing dimensions on Loneliness and depression (Govt. & Pvt.)

Government / Private		N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Loneliness	Government	100	23.58	7.890	5.918	.000
	Private	100	17.03	7.762	5.918	.000
Depression	Government	100	18.37	6.211	6.797	.000
	Private	100	12.90	5.118	6.797	.000

Table-3 shows the Mean, Standard deviation and the t-values on the Loneliness and Depression scale for the (Government school children and private school children). Mean and standard deviation on the Loneliness for the Government school children are 23.58 and 7.890 and for the Private school children are 17.03 and 7.762, the t-values 5.918 and the p-value

.000 indicates that the outcome is significant at 0.05 level. Mean and Standard deviation on the depression for Government school children was found to be 18.37 and 6.211 and for the Private school children was 12.90 and 5.118, the t-value was 6.797 and the p-value was .000 which is again indicating that the outcome is significant at 0.05 level.

Table 4. Mean S.D and Independent t-test comparing dimensions on Loneliness and depression across gender.

Variables		N	Mean	S.D	t-value	p-value
Loneliness	Male	100	20.14	7.859	-.275	.784
	Female	100	20.47	9.075	-.275	.784
Depression	Male	100	15.19	6.838	-.998	.319
	Female	100	16.08	5.720	-.998	.319

Table- 4 shows the Mean, Standard deviation and the t-values for the male and female participants on the Loneliness and Depression scale. Mean and standard deviation on the Loneliness for the males are 20.14 and 7.859 and for the females are 20.47 and 9.075, the t-values was found to be -.275 indicating that the outcome is non-significant at 0.05 level. Mean and standard deviation on the depression for the males are 15.19 and 6.838 and for the females are 16.08 and 5.720, the t-values was found to be -.998 and the p-value

.319 indicating that the outcome is non-significant.

Table-5. Interrelationship between Peer victimization, Loneliness and Depression

		Peer victimization	Loneliness	Depression
Peer victimization	Pearson Correlation	1	.378**	.363**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	200	200	200
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	.378**	1	.362**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	200	200	200

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Depression	Pearson Correlation	.363**	.362**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	200	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table-5 shows the output for correlation/ (interrelationship) between the Peer-victimization, Loneliness and Depression. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the three dimensions is $r = .378$ and $.363$, which indicates a positive, significant interrelations at 0.01 level.

Conclusion

Findings of the present study indicate that significant difference was found between Government and Private school children in terms of total scores obtained on the peer victimization, loneliness and depression. As far as gender is concerned, no significant results were found on any of the scales or sub scales to be gender specific.

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