



Students' Perceptions of Bullying at Schools: A Phenomenological Study of Students' Bullying Experiences in Their Schooling

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Abstract- Bullying is a widespread social phenomenon. It has been identified as a significant problem in today's schools. This study aims to examine students' perceptions and definitions about bullying as a witness, victim or bully. It was a phenomenological study of students' bullying experiences in their schooling. Through 40 in-depth interviews and using the thematic method for analysis, several themes were appeared, such as: definitions of bullying according to students' perspectives: the sub-themes were physical, verbal and emotional bullying, role of group, role of power, bullying as in fun, bullying leads to violence. Moreover, other major theme was appearances: weight and sizes. Appearances as a motive for bullying emerged as a theme that was specified by many of those interviewed. According to many participants, weight and size were the two important reasons to get bullied, Participants' definitions of bullying were from the angle of those who are bullied, bully, and who have witnessed bullying. In addition, theme that emerged within the data included: students view on preventions in events of bullying, methods to reduce bullying in school, where bullying takes place, this could help school administration to make strategies to reduce bullying according to the students needs. The findings of the study highlight the many factors which were used by students to bully other fellow students. So, these findings will help schools and other educational institutions to format and implement different strategies to avoid bullying in their schools and make their schools a better learning place for their students.

Keywords: phenomenological study, Bullying, Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Olweus (1993), an innovator in this area of research, explains bullying as instances 'when student become a subject, again and again, to negative activities by other students. Bullying also can be regarded as an issue of a more typically unsocial and rule-breaking behaviour sample (Olweus 1995). Bullies are, "often considered by impetuously and sturdy needs to rule other humans ... they have little sympathy...and they are expected to be physically more potent than...the sufferers" (Olweus 1995). Victims are often vigilant, delicate and quiet students, who suffer from low self-confidence. Handwerk (2005) additionally claims that victims lack the social competence that may help divert bullying, which includes how to use humour. When bullied, they normally response emotionally, shed tears, getting irritated, which only reassures more abuse. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) reveal that families play a big part in preparing their children to cope with bullying. Crothers and Kolbert (2008) explain that childhood bullying has an increasing amount of been identified as one of the common and widespread forms of school violence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The available literature on bullying does not take an exclusive look on the topic, it is rather seen conclusively as an offshoot of violence. Although being varied in nature and extent, these topics can be studied both exclusively and simultaneously. The terms "bullying" & "violence" are often talked about collectively in the literature review, the reason behind adjoining these terms is the fact that most scholarly articles assume that bullying and violence is connected and should be studied in conjunction because of their inter-relation.

There have been several events which affirm the direct relation of bullying with violence (Howell, 1997), for instance, in the examples of many school shootings where criminals were recognized as victims of

bullying (Aronson, 2000). The idea that being at the receiving end of bullying often leads to violent acts as a revenge mechanism is found abundantly in literature on bullying. (Howell, 1997).

The three major types of bullying are as follows: Physical (This includes physical acts such as property destruction, fights, aggressive pushing and pulling, manhandling etc.) Verbal (inclusive of teasing in an average manner, evil and merciless plotting, calling names, threatening.) and finally Psychological (consisting of inventing rumours that may or may not be true, misleading relationship status in social setting and making an individual isolated from social/academic groups etc. (Cohn and Canter, 2003; Koki, 1999).

Olweus, a researcher, and a scholar of psychology, studied the concept of bullying in the mid 1970's, his work highlighted the issue and emphasised on its importance, his contribution was well received in the academic circles and a need to address this issue in schools was accepted. The research he conducted led to a clear factual result that there existed an important underlying problem which needs to be addressed. Subsequently, he developed a model known as the Olweus Bullying Prevention application (OBPP), the implementation and following of this model in schools resulted in substantial decrease in bullying in schools. A prominent feature of this research was the introduction and awareness of bullying and how it works to academic and professional circles ultimately leading to further improvements by contributions made by the people who agreed with the research.

Objectives of the Study

- The general objective of this study is to examine the student's perceptions about bullying.
- To examine how students define the term bullying.
- To investigate the experiences of students regarding bullying.
- To analyse how students coped with the bullying experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that directed this study was:

- What perceptions do students have regarding bullying?
- How do students define the term "bullying"?
- What are the students' experiences about bullying?
- How do students cope with the bullying experiences?

The aim of this study was examining students' perceptions of bullying experienced in their schools and to examine how they handled with the experiences, even if they were the bully, victim, or witness (bystander) or they had experienced more than one character.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to notify teachers regarding bullying events and offer the understanding of how students perceive bullying. It can help teachers to minimize bullying events in school and help those students who are suffering from it. It helps teachers to make a good and secure atmosphere in schools for their students. This might upsurge attendance and expand educational accomplishment. To understand school bullying and its effects it is necessary to investigate students' perceptions regarding bullying, in addition with students' perceptions of school involvement in these incidences.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design of this study was the qualitative research method. The methodology includes investigation of the perceptions of students who had bullied, been bullied, or had witnessed others being bullied, as well as their definitions of bullying. This study was designed to get an understanding of the

perceptions of the students in the clarification of occurrences of bullying. The strategy of inquiry was used is phenomenological research.

Target Population

The population of this study consists of all the students from public and private secondary schools (girls and boys) in the Lahore city.

Sample Size

In this study, interviews were conducted from the schools. The sample consisted of 40 participants for interviews. The sample was selected by snowball sampling technique.

Research Instruments used in this study

The data collection instrument was used in this study, are in-depth interviews with secondary school students. The interviews provided the participants with a chance to speak more personally about bullying. This method allowed the participants to express freely about bullying as they experienced. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used.

Data Analysis

Most of the interviews were tape-recorded with the approval of the participants but few participants were not comfortable with the tape recording, so their interviews were recorded in written form. Then the tapes were transcribed precisely. A few notes were written by the researcher to help in precision and accurate transcript. The transcriptions were analysed using the thematic method.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the findings of the study the three major themes that emerged in the data were: (1) students' definitions of bullying, (2) the role of appearance in bullying, (3) students' view on prevention. In schooling, students are possibly face bullying in anyone of its types; they will be challenged by bullying as a victim, bully, or as witness at least once in a school. In this study, participants were defined the most common forms of bullying that is physical and verbal bullying. As it was already stated within the literature, that bullying is teasing, threatening, physical and verbal exploitation (Aronson, 2000). Whereas physical and verbal bullying were already existed in the literature, but the definition that emerged in this study was emotional bullying. This type of bullying is not directly present in the past literature. Physical or verbal bullying is easy to recognize for teachers and other adults that a student being bullied physically or verbally, but it is hard to point out this covered sort of bullying. Another exceptional factor of this study was that the definitions came out were the perceptive of a, bully, victim or witness. These definitions came from the participants who already have experience as a bully, victim or witness as well.

Bullying have an emotional component and it looks like obvious. But in this study, several of the participants take emotional bullying as a type of bullying rather than its component. A few of the participants discussed directly the specific events that they thought associated to emotional bullying.

Emotional bullying may be very hard to outline and cope with wisely to decrease its instance. In relational bullying it is very hard to obtain help, because school administration and teachers generally did not give it much consideration. They usually modulate the problem or blame the victim (Simmons, 2002).

The role of group in bullying is one more theme that appeared in the data. In the results, it is recommended that groups are influencing bullying, participants think that the more the number of groups of bully than it has more effect on the victim. In previous researches it has been discussed that groups are playing significant role in the bullying process (Greene, as referred to in Alvine, 1994; Sentse, Scholte, Salmivalli & Voeten, 2007). The number of the participants who discusses the role of groups in bullying, is little but they mention that this role of group was substantial in bullying activities.

In this study, some participants mentioned that bullying is one-on-one, means something that one individual does to other individual, while many stated that bullying mostly done in the form of groups and how they affect the other components in the events of bullying.

The result of this study proves that the perceptions of students as bully, victim and witness and their definitions regarding bullying must define bullying more clearly and all other components associated with it. If we want to stop bullying, we need to know those who involved. Additionally, the research also indicates that students were understand that bullying is not always a one-person act, but something that should be reinforced with the aid of a group's involvement or non-involvement. Also understand the role, groups play in the events of bullying might also help an individual to become capable of controlling the aspect of group in the events of bullying. Like as a few human's urge on the bully and some stand and saw without getting concerned, it should be expected that people should have the bravery and abilities to get concerned.

In this study, a few participants see bullying as in fun. According to them bullying is fun activity that amuses them. A few participants stated bullying as "all in good fun," this was a reason for a group's torturing another student. Also, more upsetting, previous research determined that 23% of the student said that they were "amused by bullying situations" (Sutton & Smith,1999).

Similarly, another theme that emerged in this study was the influence of appearances. Appearances matter a lot in bullying process. A person could become the target of bullying because of their appearances. More than a half participant mentioned size and weight as a reason to become a target. The appearance matter, precisely weight and size, emerged due to, there is insignificant literature present on weight and size and their connection to the bullying, and it is substantial to understand the variations in the appearance can affect the events of bullying.

In the theme appearances, two sub-theme that came out were weight and size and weight, it could become the reason to target that individual who looks different from others in school. Most possible features to become a target are overweight, bigger or smaller from others in school. If the student is different from another fellow student, he/she might get bullied. Many participants who experience as the bully, victim or witness mention that weight as an issue in who gets bullied. The individual who become the target of bullying because of their appearances were expected to face the verbal or emotional bullying. Most of these participants stated that verbal abuse is the common way to bully someone who is different. In this study, there was no indication on physical bullying of students who were obese. Most of the participant who experience bully because they were obese, usually face verbal or emotional bullying. Most of them receive verbal remarks from others due to their weights. It might additionally look obvious that if an individual was bullying another person or watching another individual bullying a person due to his or her weight, there should be a few forms of verbal remark made related to the weight of individual. In the literature, the studies that discusses weight as a reason to bully is restricted. It has proven in the results of previous researches that if a student is vulnerable, obese or just look different from rest of others, they are much possible to face bullying (Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). Appearance, particularly weight, may additionally play a big part in who become the target of bullying.

Another unique element of this research is that, this research also shows the point of view of students on prevention. A few participants said nothing can be done to stop bullying. Bullying is and will always present in schools. Some participants stated there should be stricter rules in school and a few participants stated teachers should be more aware of bullying activities. Some participants also said that it is necessary to train the students to deal with bullying. A little than few participants also stated that no one can help victims, victim should stand for themselves. It helps in understanding bullying and tackling bullying. Because these preventions were coming from the participants who might be the bully, victim or a witness. The student's point of view on prevention were restricted in the previous literature. In the literature, Olweus (1993) presents a prevention program that reduces the bullying in schools up to 50%. The main elements of this program were spread awareness in teachers and parents regarding bullying, implementing anti-bullying plans in schools and held seminars in the awareness of bullying. In the previous literature, Morrison & Skiba, (2001) stated in their study that in the United States, nearly 20 % school students were suspended once in a year. So, there were many anti-bullying programs were present like suspension and expulsion and zero tolerance policies, but in literature there were not a single research present who discusses the student's point of view on prevention. This current research may discover ways to show bravery and assistance in preventing the torture that others may often experience in their educational life.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study the result offers understandings of numerous elements of bullying and they also confirmed several elements of bullying which were already recognised. Like earlier researches, in this study the definition of bullying is consistent, the physical and verbal bullying described by participants are like definition described in previous researches, but something unique appeared in the definitions is the concept of emotional bullying and studied separately. Similarly, another theme that emerged in this study is the role of groups plays in bullying is unique with some of what has been discovered, whereas in bullying the new conclusions that recommend that groups are a most crucial factor. Overall appearance was one more theme that was discovered in the data. Even if it was someone's weight or size there was clear indication of appearance as an issue in lots of events of bullying that were mentioned by the participants. Further the theme that appeared was the student's views on prevention of bullying. This study could help schools and other educational institution to make better plans to reduce bullying in their schools. The findings of this study will help teachers to understand their students and to understand what things students consider as a bully. This can help teachers in maintaining their self-esteem and in class and verbal bullying should be prohibited in class. Teachers should prevent students from making fun of others who call other students names badly.

The curriculum is a vital component in supporting school students in enhancing their personality. By reading students the characters who are suffering from the same condition as they are and study regarding how those characters' handle the bullying conditions. One more component that can assist in reducing bullying is social justice. It is recommended that the social justice should be used in the school curriculum of students. By seeing the problems regarding strength, inequity, and unfairness, students will understand the effect of their moves, and other actions, that have an influence on the society and their surroundings

Teacher's training helps in understanding the specific components and shades of bullying. Teacher's training can offer teachers with successful plans for coping with bullying within the school room with the use of effective curriculum. It could additionally assist teachers to understand how they can train their students and how students can defend themselves when they challenged by the problem of bullying. With the help of teacher's training, teachers are already aware of the specific sorts of bullying outside of the typical types like physical and verbal bullying. There is one sort of bullying that is not common for several teachers is relational bullying, but it is a shape of bullying that affects the education of several students. Teachers can also become aware about the variations among the bullying, group bullying and one-on-one bullying.

In this study, various definitions of bullying were provided by participants. These definitions can help teachers and administration more insight into the life of students those are facing bullying and how students perceive bullying. Most important stage in problem solving is to define the problem well, and by aware of how school students are defining bullying, we are more prepared to understand activities of bullying and create responses to this problem.

At schools, students bully in all stages whether it is primary, elementary, and high schools, and even if it is a supremacy fight, the impact of friends or other group members, usually spreads with classes, but the question is when and how does it begin? In attempt to know bullying well, it will be useful to understand when it starts and how it begins? The aim of the present study was to investigate students' perceptions and definitions of bullying in their schooling, but the participants said that they experience bullying more in their primary school levels. At the same time, a few participants pointed out that appearances as a reason they have been bullied in elementary level, not anything revealed about being bullied due to size and weight in the elementary level. By determining when students begin to see appearances, after they begin to bully, and where they learn how to bully will offer understanding that might help in minimizing activities of bullying by initial precaution plans.

More studies should be conducted on how students define bullying at distinct level or time would offer teachers with a plan for doing something that could let them to customise their education, methods, and point of view associated with bullying in their classrooms. What may start to bully in a one level might not in some other level.

Research need to be performed assessing the usefulness of teacher's training associated with bullying. Teacher's training is important for every teacher's pursuing education, and a few teachers join teacher's training courses that emphasizes on bullying. In addition, studies required to assess the efficiency of

different schemes that cope with bullying or plans that deal with comprehensive problems in effort to making an environment where there is no space for bullying.

More possible researches need to be observed on the people who become the target of bullying in particularly. For Example, "who are the victims of bullying and why?" might help in classifying the victims. While, it would also be of immense worth to think about the impact of ethnicity in the bullying events. Meanwhile a theme emerged within this study recommend that some students stood up for themselves and for who become the target of bullying, it might be beneficial to understand the person how and why they stood up for themselves and for the other victims of bullying, hence these aspects may be required and helped other educationalists to discover methods to reproduce these aspects in students by selecting different curricula.

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