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A STUDY ON THE FREQUENCY OF BULLYING PERPETRATION AND VICTIMIZATION AMONG ELDER ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract:

This study examines the frequency and nature of bullying perpetration and victimization among older adolescents aged 16 to 18. Using the Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS) and the Adolescent Peer Relations (APR) scale, data was collected from 30 students through self-reported surveys. Results indicate that while bullying behaviors are not widespread in this age group, verbal bullying is the most common form when it does occur. Approximately 40% of respondents reported occasional experiences of teasing, particularly related to competence, though most did not feel significantly distressed. Bullying perpetration was generally infrequent, with verbal forms being more prevalent than physical or social ones. The findings also show a correlation between bullying involvement and experiences of interpersonal violence, supporting the co-occurrence hypothesis. These insights highlight the importance of context-specific anti-bullying interventions and the need for school-wide strategies that consider students' psychological and social environments.

Keywords:

Bullying, Adolescents, Violence, Teasing, Psychology, Intervention, Education

Introduction

Bullying is commonly defined as a pattern of aggressive interactions between two or more individuals, where one or more participants consistently use intimidation, hostility, or physical force to assert dominance (Fatah et al., 2022). It is the practice of physically or verbally abusing

another person to demonstrate superior strength, with the secondary intent of making the victim feel inferior and more submissive to the aggressor. Bullying involves repeated interactions targeting a single victim, with the aim of making them feel unsafe, isolated, and abandoned (Norshidah & Khalim, 2014).

The prevalence of bullying in today's classrooms is a global epidemic affecting students worldwide. Researchers, educators, parents, and students themselves all have a vested interest in addressing this issue. Bullying-related anxiety has led to an estimated 160,000 students missing school each day (Edwards, 2004).

To effectively combat bullying, it is crucial to understand that it is a multi-stage process. At each developmental milestone, the intensity of bullying escalates. Initially, students may stare or look at the victim oddly. As the behavior persists, the victim may face ongoing mockery and whispers. The third stage may involve verbal insults and name-calling. Eventually, physical force may be used, including pushing, tripping, or physical assault. Bullying often reduces the victim to a subjugated state, with the victim being treated as a punching bag for the aggressor's enjoyment. This process severely damages the victim's sense of identity and can leave long-lasting or even permanent emotional scars.

Khalim (2014) identifies two primary types of bullying: direct and indirect. Direct bullying involves physical assaults such as hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, pushing, or pinching, which threaten the victim's physical safety. Indirect bullying, on the other hand, includes actions like insults, teasing, and social exclusion, which can significantly affect the victim's mental and emotional well-being. The latter, often referred to as "mind games," is particularly prevalent in educational settings. Both forms of bullying can have harmful effects on a student's mental and social health (Norshidah & Khalim, 2014).

Adolescents' involvement in bullying can be attributed to various factors, including personality traits, peer influences, and home and school environments. Data indicates that bullying is more common among individuals who struggle with social adjustment. Furthermore, the likelihood of engaging in bullying behavior is often influenced by peers, family dynamics, school culture, and community factors (Sabramani et al., 2021).

The consequences of bullying are severe, contributing to an increase in suicides and violent behavior among adolescents. Between 5 and 15 percent of individuals globally have experienced bullying in the 21st century, with significant repercussions (AIP, 2011; Steward et al., 2015).

Literature Review
According to Currie et al. (2012), bullying is most prevalent during the middle school years but can occur as early as preschool. It is not confined to the classroom setting and can take place in various locations such as the school canteen, gym, on the school bus, or even on the internet. Bullying affects not only the victim but also those who witness bullying episodes, those who engage in bullying, and those who may be both victims and perpetrators of bullying. Identifying effective bullying prevention programs and policies is challenging due to the wide range of settings and individuals involved, making it unlikely that a one-size-fits-all solution exists. Common strategies for preventing bullying include behavioral interventions that promote

positive cultural norms and school policies outlining acceptable behavior (Preventing Bullying through Science, Policy, and Practice, 2016).

Graham-Bermann and Perkins (2010) argue that domestic violence has devastating effects on victims, their children, and families, necessitating the exposure and resolution of all forms of abuse. Exposure to domestic violence negatively impacts both the physical and emotional health of the affected individual. Interpersonal violence, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010) as physical, sexual, or psychological abuse by a current or former partner, also affects children and adolescents who witness such violence, often resulting in them becoming victims themselves.

The Problem Behavior Theory, proposed by Jessor (1991), suggests that young people's behavior is directly influenced by their experiences in the world. Risk and protective factors for physical violence and bullying perpetration emerge and are maintained at multiple levels of adolescents' social environments, including the individual, peer group, school, and broader community (Espelage, 2014). Internal variables, such as aspects of one's personality, are factors that cannot be easily influenced by external forces. Strong family cohesion is a key protective factor at the interpersonal level, while adverse childhood experiences, such as family violence, contribute significantly to the development of bullying behavior (Forster et al., 2017). Additionally, research has shown that perpetrators of bullying may have been victims themselves at a younger age (Borowsky et al., 2012). School climate and anti-bullying regulations also play a significant role in either discouraging or encouraging bullying behavior (Espelage et al., 2007).

The theory of intergenerational violence provides insight into how violent behaviors learned in the home can be transferred to future relationships. The cycle of intergenerational violence describes how violence perpetuates from one generation to the next. Numerous studies have found that children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors, including bullying at school, regression, controlling tendencies, and imitative behaviors (Marshall et al., 2022; Widom & Wilson, 2015). The abuse within families often has far-reaching effects, impacting subsequent generations.

The development of social identity plays a crucial role in bullying behavior. Domestic abuse can harm one's self-concept and have lasting effects on mental, emotional, and intellectual development. Factors such as group similarity, group norms, and intra-group standing are significant contributors to bullying behavior, especially among elementary school students. When children share similar perspectives, they are more likely to conform to group dynamics. To maintain membership in a group that values bullying, children may adopt negative attitudes as a way to fit in. Furthermore, youngsters in bullying groups tend to exhibit similar behaviors in terms of their participation in bullying (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009). Therefore, the social context in which bullying occurs must be carefully considered. According to social identity theory, peer groups significantly influence an individual's tendency to engage in bullying (Boulton, 1995).

Exposure to domestic violence and corporal punishment has a profound impact on adolescent well-being and risky behaviors. Studies show that witnessing domestic violence correlates with experiencing various forms of violence, including bullying. Adolescents exposed to violence are more likely to experience poor mental health, feel dissatisfied with their lives, and be bullied (Lepisto et al., 2010).

Interpersonal violence is closely linked with bullying victimization. Studies have found that adolescents who are victims of bullying are significantly more likely to experience interpersonal violence. This aligns with earlier research conducted in different locations (Peltzer et al., 2014). The data suggests that being a victim of bullying increases the likelihood of engaging in aggressive behavior as a form of self-defense or coping with conflict. The co-occurrence hypothesis of interpersonal violence posits that individuals who have experienced one form of violence are more likely to suffer from other types of violence (Hamby et al., 2017). This highlights the importance of identifying students who are frequently bullied by their peers or teachers, which could reduce the occurrence of violent incidents in schools. As such, anti-bullying interventions are essential in school settings (Hamby et al., 2017).

Peltzer and colleagues (2014) also found that current alcohol consumption is strongly correlated with interpersonal aggression, supporting findings from previous studies. Adolescents who drink alcohol at school are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing interpersonal violence compared to their sober peers. This is particularly concerning given that adolescents who engage in alcohol consumption are more likely to participate in delinquent activities, including fights or confrontations, often due to impaired judgment and decision-making abilities (Beyene et al., 2019). Underage drinking is associated with numerous negative outcomes, including increased aggression and violence toward others, and adversely affects adolescent health and development. Many studies have demonstrated that substance use, particularly alcohol and illegal drugs, contributes to risky behaviors both in schools and society at large (Edwards et al., 2019). To address this issue, monitoring and intervention programs, such as alcohol cessation therapy and counseling, should be implemented in schools.

Research indicates that being bullied is strongly linked to poor mental health outcomes, which may help explain the negative consequences experienced by victims. Le et al. (2019) found that among Vietnamese adolescents aged 11 to 16, there was a negative correlation between being bullied and maintaining a healthy mental state. Students with poor mental health were also more likely to be bullied than their peers with better mental health. Bayer et al. (2018) examined the effects of bullying on the mental health of Australian children aged 8 to 9 and found that children bullied more than once a week had worse mental health compared to those who were bullied less frequently. The study also indicated that having strong friendships served as a protective factor, reducing the impact of bullying on mental health.

Hysing et al. (2019) studied the relationship between bullying (whether as a victim or perpetrator), mental health, sleep disorders, and school performance among 16-19-year-olds from Norway (n = 10,200). They found that all three groups—bullies, victims, and those who were both bullies and victims—experienced poorer mental health, lower academic performance, and more difficulty falling or staying asleep. Victims of bullying reported more behavioral issues, while those who bullied others also reported higher levels of emotional problems. These findings highlight the significant impact bullying can have on adolescents' mental and emotional well-being.

Methodology
The participants in this study were selected using random purposive sampling. The aim of this research is to examine bullying behaviors among adolescents in their late teens. A total of 30 adolescents participated in the survey. The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 18 years (M = 17.1, SD = 0.66). The majority of participants were undergraduate university students.

Instruments

To achieve the objectives of this study, two instruments were used to assess bullying behaviors and their effects: the *Perception of Teasing Scale* (POTS) and the *Adolescent Peer Relations Scale* (APR). Both instruments were designed to evaluate the frequency and impact of bullying. The POTS was utilized to analyze the frequency of bullying victimization, while the APR was employed to measure the frequency of bullying perpetration.

The *Perception of Teasing Scale* (POTS) was developed by Thompson et al. (1995) and further validated by Hamburger et al. (2011). This scale is widely used in studies of weight-related and appearance-related teasing (López-Guimerà et al., 2012). Originally designed to measure weight-based and competency-based teasing (Jensen & Steele, 2010), we adapted some of the terminology to encompass a broader range of teasing behaviors, in line with the study's focus on various types of bullying.

The POTS comprises 11 items that measure the frequency of bullying victimization, followed by an item assessing the perceived distress caused by each instance of bullying (Jensen & Steele, 2010). Each response is recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, with frequency responses ranging from "1 – Never" to "5 – Very Often," and distress ratings ranging from "1 – Not Upset" to "5 – Very Upset."

Additionally, the *Adolescent Peer Relations* (APR) scale, developed by Parada in 2000, was used in this study. The APR includes 36 items, divided into two sections: Section A measures bullying perpetration, and Section B measures bullying victimization (Hamburger et al., 2011). Given that the POTS was already used to assess victimization, only Section A of the APR was employed to measure bullying perpetration.

The APR measures three forms of bullying: physical, verbal, and social (Finger et al., 2008), as defined by Hamburger et al. (2011). The instrument utilizes a 6-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "1 – Never" to "6 – Everyday." It is intended to assess bullying behaviors observed over a one-year period.

Findings

To meet our objectives, we simply used descriptive statistics to understand the frequency of bullying behavior. The data was collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

| Subscale	Average of Never	Average of Sometimes	Average of Occasionally	Average of Often	Average of Very Often
Appearance	39.34%	18.68%	38.00%	3.32%	0.66%
Competence	25.57%	25.02%	40.55%	7.23%	1.65%
Grand Total	31.83%	22.14%	39.39%	5.45%	1.20%

Table 1.0

In the first section of the study, data were collected on the frequency of teasing experiences across two subscales: appearance and competence. Table 1.0 illustrates the frequency of teasing for each subscale. The majority of respondents (nearly 40%) reported experiencing teasing "occasionally." Specifically, competence-based teasing had the highest frequency, with 40.5% of respondents indicating that they experienced it occasionally. In comparison, 38% of the sample reported experiencing appearance-based teasing occasionally.

Additionally, almost 32% of the participants reported never experiencing any form of teasing. Appearance-based teasing appeared to be less frequent among older teens, with less than 1% reporting such an experience. Only 1.2% of the total responses indicated experiencing teasing "very often," and most of this was related to competence-based teasing (1.65%).

Subscale	Average of Not Upset	Average of Occasionally Upset	Average of Somewhat Upset	Average of Fairly Upset	Average of Very Upset
Appearance	42.66%	34.00%	17.34%	6.00%	0.00%
Competence	37.20%	30.55%	17.77%	8.32%	6.12%
Grand Total	39.68%	32.12%	17.57%	7.26%	3.34%

Table 1.1

Table 1.1 presents the perceived distress experienced by respondents based on the subscale of teasing. Overall, approximately 40% of participants reported not feeling upset by the teasing incidents. In contrast, 32.12% of respondents indicated that they felt occasionally upset, 18% felt somewhat upset, about 7% felt fairly upset, and only about 3% of respondents reported feeling very upset by the teasing they experienced.
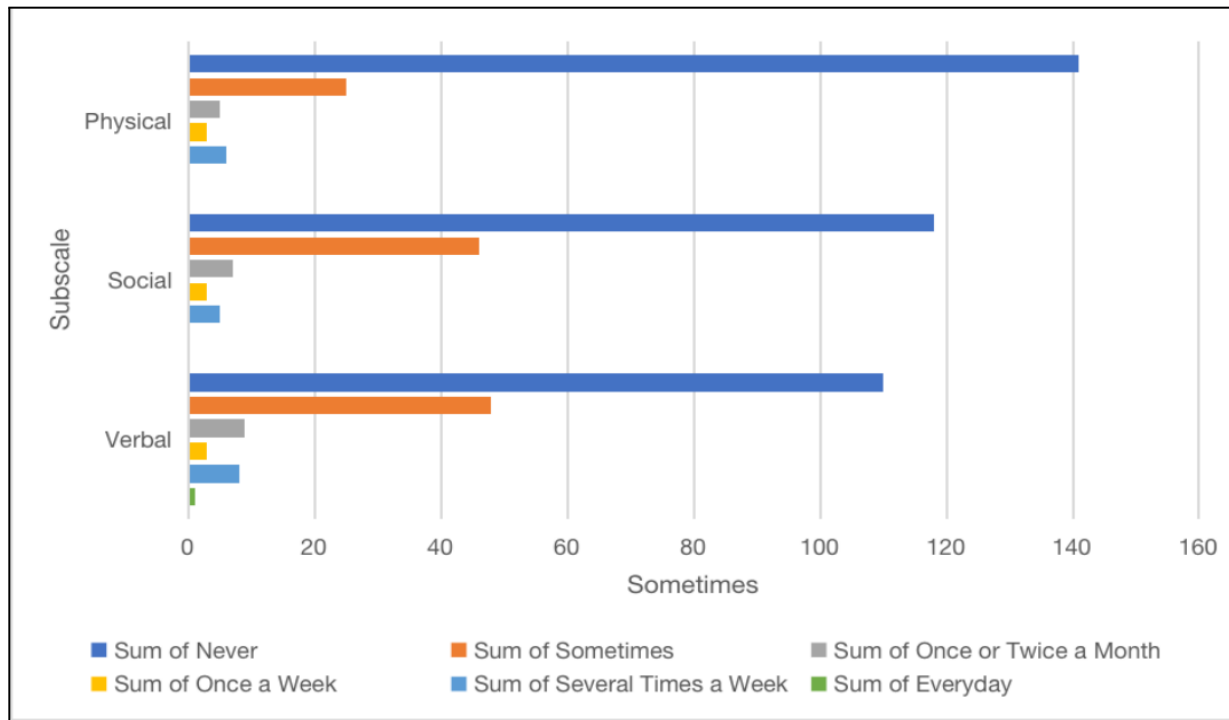
Graph 1.2

Graph 1.2 illustrates the frequency with which respondents perpetuated bullying. The instrument used to gather this data consisted of 18 items, divided into three subscales, with each subscale containing 6 items. Among the various forms of bullying, verbal bullying was the only type reported as occurring "every day." However, the majority of respondents indicated that they never engaged in bullying.

Verbal bullying was the most frequently perpetrated form, followed by social bullying, which occurred second most frequently. Physical bullying was reported as the least frequent form of bullying. In terms of the frequency of these behaviors, most instances of bullying perpetration were reported as occurring "sometimes."

Overall, the findings suggest that most adolescents in their late teens do not engage in frequent bullying. The majority of bullying perpetuation occurs occasionally, with verbal bullying being the most common type, though bullying is not a daily occurrence within this age group.

Discussion

The prevalence of bullying behavior in this study was relatively low compared to previous studies conducted both locally (Tuan, 2007; Yaakob et al., 2004; Yahaya et al., 2009) and internationally (Nansel et al., 2004; Kumpulainen et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2006). This discrepancy can be attributed to differences in the tools used, definitions of bullying, and environmental variables. Bullying behaviors may be perceived differently across various communities. In some cultures, bullying among peers is tolerated as part of growing up, while in others, it is regarded as invasive and inappropriate. Additionally, the bullies in this study were "exclusive" or "pure" bullies, meaning they were active perpetrators of bullying but had never been victims of bullying themselves.

Bullying behavior in adolescents with predominantly hyperactive symptoms is often described in terms of hyperactivity and impulsivity (Unnever & Cornell, 2003; Olweus, 1978). However, the presence of conduct issues, rather than hyperactivity or impulsivity alone, was found to be a major predictor of behavior problems (Perren et al., 2006).

Interestingly, internalizing behaviors were found to be a protective factor against bullying in this study. Adolescents who internalized their feelings and were introverted, as well as those experiencing somatic issues, may be less likely to engage in violent behaviors like bullying. Such adolescents often experience anxiety, which makes it more difficult for them to engage in bullying behavior (Jansen, 2011), thus insulating them from participation in bullying.

This study also revealed a significant association between bullying behavior and interpersonal violence among in-school adolescents. Adolescents who were victims of bullying were more likely to be involved in interpersonal violence. This finding is consistent with earlier research (Cecen-Celik & Keith, 2019; Peltzer & Pengpid, 2014; Pickett et al., 2013) and supports the co-occurrence hypothesis of interpersonal violence, which posits that individuals who have experienced at least one form of violence are more likely to experience interpersonal violence (Hamby et al., 2012). Identifying adolescents who are frequently bullied may help reduce incidents of violence in schools. Consequently, implementing anti-bullying programs is critical in school environments.

Parental guidance, as well as the absence of peer victimization and emotional and mental stress, can be beneficial for adolescents, as described by Randall et al. (2014). Inadequate parenting can lead to bodily and emotional stress, and can hinder social and cognitive development (Waldvogel et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2003). These findings further underscore the significance of intimate relationships and social networks in the development of violent behavior. The ecological theory of interpersonal violence suggests that the social capital individuals accumulate through their relationships can act as a buffer against violent behavior (WHO, 2021). Preventive interventions aimed at reducing interpersonal violence can help young people form positive peer relationships. Additionally, school administrators can help increase students' feelings of acceptance and belonging by implementing measures such as social support networks through oversight and monitoring.

In this study, a connection was observed between older age and lower instances of interpersonal violence among adolescents. Students aged 17 to 18 were less likely to experience interpersonal violence than younger students. The most plausible explanation for this finding is that older adolescents (17 years and older) have developed better self-control regarding their aggressiveness, and are less inclined to resort to physical violence in response to conflicts. These older adolescents are more likely to use problem-solving skills rather than physical aggression to resolve conflicts (Muula et al., 2007). This observation aligns with previous studies under various conditions (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2020; Peltzer & Pengpid, 2019). The ecological model of interpersonal violence suggests that age is an important socio-demographic determinant in victimization, and our findings support this view (WHO, 2021). Addressing bullying perpetration remains a crucial objective in violence prevention programs for adolescents in school settings.

In many reported cases, victims of bullying suffered significant injuries that could have long-term consequences. Harmful interactions between bullies and their victims often continue unabated, sometimes even resulting in fatalities. In Malaysia, media reports on bullying often rely on police complaints, court cases, or viral videos rather than scholarly research (Vanar, 2017; Chua, 2018; BERNAMA, 2019; Mohamed, 2019).

It is clear that the phenomenon of bullying is complex, time-consuming, and difficult to resolve. It requires committed efforts from multiple stakeholders, including government agencies such as the Social Welfare Department, the Royal Malaysia Police, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education. Ongoing efforts, as well as collaboration with adolescents in documenting their experiences, are essential for interventions aimed at reducing bullying among this age group. The knowledge gathered from bullies and their victims is vital to improving intervention outcomes.

Verbal bullying emerged as the most commonly perpetrated form of bullying. While it may not seem to have immediate or physical effects, it should not be overlooked as it can have a profound impact on the victim's emotional and psychological well-being. Victims of verbal bullying may develop a fear of attending school and, over time, may become resentful and engage in bullying behavior themselves (Norshidah & Khalim, 2014).

Conclusion

Bullying is an issue that requires a coordinated response from parents, teachers, and supported by the State Education Department and the Ministry of Education. All parties involved must collaborate effectively and professionally, setting aside emotions to ensure the process is not disrupted. It is essential that these stakeholders work together to address bullying, as schools, as educational institutions, should not condone violent and cruel behavior. Instead, they must focus on providing training that fosters the development of adolescents who can contribute positively to society, religion, and the nation.

To better understand bullying in schools, students participated in a survey that explored various forms of bullying and the impact on vulnerable students. An effective, all-encompassing strategy to combat bullying in Malaysian schools cannot be fully realized unless both students and faculty are aware of the issue. Early efforts to foster societal understanding can be significantly supported by conveying the experiences and emotions of adolescents who are victims of bullying.

In summary, adolescents who engage in bullying behavior require immediate intervention. School bullying is a serious issue among Malaysian adolescents, and identifying the factors related to bullying, particularly those unique to the local community, is crucial in developing effective solutions. A comprehensive social protection mechanism that includes family, school, and community should be established, with appropriate policy attention and practical interventions directed at addressing adolescent bullying

Acknowledgement

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