

Bullying Among Adolescents: Levels of Victimization and Impact Assessment

Rupa Shrestha¹, Kalpana Paudel Aryal PhD², Ratna Shila Bastola, PhD³, Durga Laxmi Shrestha⁴, Ishwori KC⁵

^{1,3}Pokhara Nursing Campus, Tribhuvan University, Institute of Medicine, Pokhara, Nepal

²Birgunj Nursing Campus, Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University, Birgunj, Nepal

^{4,5}Bheri Hospital Nepalgunj, Bank, Nepal

Correspondence: Dr. Kalpana Paudel Aryal, Birgunj Nursing Campus, Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan, University, Birjung, Nepal

Email: kalpana1.paudel@ponc.tu.edu.np

Mobile No: 9841582485

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Peer bullying is the prevailing problem among school going students leading to physical, mental and social impact. The study aimed to assess the level of bullying and victimization and its associated factors among adolescents.

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 242 adolescent students of grade 8 and 9 in two randomly selected schools of Madhyapur Municipality of Bhaktapur district, Nepal. Data was collected using self-administered structured questionnaire through complete enumeration method. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage and mean) and inferential statistics (chi-square test and Pearson's correlation test).

Results: The findings of the study revealed that 82.2% of the adolescents were involved in mild bullying and 1.7% was involved in moderate bullying. Also, 85.1% of the respondents were victim of mild bullying, 4.5% were victim of moderate and 2.1% were victim of severe bullying. There was significant association of level of bullying with school grade and bullying victimization was significantly associated with academic performance of the respondents. Moreover, there was weak positive correlation between bullying and victimization ($r = 0.189, p = 0.003$).

Conclusions: The findings revealed that victimization increases when bullying increases among adolescents. Hence, bullying should be reduced so as to reduce victimization. School authorities should focus on no bullying counseling classes to students. Further concerned authorities should also formulate rules regarding bullying for better school environment and peer relationship.

Keywords: *Bullying, Victimization, Adolescents, School children*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying among adolescents has emerged as a significant public health concern, characterized by repeated aggressive behavior that entails an imbalance of power¹. In Nepal, where cultural, social, and educational dynamics interplay, the problem of bullying among school-aged children is prevalent and warrants urgent attention. Numerous studies have documented the negative consequences of bullying, which can manifest in both physical and psychological forms, leading to dire implications for victims' mental health, academic performance, and social relationships².

Scholarly research indicates that bullying in Nepalese schools is alarmingly common, with many adolescents reporting experiences of victimization. In Nepal a report highlighted that a substantial percentage of students

experienced bullying, both in its traditional form—such as physical and verbal abuse—and in contemporary manifestations, including cyberbullying³. Bullying behavior not only affects the victim but also the broader school environment, perpetuating a culture of fear and anxiety that undermines the educational experience⁴.

Several factors contribute to the prevalence of bullying among adolescents. Familial influences, including authoritarian parenting styles and domestic violence, exacerbate aggressive behaviors among youth⁵. Social interactions among peers also play a critical role. Adolescents often engage in bullying to establish dominance or conformity within peer groups, which can lead to a cycle of victimization and aggression⁶. Furthermore, the role of educational institutions is crucial; many schools in Nepal lack effective anti-

bullying policies and programs, which hinders the identification and intervention of bullying incidents⁸.

The effects of bullying are profound and can lead to long-term psychological damage. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can persist into adulthood^{7, 8}. Additionally, the academic performance of bullied students often declines due to absenteeism and disengagement from school activities. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the levels of bullying and its effects on adolescents in Nepal is essential for effective intervention and prevention strategies.

Despite the growing recognition of bullying as a critical issue, empirical research specifically addressing the bullying and impact of bullying among Nepalese adolescents remains sparse. This study aims to assess the levels of bullying and victimization among adolescents in Nepal and explore the multifaceted factors associated with these behaviors. By identifying the extent of bullying in schools and its impact on affected students, this research will contribute to the development of targeted interventions to foster a safer educational environment.

METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among adolescent students of two schools of Bhaktapur district, i.e., Adarsha Higher Secondary School and Ganesh Madhyamic Biddhalaya. A total of 242 students of grade eight and nine were participants in the study with inclusion criteria of those students who could bring consent from parents and who agree to participate and present during data collection days. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part-I consisted of demographic data such as age, sex, grade, ethnicity, academic performance (previous year), father's occupation, mother's occupation, parental relationship, residence (staying with whom) and socio-economic status. Part II consisted of questions related to peer bullying and victimization which was assessed through standard tool i.e., Adolescent Peer Relation Instrument (APRI) developed by Roberto Parada⁹. Before data collection, the permission was taken to use tool for research. It consisted of 36 questions and six sub scales assessing for frequency for physical, verbal and social bullying as both bully and victim. It has two parts, part A consisted of 18 questions for bully and part B consisted of 18 questions for victim. All questions were scored through 6 -points Likert scale as follows: (1= Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Once or twice a month, 4=Once a week, 5=Several times a week, 6=Everyday).

Bully scoring was range between 18 to 108. Score 18 or below was no bullying, for mild bullying the score was 19-40. For moderate bullying, score was 41-60 whereas for severe bullying, bullying score was 61 and above. The tool has physical, social and verbal domains. Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 10 and 14 were for verbal bullying. Items 4, 8, 11, 13, 17 and 18 were for social bullying. Items 2, 6, 9, 12, 15 and 16 were for physical bullying. Part B had Victimization Scoring ranges between 18 to 108. For no victimization score 18 or below was given. Similarly for mild victimization, victimization score was 19-40. For moderate victimization, score was 41-60 whereas for severe victimization, bullying score was 61 and above. It also has physical, social and verbal domains. Items 1, 4, 7, 11, 13 and 18 were for verbal victimization. Items 3, 6, 9, 12, 14 and 17 were for social victimization. Items 2, 5, 8, 10, 15 and 16 were for severe victimization. In Nepal, APRI tool was used in Dharan¹⁰ to assess the prevalence of bullying. So this tool was valid in case of Nepal too. Cronbach's alpha is 0.95 for total bully and 0.94 for total victim score; and the subscale score=0.82-0.89.

Data was collected after getting formal administrative approval from the research committee of TU, IOM, Pokhara Nursing Campus. Formal permission was taken from Adarsha Ma.Vi. and Ganesh Ma.Vi. Informed consent was obtained from guardian of each respondent and assent from the respondents was also obtained before data collection. Consent form was sent to their home and asked respondents to take informed consent from respondents' guardian. The respondents were also explained that they had the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time when they feel uneasy to answer. Primary investigator collected the data in their respective classrooms and it took 20-30 minutes for each respondents to complete the questionnaire. Researcher remained within the setting of data collection until the respondents completed the questionnaire of the study. The questionnaire was collected immediately after completion of the questionnaire by the researcher herself. The duration of data collection was two weeks from 2022/09/20 to 2022/09/30. Anonymity was maintained by using code number instead of name. Confidentiality was maintained by not disclosing the information with others and respondents was made clear that collected data was used only for the research purpose.

The collected data was analysed and interpreted according to the objectives of the study. All the data was overviewed, checked and verified for its completeness, consistency, utility and accuracy. Any error, incompleteness and inconsistency were removed. Data was analysed by using statistical package for social

sciences (SPSS) version 16. The descriptive statistics which is interpreted in terms of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation was used. To examine the association of bully and victimization with selected background variables was done using the chi-square test at <0.05 level of significance and Pearson correlation test was used to assess the relation between bully and victimization.

RESULTS

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents n = 242

Variables	Number	Percent
Age group (in years)		
<14	46	19.0
14-15	148	61.2
>15	48	19.8
Mean Age \pmSD(14.55\pm1.14)		
Gender		
Female	139	57.4
Male	103	42.6
Grade		
Eight	104	43.0
Nine	138	57.0
Ethnicity		
Janajati	135	55.8
Chhetri	61	25.2
Brahmin	22	9.1
Dalit	12	5.0
	12	5.0
Madhesi		
Living with		
Both parents	180	74.4
Single parent	37	15.3
Relatives	24	9.9
Other (friend in room)	1	0.4
Academic Performance		
A+	10	4.1
A	29	12.0
B+	66	27.3
B	72	29.8
C+	51	21.1
C	12	5.0
Below C	2	0.8
Monthly Income		
Enough	180	74.4
Less than enough	56	23.1
More than enough	6	2.5

More than half (57.4%) of the respondents are females, majority (61.2%) of respondents are within age 14-15. More than half (55.8%) belongs to janajati ethnicity.

More than half (74.4%) of the respondents were living with both parents. More than quarter of respondents had of academic grade B. Majority (74.4%) of respondents have enough family income. (Table 1)

Table 2 depicts majority (76%) of the repondents was involved in verbal bullying, 58.7% were involved in physical bullying and 31% were involved in social bullying. Majorities (81.4%) of the respondents were victim of verbal victimization, 73.6% faced physical victimization and 68.6% faced social victimization.

Table 2. Domain wise distribution of bullying and victimization among respondents n=242

Domain	Not Experienced	Experienced
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Verbal bully	58 (24.0)	184 (76.0)
Physical bully	100 (41.3)	142 (58.7)
Social bully	167 (69.0)	75 (31.0)
Verbal	45 (18.6)	197 (81.4)
Victimization		
Physical	64 (26.4)	178 (73.6)
Victimization		
Social	76 (31.4)	166 (68.6)
Victimization		

Table 3 depicts that majority of the respondents (82.2%) were involved in mild form of bullying, 16.1% weren't involved in any bullying and 1.7% of the respondents were doing moderate bullying. Majority of the respondents (85.1%) were victim of mild form of bullying, 8.3% weren't being victim of any bullying and 4.5% of respondents were victim of moderate bullying and 2.1% were victim of severe bullying.

Table 3. Bullying and victimization level of the respondents n = 242

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Bullying		
No	39	16.1
Mild	199	82.2
Moderate	4	1.7
Victimization		
No	20	8.3
Mild	206	85.1
Moderate	11	4.5
Severe	5	2.1%

Table 4 depicts that there was statistically significant association between grade of the respondents and bullying level (≤ 0.05).

Table 4. Association between bullying level and selected variable among the respondents

n = 242

Variables	Level of bullying		χ^2	P- value
	No (%)	Bullying (%)		
Age group (in years)				
≤14	19(16.10)	99(83.9)	0	0.99
≥15	20(16.1)	104 (83.9)		
Gender				
Male	19(18.4)	84(81.6)	0.72	0.39
Female	20(14.4)	119(85.6)		
Grade				
Eight	25(24)	79(76)	8.46	0.004*
Nine	14(10.1)	124(89.9)		
Ethnicity				
Janajati	18(13.3)	117(86.7)	1.74	0.18
Others (Brahmin,Chhetri,Dalit,Madhesi)	21(19.6)	86(80.4)		
Family income				
Not Enough	5(8.9)	51(91.1)	2.78	0.09
Enough	34(18.3)	152(81.7)		
Living with				
Both parents	31(17.2)	149(82.8)	0.63	0.42
Others(single parent,relative)	8(12.9)	54(87.1)		
Academic performance				
A+ to B	27(15.3)	150(84.7)	0.36	0.54
Below C+	12(18.5)	53(81.5)		

Table 5. Association between victimization level and selected variable among the respondents

n = 242

Variables	Level of victimization		χ^2	P- value
	No (%)	victimization (%)		
Age group (in years)				
≤14	8(6.8)	110(93.2)	0.67	0.41
≥15	12(9.7)	112(90.3)		
Gender				
Male	11(10.7)	92(89.3)	1.38	0.24
Female	9(6.5)	130(93.5)		
Grade				
Eight	10(9.6)	128(92.8)	0.44	0.51
Nine	10(7.2)	222(91.7)		
Ethnicity				
Janajati	10(7.4)	125(92.6)	0.29	0.59
Others (Brahmin, Chhetri, Dalit, Madhesi)	10(9.3)	97(90.7)		
Family income				
Not Enough	2(3.6)	54(96.4)	2.12	0.17#
Enough	18(9.7)	168(90.3)		
Living with				
Both parents	16(8.9)	164(91.1)	0.36	0.78#
Others(single parent,relative)	4(6.5)	58(93.5)		
Academic performance				
A+ to B	11(6.2)	166(93.8)	3.65	0.05*
Below C+	9(13.8)	56(86.2)		

* Pearson's Chi square test, # Fisher's exact test

Table 6. Correlation of bullying and victimization among respondents n = 242

Characteristics	Mean	Pearson's Correlation coefficient	P-value
Bullying among adolescent students	22.39±5.12	0.189	0.003 *
Victimization among adolescent students	26.42±10.07		

Table 5 depicts that there is significant association between victimization and academic performance of the respondents (≤ 0.05).

Table 6 depicts that there is positive correlation between bullying and victimization which is statistically significant (< 0.05).

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted on 242 students to access the level of bullying and level of victimization and revealed that majority (82.2%) had involved in mild form of bullying in the study which is very similar to study conducted in Dharan (84.8%)¹⁰. Also in the study majority (85.1%) suffered mild form of victimization which was further similar to same research in Dharan, 82.3%¹⁰. Furthermore, the present study showed that both verbal bullying and victimization were common form of bullying and victimization which is again supported by the past study¹⁰. Also, study conducted in Kerala among 764 students of grade 7, 8 and 9 among four public schools showed verbal bullying as common bullying over other form of bullying¹¹. A study in Kathmandu favors that verbal bully was the commonest (75.8%) type of bullying¹².

There was significant association of bullying with grade of respondents which is in line with the study of Dharan¹⁰. Unlikely there was no any significant association with other selected variables in present study. There was significant association of victimization with academic performance of the respondents. However, there was no any significant association of victimization with other selected variables in the present study. But the study in Dharan had shown significant association of bullying with age, gender, family monthly income and academic performance of the respondents¹⁰. Also, there was

significant association of victimization with grade of the respondents. The study conducted in Kathmandu among 524 students among four public and four private schools among students of grade eight and ten revealed that there was no association of age with any form of bullying and victimization which supported the present study⁸. The present study showed positive correlation between bullying and victimization ($p < 0.003$) which supported by the study of Dharan¹⁰. Hence, the study concluded that majority of the respondents had involved in mild bullying and there is significant association between bullying level and grade. Also there is significant association between victimization level and academic performance. There is significant positive correlation between bullying and victimization. Thus, if there is increase in bullying there is increase in victimization too. So, bullying should be reduced to reduce victimization.

CONCLUSIONS

The study suggests victimization can be reduced by minimizing bullying. The school authorities should conduct no bullying counselling classes to adolescents. Further concerned authorities can formulate rules regarding bullying. Government can emphasize no bullying project through the active mobilization of school health nurses.

IMPLICATION FOR SCHOOL HEALTH POLICY, PRACTICE AND EQUITY

The findings of the study provide baseline information for future researcher and can be used for further study. Also, the findings are beneficial to school administrations, teachers and health personnel in formulation of rules regarding bullying. The study provides foundation for health care provider and school health nurse to provide need based care and counselling for students suffering bullying and helps to conduct no bullying program.

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL STATEMENT

Human subjects are not harmed physically, mentally and socially. Data was collected after getting formal administrative approval from the research committee of TU, IOM, Pokhara Nursing Campus. Formal permission was taken from Adarsha Ma.Vi and Ganesh Ma.Vi. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent and guardian before data collection. Researcher herself explained objectives as well as instructions about questionnaire of the study to the respondents a day before data collection within 20-30 minutes.

Consent form was sent to their home and asked respondents to take informed consent from respondents'

guardian. The respondents were also explained that they had the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time when they feel uneasy to answer. Anonymity was maintained by using code number instead of name. Confidentiality was maintained by not disclosing the information with others and respondents was made clear that collected data was used only for the research purpose.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There is no any conflict of interest for this paper.

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