Bullying in Schools: Attitudes of Children, Teachers and Parents

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Abstract

The present study investigated attitudes of children, parents, and teachers towards bullying. 100 children (50 male; 50 female), 100 parents (59 fathers; 41 mothers) and 100 teachers (43 male; 57 female) responded on questionnaire i.e., Parental Attitudes to Bullying Scale and the Children’s Attitudes to Bullying Scale. Findings depicted that children were largely sympathetic towards victims; most of the parents were found to be largely sympathetic towards victims, supportive of intervention, but less understanding towards bullies; whereas teachers showed best understanding of all three dimensions. There was little association between parental and children’s attitudes, although there was significant association between teachers’ and parents attitudes on victim and bullies subscales. Gender-wise significant differences were also found on some subscales. Mothers were more sympathetic than fathers towards victims, but there were no gender differences among sample of children and teachers.

Keywords: School bullying, Attitudes towards bullying, Bullying at school, Pakistani Schools

1. Introduction

School bullying has become a major topic of interest all over the world from last few decades. Bullying among children is understood as repeated, negative acts committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts may be physical or verbal in nature -- for example, hitting or kicking, teasing or taunting -- or they may involve indirect actions such as manipulating friendships or purposely excluding other children from activities (Olweus, 2001). Implicit in this definition is an imbalance in real or perceived power between the bully and victim. Despite the dearth of literature on this issue in western countries, little has been explored in Pakistan in this area. Very few studies have been conducted to see the understanding of school bullying and some correlates (e.g., Hanif & Smith, 2010). Besides the prevalence of bullying and devastating effects of bullying, attitudes towards bullying has significant role to understand this problem. Present study may be first in nature that investigated differential attitudes towards bullying. The comparison of children, teachers and parents attitudes towards bullying may help to design an effective intervention plan to monitor school bullying.

2. Literature Review

Empirical studies has established that school bullying is widely spread area of interest in researchers due to its extent and negative psychological effects and academic performances of children. Children are harassed mostly by their peers at school due to an imbalance of power and harassment (which can be direct or indirect, physical or verbal) happens repeatedly (Salmivalli et al., 1996).
Commonly, children in schools may suffer persistent teasing or name-calling, physical violence, threats of violence, theft or damage to property, social exclusion, or the spreading of malicious rumors. Both boys and girls are as likely to be bullied, although boys suffer more often direct bullying, such as violence or verbal abuse, while girls experience more often indirect bullying, such as social exclusion or malicious rumors (Rivers & Smith 1994). Boys are more likely to admit to being bullies: few girls do. Most victims do tell somebody about being bullied, but they are more likely to tell someone at home than a teacher. It has also been reported that bullying not only causes considerable negative effects to individual children but also has a damaging effect on school atmosphere (Olweus, 1993, 1994). Research on school bullying (Stephenson & Smith, 1989; Slee & Rigby, 1993; Smith et al., 1993; Boulton & Smith, 1994; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Austin & Joseph, 1996) has explored three groups of children involved in bullying situations: the bullies, the victims, and those who bully others and are bullied themselves (the bully/victims); recently, the emphasis has been given to intervention programs to prevent bullying. So when attitudes towards bullying are measured three aspects are significant i.e., bully, victim and interventions.

It has been observed that mostly intervention programs to prevent bullying aimed to encourage children and bystanders to report incidents, then peer pressure must be mobilized against the bullies. Children must become more sympathetic towards the plight of victims, less tolerant of bullying behavior and more supportive of staff intervention. However, little is actually known about children’s attitudes towards these issues. In other words, bullying behavior is often tolerated (or even encouraged), This might lead us to expect strong peer group approval of bullies, and a lack of sympathy for victims (especially those who dare to complain about it). Rigby and Slee (1993) developed a measure to see the children’s attitudes towards bullying, afterward, Eslea and Smith (1994; 2000) worked on parental attitudes and children towards bullying. These studies provide some information regarding one’s attitudes towards bullying. As mentioned earlier, less has been done in Pakistan with this reference. So present study has explored not only the attitudes towards bullying but also provide a comparison of attitudes of children, their parents and teachers with this assumption that all three parties show different attitudes towards three dimensions of attitudes scale i.e., towards bully, victim and intervention. Further, present study has also explored gender-wise differences with this rationale that in Pakistan gender wise stereotypical attitudes are prevalent.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

A total sample of 300 consisted of 100 children, 100 teachers and 100 parents were selected from Islamabad. The sample of children (50 boys; 50 girls), Teachers (43 male and 57 female) was selected from Federal secondary schools and parents (59 fathers and 41 mothers) were approached through school teachers. The age range of children was 13 years to 16 years ( \( M = 14.21; SD = 2.31 \) ), teachers was 26 years to 48 years ( \( M = 36.27; SD = 6.54 \) ) and that of parents was 31 years to 48 years ( \( M = 39.01; SD = 5.89 \) ). Only those individuals were selected who volunteered to participate.

3.2. Measures

Children’s Attitude to Bullying Scale: The Children’s Attitude to Bullying Scale (CAB) (Eslea & Smith, 2000) is comprised of 15 items with three subscales: attitudes towards victim, Bully, and intervention, scored on 5 point rating scale: strongly disagree to strongly agree, responses were scored as 5 points for the most sympathetic and 1 for the least giving a possible range of 15-75 for the scale. The alpha coefficient for the total sample was found .68. In the CAB, a “sympathetic” attitude is defined as being supportive towards victims, condemning bullies and supporting intervention. an “unsympathetic” attitude condemn weakness and admires aggression, is understanding towards bullies, and does not support intervention.

Parental and teachers attitudes to bullying scale: 18 items Parental Attitudes towards Bullying (PAB) scale (Eslea & Smith, 1995) was used to measure parents and teachers attitudes towards bullying scale. The structure and scoring of this scale is same as of CAB, except that each subscale is comprised six items each. Before the administration, the measures were pre-tested on a small sample to see the comprehension of items, and it was found that items of scales can be easily comprehended and no need to translate the items into Urdu language. The reliability of scale on study sample was found as .77, .83 and .87 for children, teachers and parents respectively.
3.3. Procedure

The scales were pretested before the administration on study samples. The objective was to identify if there is any need to translate these scales into national language or individuals can understand items easily, on the basis of this activity, it was decided to use scales in English language as everyone with basic qualification of secondary level can understand these items.

For study, children and teachers were approached in federal secondary schools through the consent of authorities. Parents were contacted through school teachers. Children were given CAB, whereas PAB was administered on the samples of parents and teachers. They were assured confidentiality of their responses.

4. Findings

Data was subject to Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS 17) for analysis. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test were employed to meet the objectives of study.

Results in table 1 showed significant differences on overall attitudes of children, teachers and parents towards bullying. Post hoc analysis revealed parents have overall and towards victims more sympathetic attitudes.

The results in table 2 indicates significant gender differences on attitudes towards bullying on its total and subscales where females have more sympathetic attitudes on total and victim subscale, whereas, males have more sympathetic towards bully and intervention.

Results in table 3 indicate that mothers have overall more sympathetic attitudes towards bullying and towards victims as compared to fathers.

Results in table 4 indicate that there are no gender differences regarding teacher’s attitudes towards bullying.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated attitudes towards bullying in a comparative framework between children, their parents and teachers. Firstly, it seems that children, parents and teachers generally have very sympathetic attitudes towards the victims of bullying and are supportive of anti-bullying intervention, as predicted. Whereas attitudes towards bully are different in all three groups, as teachers have best understanding of bully behaviors. As far as attitudes towards the bullies themselves is concerned, previous research led us to suppose that the majority of parents would be less than understanding towards bullies, and this indeed was the case in present study. This is not an encouraging finding, however, for if a majority of parents are not happy to see things from the bully’s point of view, they may not be supportive of anti-bullying strategies. Previous research led us to believe that those who were sympathetic towards victims would be unsympathetic towards bullies. In fact, the opposite was found: those who are most sympathetic towards victims are also the most understanding towards bullies. Our research suggests that while children seem to take sides (that is, they are either pro-victim and anti-bully, or pro-bully and anti-victim), adults have a more general level of sympathy, either supportive of both bullies and victims, or negative towards both. Some items drew extremely unsympathetic responses. Seventy percent agreed that everybody should be able to stand up for themselves. This suggests that many parents still believe that children should be sorting out bullying problems on their own, without involving school staff or members of their peer group. This may not be a bad thing, especially if the standing up is through assertiveness rather than violence, but it does beg the question that, if everybody should stand up for themselves, where does that leave those who are unable to do this? Some parents feel that extra help for the weak is unfair, yet if children lack the mental, physical or social abilities to cope with bullying, what are they supposed to do? Remember that most parents did agree that even the toughest kids get bullied sometimes.

Regarding gender differences, findings indicate significant gender differences on attitudes of children towards bullying where females have more sympathetic attitudes on total and victim subscale, whereas, males have more sympathetic towards bully and intervention. Regarding parents, mothers have overall more sympathetic attitudes
towards bullying and towards victims as compared to fathers; As far as teachers are concerned no significant
gender differences were found among male and female teachers.
The present study leads to this conclusion that to address the issue of school bullying, this is important to see the
differences among the attitudes of children, their parents and teachers. This may lead to plan an effective
intervention plan.
References


Table 1
One Way Analysis of Variance for children, teachers and parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Children (n = 100)</th>
<th>Teachers (n = 100)</th>
<th>Parents (n = 100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes (total)</td>
<td>35.85</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>34.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>8.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>8.27</td>
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\[ df = 297, \ ***p < .001 \]

Table 2
Gender-wise comparison of children on Attitudes towards bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Male Mean</th>
<th>Male SD</th>
<th>Female Mean</th>
<th>Female SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes (total)</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>15.14</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>14.23***</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.40 .027</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td>5.68**</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.93 1.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>.660</td>
<td>3.16**</td>
<td>.853</td>
<td>.61 0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>1.80*</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.24 .117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ df = 97, \ *p < .05, \ **p < .01; ***p < .001 \]

Table 3
Gender-wise comparison of parents on Attitudes towards bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Fathers Mean</th>
<th>Fathers SD</th>
<th>Mothers Mean</th>
<th>Mothers SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes (total)</td>
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<td>4.44</td>
<td>21.44</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.93*</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.40 .027</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
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<td>1.31</td>
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<td>.61 0.78</td>
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<td>Intervention</td>
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<td>4.71</td>
<td>17.94</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.24 .117</td>
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\[ df = 97, \ *p < .05 \]
Table 4

Gender-wise comparison of teachers on Attitudes towards bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Male Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Female Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>95% CI LL</th>
<th>95% CI UL</th>
<th>Cohen’sd</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes (total)</td>
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<td>1.09</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>.864</td>
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<td>.027</td>
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<td>3.94</td>
<td>.660</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.853</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
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<td>5.63</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.117</td>
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</table>

\( df = 97 \)