

The Impact of Bullying and Cyberbullying on Psychological Well-Being among Adolescents

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Abstract

Background: Bullying and cyberbullying are global problems among adolescents, contributing to psychological problems such as Depression and Anxiety Disorder. The growing use of virtual and online communication has exacerbated exposure to victimisation. **Objective:** The research will investigate the effect of bullying and cyberbullying on adolescent mental health and to compare its effects. **Methodology:** This quantitative cross-sectional study included 300 adolescents (13-18 years old). Survey data on bullying involvement and measures of psychological well-being (anxiety, depression and self-esteem) were gathered through questionnaires. Data were analysed using SPSS. **Findings:** There were positive associations between bullying and psychological distress. Cyberbullying was more strongly linked to depression and social isolation and both forms of bullying had a negative effect on self-esteem. Those vulnerable to both forms exhibited the greatest levels of distress. **Conclusion:** The results suggest bullying, especially its digital form has a serious negative impact on the psychological well-being of adolescents. Multifaceted strategies including school, parental and online communities are needed to reduce this.

Keywords: Bullying, Cyberbullying, Adolescents, Psychological Well-being, Depression, Anxiety, Self-esteem

1. Introduction

Puberty is a pivotal time in human development, characterized by substantial physiological, psychological and social transformations, which render individuals more susceptible to environmental influences. One such stressor is bullying, as it is a sustained and damaging behavior. Bullying is typically defined as the persistent use of bullying (physical, verbal or relational) by individuals with power over their victim [1]. Over the last decade, increasing digital technologies and social media have evolved traditional bullying into cyberbullying, where bullying can occur outside the school gates and in a continuous time and space [2]. The nature of cyberbullying, where the participant is more anonymous, a broader audience is reached, and the bullying is permanent, further exacerbates the possible psychological impact [3]. Teens targeted by these attacks report greater emotions of angst, isolation, and impaired performance [6]. This is a critical time in adolescents' life for psychological well-being, or the emotional stability, self-esteem and other aspects of mental health. Studies have shown a strong association between victimization from bullying and a number of mental health issues including Depression and Anxiety Disorder, as well as lower life satisfaction [4][5]. In particular, recent research has found that bullying victimization is associated with the development of chronic psychological problems such as low self-esteem, loneliness and suicidal thoughts [6]. Likewise, cyberbullying has been linked to higher levels of depression and anxiety because of its nature of being intrusive [7]. The ever-present nature of technology means that it might be hard for a victim to escape cyberbullying, resulting in sustained feelings of stress and exhaustion [8]. And the co-occurrence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying indicates many teens are experiencing both forms of bullying simultaneously, which can magnify their effects [9]. While there is increasing recognition of these forms of bullying, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the unique and aggregate effects of these forms of bullying on the mental health of adolescents. Numerous studies examine either traditional bullying or cyberbullying, but not both, limiting comparative insights [10]. Also, cultural factors and variations in experiences of bullying are mostly overlooked, especially from developing geographies [11].

1.1 Objectives

1. To study the extent of bullying and cyberbullying in adolescents
2. To explore their effect on mental health
3. Looking at the differences in effects of bullying and cyber bullying

1.2 Research Gap

While existing studies have generally established the relationship between bullying and mental health problems, little has been done in relation to integrated comparative analyses of traditional and cyber types of bullying. In addition, little has been done to explore the combination of exposures' effects and their harmful consequences on mental health. Our study offers a comparative and comprehensive analysis of teen experiences of bullying.

2 Literature review

Translation studies still point to bullying (and cyberbullying) as important factors in adolescent mental health. Research continues to demonstrate that traditional bullying leads to increased psychological distress, such as stress, emotional distress and depression symptoms [12][13][14]. Despite the dynamic nature of youth, there is long-term evidence that these experiences are not transitory and can contribute to life satisfaction and well-being in adulthood [15]. However, the advent of cyber platforms has seen the rise of cyberbullying, a more serious and multifaceted issue. It is not restricted by geographical boundaries and may be ongoing, amplifying mental health disorders. Those exposed to cyberbullying experience increased levels of Anxiety Disorder, emotional despair and helplessness [16][17]. Lack of identification in cyberbullying also increases the severity of impact, with perpetrators potentially being allowed to act without consequence and further increase in victim distress []. Other well-documented effects of both traditional and cyber bullying are social withdrawal and diminished self-worth [19][]. Young people who are repeatedly victimized by bullies tend to isolate themselves from their peers, resulting in reduced social support and feelings of isolation [21]. Research also has highlighted the intersection of traditional bullying with cyberbullying, suggesting victims of theft form of bullying are likely to experience both, leading to increased psychological distress [22]. Theoretical frameworks such as the Social Learning Theory can help us understand the conditions that may lead to the development of aggressive behavior through direct contact and imitation of peers and online interactions. While research on this topic continues to grow, there is a gap in the integration of studies of online and offline (bullying) behaviors and more research into the interactive impact on the well-being of adolescents are needed.

3 Conceptual frame work

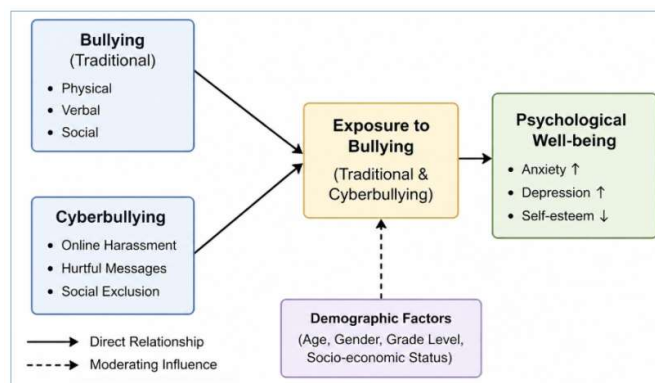


Figure 1: The Impact of Bullying and Cyberbullying on Psychological Well-being

The conceptual model in Figure 1 shows the relationship between bullying and cyberbullying and adolescents' psychological well-being. Bullying (physical, verbal and social) and cyberbullying (online and technology mediated bullying, harmful statements and social exclusion) serve as independent variables impacting exposure to bullying. Exposure, in turn, affects adolescents' psychological well-being, as measured by higher rates of Depression and Anxiety Disorder, and lower self-esteem. Demographic variables like age, gender and socio-economic status also act as moderating factors, which may affect the relationships above. This model offers insights into direct and indirect effects, offering a comprehensive view of how various forms of bullying impact adolescents' psychological well-being.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to determine the association between bullying, cyberbullying and mental health in adolescents. This design was deemed suitable as it provides a snapshot of a large population at a specific time point, allowing for the detection of patterns, prevalence and relationships between variables. This methodology is more common for studies in the behavioral and mental health fields as it is efficient and provides for the drawing of generalizable conclusions [20].

4.2 Participants

A sample of 300 adolescents (13-18 years old) was recruited for the study to address the needs of a vital period for interaction with peers and the need for peer influence. The study used stratified random sampling, which was used to represent all age, gender and educational background. Data was collected from secondary schools, with informed consent taken from participants shown in table.1.

Table.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	13–15 years	160	53.3%
	16–18 years	140	46.7%
Gender	Male	155	51.7%
	Female	145	48.3%
School Type	Public	180	60%
	Private	120	40%

The chosen sample size is comparable to previous studies on mental health among adolescents, to achieve sufficient power and representativeness [21] [22].

4.3 Data Collection Tools

This study used reliable and valid questionnaires to assess exposure to bullying or cyberbullying and psychological well-being. These tools have been shown excellent valid and reliable in previous studies (see table 2).

Table .2. Measurement Instruments

Variable	Instrument Used	Description
Bullying Exposure	Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire	Measures frequency and type of bullying
Cyberbullying Exposure	Cyberbullying Scale	Assesses online harassment experiences
Psychological Well-being	Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)	Evaluates emotional states

		and stress
Self-esteem	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	Measures self-worth and confidence

Standardized instruments ensure valid results and make our results comparable to other literature [17] [23]. Data collection sheets were filled out in a supervised classroom environment, to ensure accuracy of responses.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were entered into and analyzed with SPSS. Demographic information and prevalence were presented using descriptive statistics. It conducted inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and multiple regressions) to explore associations between bullying variables and psychological well-being. This allowed for the examination of relationships between variables such as experiences of bullying and depression or anxiety. Regression analysis was used to understand the predictive effects of bullying and cyberbullying on mental health. We used a threshold of $p < 0.05$ to assess significance.

5 Results & Discussion

The results of statistical analyses of the data from 300 adolescents are presented here. The findings are related to the nature of bullying and cyberbullying and their associations with measures of psychological well-being including Depression, Anxiety Disorder and self-esteem. The analysis used various statistical tools such as descriptive and inferential statistics to explore relationships (correlation) and predictive effects (regression). The results are presented in tables and the use of graphical illustrations are included to aid interpretation.

Table.3. Prevalence of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Type of Exposure	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Traditional Bullying	186	62%
Cyberbullying	144	48%
Both Forms	105	35%
No Exposure	84	28%

Over half the sample reported both forms of bullying, with almost half reporting cyberbullying. Table 3 reveals overlap (35%) at a high level, suggesting the heightened risk.

Table.4. Psychological Impact Scores

Variable	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	3.8	0.9
Depression	4.1	1.1
Self-esteem	2.5	0.8

As seen in the table 4, mean score of depression (4.1) reflects the most common psychological effect of being bullying in adolescents. Emotional distress (anxiety) is also high (3.8). By contrast, a depressed mean score (2.5) in self-esteem suggests lowered self-esteem. The standard deviations reflect moderate dispersion, indicating that although the majority of adolescents are involved, the psychological effects vary between adolescents.

Table.5. Correlation Between Bullying and Psychological Variables

Variables	Anxiety (r)	Depression (r)	Self-esteem (r)
Traditional Bullying	0.62	0.65	-0.58
Cyberbullying	0.68	0.71	-0.61

Each form of bullying is positively related to anxiety and depression and negatively related to self-esteem. Cyberbullying has a stronger correlation with depression ($r = 0.71$) than conventional bullying (see table 5 and fig.2).

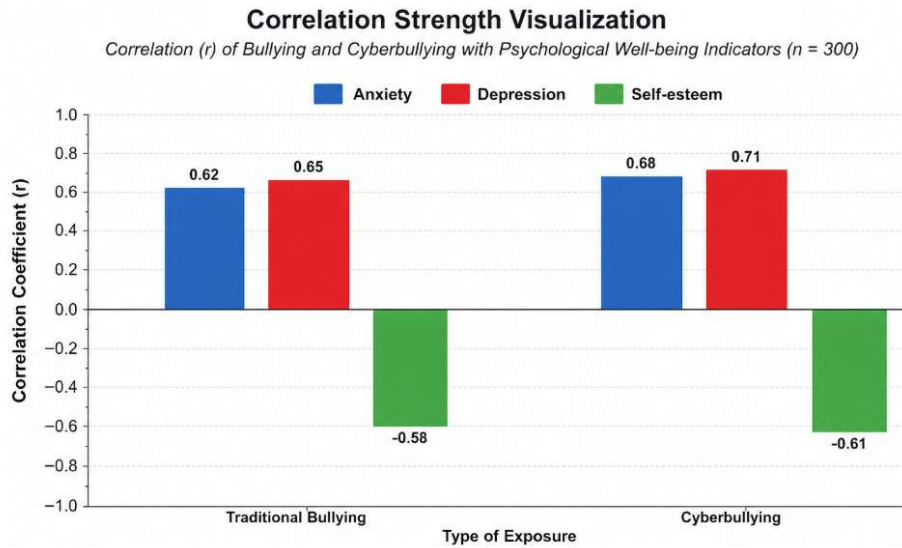


Fig.2. Correlation Strength Visualization

Table.6. Regression Analysis (Predicting Depression)

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Significance (p)
Traditional Bullying	0.42	6.21	<0.001
Cyberbullying	0.53	7.34	<0.001

Results from regression analysis show significant prediction of depression from traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has a greater impact ($\beta = 0.53$) as in table 6 and fig.3, confirming the greater impact shown in table 6.

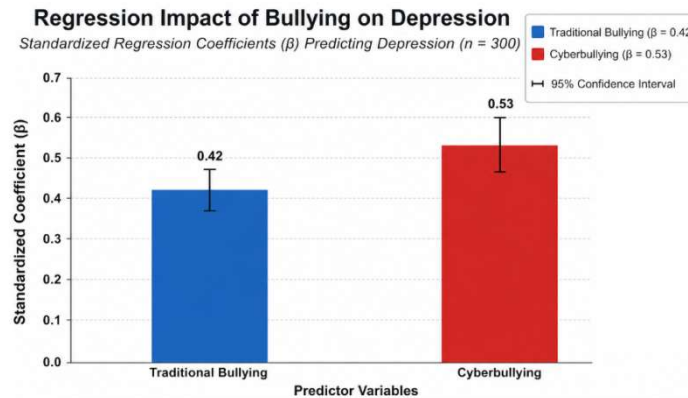


Fig.3. Regression Impact of Bullying on Depression

Findings

- a. Adolescents are frequently involved in bullying.
- b. Cyberbullying has greater psychological effects than face-to-face bullying.
- c. Both forms increase anxiety, depression and decrease self-esteem.
- d. Cyberbullying + traditional bullying = more distress

Discussion

The current research supports the evidence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying having a negative impact on student well-being. The increased mean scores of depression and anxiety suggest victims suffer significant emotional distress, as has been previously noted in studies upholding the link between bullying and Depression and Anxiety Disorder. Also, it appears that cyberbullying was more strongly related to the outcomes, possibly intensified because of its omnipresence. Lower self-esteem on the other hand emphasises the enduring effect on young people's self-worth. This finding suggests interventions for both traditional and online bullying define how bullying can be tackled.

6 Conclusion and future scope

The present study finds that both offline and online bullying plays a major role in adversely affecting the kids psychological health. The present study reveals that being victimised by bullying is significantly related to higher levels of emotional symptoms, specifically Depression and Anxiety Disorder, as well as lower self-esteem. Cyberbullying, particularly, was found to have a greater psychological impact because it is pervasive, anonymous and ongoing. Intersection of offline and online bullying further amplifies such adverse effects, underscoring the need for multifaceted approaches. Pragmatically speaking, schools, parents, and policy-makers should work together on preventative programs, online safety and digital literacy to enhance adolescents' resilience to cyberbullying and provide psychological support. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine long-term psychological consequences of bullying. Researchers can also explore cross-cultural differences, influence of social networking sites, and impact of intervention programs. Qualitative methods may reveal more insights into the adolescents' experiences and coping strategies.

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