

Research Paper: The Relationship Between Victimization With Bullying and Aggression at School



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ABSTRACT

Background: This research aimed to study the relationship between bullying victimization and aggression among high-school students in Zahedan City suburban areas.

Methods: The research method was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population included all junior high-school students in this area studying in the 2015-2016 academic year. Of them, a total of 365 students were selected randomly based on gender and grade. The research instrument was the Illinois bullying scale (2001) with its three dimensions of bullying, victimization and aggression. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient and t test for independent groups) were used to analyze the obtained data in SPSS V. 21.

Results: According to the results, the Mean±SD scores of bullying, victimization, and aggression were 3.75±0.488, 3.55±0.751, and 3.58±0.682, respectively. There was a significant positive correlation between victimization, bullying, and aggression ($P<0.01$). Also, results showed that bullying and aggressive behaviors were more among boys but girls are at higher risk of victimization at school.

Conclusion: Considering that poor social skills cause all three behaviors of bullying, victimization and aggression, we recommend social skills training to this group of children and adolescents.

Introduction

Studies have shown that three distinct groups, namely bullies, victims, and bully-victims, are involved in violence in schools [1]. Bullying is recognized as a prevalent issue in schools around the world [2]. It is one of the most common and serious

forms of proactive aggression [3] and has been recognized as a serious problem in many countries. The bullying behavior originates from the need for abusing power against others, willing to dominate them and creating a power imbalance between a bully and victims [4]. Bullies are people who continuously harass other people and are introduced by several features, including being extroverted, competitive, aggressive, hostile and impulsive.

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These people cannot express their emotions such as fear, sadness, and grief. They enjoy being dominated over others and cannot perceive the suffering that emerged in victims as a consequence of their behaviors [5]. It seems that bullies adopt aggressive strategies to resolve their unique interpersonal conflicts and do not have any alternative conflict resolution skills [6]. Bullies are at high risk of playing truant, escaping from school, dropping out of education, and establishing poor relationships with their classmates [7].

For identifying the causes of bullying and victimization, this research has focused on the study of cognitive and social-emotional processes as regulators and control mechanisms of aggressive behaviors. Aggressive children may have deficiencies in social determinants of aggression, problem-solving strategies [8], and empathy while interacting with others. Also, they have an urge to exhibit antisocial behaviors because they hold low self-efficacy beliefs [9]. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or relational, as well as direct and indirect [3]. Direct bullying includes physical attacks such as hitting or verbal attacks like name-calling. In contrast, indirect bullying refers to social exclusion by spreading rumors or denial of friendship. Regarding gender differences, boys bully more than girls [10]. Olweus also reported that boys were most likely to be victims of direct bullying, whereas girls are more victims of indirect or relational bullying [11].

About 8% to 46% of children are victims of bullying, and they are rarely able to defend themselves or retaliate against bullies [12]. Victimization is the experience among children of being targets of other children's aggressive behaviors who are not necessarily age-mates [13]. Typical forms of victimization are verbal, physical, and emotional [14]. The verbal victimization includes using words to insult, humiliate, intimidate, threaten, give a nickname, and label a victim. The physical victimization includes hitting, pushing and shoving, kicking, and the like [15]. The emotional victimization takes place by using social relationships among groups and including spreading rumors, accusing a victim, inciting others to harm the victim, and most importantly, ignoring, excluding, and depriving the victim of a group and or specific activities [16].

Aggression is among the consequences of bullying and victimization. When aggressive children who suffer from conduct disorder reach their adolescence and adulthood, they manifest several symptoms, like anxiety and aggression against others and may even get involved in a homicide and drug addiction [17]. Aggressive children and adolescents fail to predict the consequences of their

behaviors correctly, manifest some hostile social stimuli, lack a proper understanding of their aggression levels, apply few verbal solutions to prove themselves in social matters, and mainly employ aggressive solutions. These people believe that aggression is morally desirable. That is why they see aggression as an appropriate solution [18]. These behaviors have long-term and irreversible effects on students, including poor self-concept and depression, being rejected by their peers, and low social-emotional adjustment which can create a lot of problems such as expulsion from school, delinquency, and poor academic performance, like school absenteeism and school refusal [19].

Bettencourt et al. reported that teachers and peers identified similar profiles of normative and prosocial students. Their results indicated a modest agreement between peers and teachers about who was involved in peer victimization [20]. The study of Jenkins et al. indicated that peer support mediated the relation between peer victimization and risk of social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties but teacher support did not mediate this relation [21]. Results of Zhou et al. showed that poor sleep quality and school bullying are highly prevalent among high-school students in China [22].

As it was mentioned, bullying among students is common and is a debatable topic throughout the world. The victims of bullying have depression, anxiety, and a low level of general health, and because of low self-esteem, leaving school is common among them. They are more vulnerable to bullying, and all of these factors provide the ground for further crimes. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs after satisfying physical needs. Students must feel secure and comfortable in the school and be away from threatening factors to learn appropriately. Classrooms must be free of anxiety and stress for the students. Since studies have shown that living in the suburbs was related to adolescents' tendency towards delinquent behaviors, this study aimed to examine all these three phenomena among students studying in suburban areas. Zahedan City like any other large city in Iran, has suburban areas, and students who study in these areas, because of the prevailing culture, are at the risk of victimization and its consequences. Accordingly, the main objective of the present study was to answer the following question:

Is victimization related to bullying and aggression among students studying in suburban areas of Zahedan?

Methods

The present study was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population included all junior high-school students in suburban areas of Zahedan City, Iran, studying in the 2015-2016 academic year. They were 7101 students (3322 boys and 3779 girls). Of them, 365 students (171 girls and 194 boys) were selected as the sample based on gender and academic grade by using the random stratified sampling method and Cochran's sample size formula. The data collection tool was the Illinois bullying scale. This scale has 18 items and 3 dimensions of bullying (9 items), victimization (4 items), and aggression (5 items). Espelage and Holt [5] reported desirable reliability and validity of this scale. The items are scored based on a 5-point Likert-type scoring ranging from 1 to 5. Each dimension is scored separately. Higher scores in each dimension indicate the more frequent occurrence of that behavior. This scale was validated by Chalmeh [23].

The obtained Cronbach alpha coefficients for the subscales of bullying, victimization, and aggression were 0.89, 0.9, 0.83, respectively and 0.71 for the total scale. In the current study, the reliability of this scale was evaluated by the Cronbach alpha coefficients which were found 0.87, 0.77, 0.71 for the subscales of bullying, victimization, and aggression, respectively, and 0.76 for the total scale. These coefficients indicate that this scale is reliable. The Pearson correlation coefficient and t test for independent groups were conducted in SPSS V. 21 to analyze the obtained data.

Table 1. The descriptive statistics of the study variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean±SD
Bullying	2.33	5	3.75±0.488
Aggression	1.4	5	3.58±0.682
Victimization	1	5	3.55±0.751



Table 2. The correlation coefficient matrix of bullying, aggression, and victimization among the students

Variables	Bullying	Aggression	Victimization
Bullying	1		
Aggression	0.499	1	
Victimization	0.276	0.502	1

Coefficients are significant at 0.01.



Results

In the present study, 365 junior high school students were selected that studied at the schools of Zahedan suburbs from April to May 2017. About 46.85% of these students were girls and 53.15% boys. Approximately 29.95% of the participants studied in the first grade, 31.93% in the second grade, and 38.12% in the third grade. The descriptive statistics were used to examine items related to the variables (Table 1).

Based on the results presented in Table 1, the mean values of bullying, aggression, and victimization were higher than the theoretical mean that was 3. Therefore, bullying, victimization, and aggression were prevalent among the students in suburban areas of Zahedan. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship of victimization with bullying and aggression (Table 2).

According to Table 2, victimization at school was significantly and positively associated with bullying and aggression ($P < 0.01$). This information means that students who were bullied at school displayed more aggressive and bullying behaviors compared with the other students.

The independent t test was used to examine the differences between bullying, aggression, and victimization among the students in terms of gender (Table 3).

According to Table 3, there were significant differences between bullying, aggression, and victimization in terms of gender ($P < 0.05$). The boys displayed more

Table 3. Comparison of bullying, aggression, and victimization among the students in terms of gender

Variables	Gender	No.	Mean±SD	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig.
Bullying	Girls	171	3.64±0.514	-0.207	-4.13	363	0.000
	Boys	194	3.84±0.443				
Aggression	Girls	171	3.49±0.619	-0.168	-2.37	363	0.018
	Boys	194	3.65±0.725				
Victimization	Girls	171	3.72±0.678	0.328	4.25	363	0.000
	Boys	194	3.39±0.781				



aggressive and bullying behaviors compared with the girls; however, the girls were at a higher risk of becoming victims at school in comparison with the boys.

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the relationship of victimization with bullying and aggression among junior high-school students of suburban areas of Zahedan. The findings of this study showed that all three phenomena of bullying, aggression, and victimization were prevalent among the students in these areas. The results of a study conducted by Mazaheri Tehrani et al. on middle school students living in suburbs of Zanjan indicated that 80% of students believed in bullying, 40.9% witnessed bullying, 33.3% were victims of bullying, 9.8% were bullies, and 16% played a combination of bully-victim roles [24]. When examining the incidence of bullying in Central and Eastern Europe, United Nations figured out that 35% of students aged 11 to 15 years (ranging from 15% in Sweden to 64% in Lithuania) were bullied for two months. In countries such as Greece, 23% of girls and 26% of boys reported that they had experienced bullying in the last two months. While 33% of girls and 36% of boys in the US, 32% of girls and 32% of boys in England, and 36% of girls and 34% of boys in France experienced bullying in the last two months before conducting the study [25]. All these studies demonstrated the prevalence of bullying, aggression, and victimization at schools.

Other studies have demonstrated significant differences between boys and girls with respect to the prevalence of bullying, aggression, and victimization at schools. In this regard, boys displayed more aggressive and bullying behaviors compared with the girls. In contrast, girls were more likely to become victims of bullying at school. It should be noted that the degree of bullying behavior and its nature vary across different levels of education, ur-

ban and rural areas, gender, and other demographic and socio-economic factors [26, 27]. Craig et al. concluded that boys were more inclined to display bullying and aggressive behaviors compared with the girls. In another study, the results indicated that, in early adolescence, boys were three times more likely to bully others compared with the girls [28]. Bullying includes various victims in terms of age, gender, education, and social class [29]. Other studies have shown that boys use more direct methods of bullying compared with the girls, and the victims of such bullying were often boys. Furthermore, indirect bullying including social exclusion and rejection were more common among girls [30].

Several epidemiological studies [31, 32] indicate that bullying occurs more among boys and they were more likely to become bullies in comparison with girls [33]. Concerning these findings, the differences in bullying and aggression between boys and girls become evident from the age of two or three. In kindergarten, physical aggression and verbal aggression are more common among boys and they often try to seek revenge on others. Besides, adults use more aggressive behaviors in dealing with boys compared with girls [34].

The results of other studies showed that victimization at school was significantly and positively related to bullying and aggression. In most studies, people who were bullied were introduced as introverted, weak, emotional, shy, cautious, and insecure people with high levels of anxiety [35]. Physically speaking, most victims are smaller than bullies and cannot adequately defend themselves physically and verbally. In this regard, they usually become targets for bullies without any specific causes [26]. As a result, these people are less likely to become bullies. These findings are not consistent with the results of the present study, which indicated that victimization at school was significantly and positively correlated with

bullying and aggression. However, it should be noted that besides the bully and victim groups, there is a third group that shows the descriptions of both groups (bullies and victims) and its members play the victim-bully role. This role derives from the role of a victim, which has two types: passive victim and active victim (who seeks revenge and displays aggressive behaviors when dealing with bullies) [23]. Therefore, victims may seek revenge and display bullying and aggressive actions against bullies or weak individuals. In other words, people who were victims of bullying can become bullies, seek revenge, and show their anger through bullying weak individuals. As a result, they tend to bully and aggression.

Conclusion

Bullying, victimization, and aggression results from poor social skills in children and adolescents. Hence, teaching social skills to children and adolescents are highly recommended. Through improving social skills in these children, they can promote their interpersonal capabilities and maintain healthy relations with their peers in the present and future. Moreover, it helps these children to develop their skills to control their emotions, increase their self-esteem, decrease their stress, and modify their negative behaviors.

Furthermore, since this study was carried out on the students at high schools in suburban areas, other researchers are suggested to examine these phenomena among students studying in urban and rural areas. Since the current study was only conducted on the junior high-school students in suburban areas of Zahedan, the generalizing of its results should be done cautiously.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

This research received ethical approval (No. 952/98/7520) and registered on November 16, 2019.

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Authors' contributions

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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