

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Socio Demographic Risk Factors of Bullying and Victimization in Adolescents: Prevalence Based Study**

Sameera Shafiq, Sidra Batool

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To investigate the prevalence of bullying-victimization in adolescents and to subsequently explore impact of socio-demographic variables.

**Study Design:** This cross-sectional research design.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted in Department of Psychology, University of Gujrat and data was collected from February to May 2019.

**Materials and Methods:** Stratified sampling technique was applied to select 608 students, with age range between 16 to 19 years, from the private-public colleges of Sarai Alamgir with the permission of principals and teachers. Urdu version of Adolescent Peer Relationship Inventory (APRI) along with demographic form was administered on the students with their informed consent.

**Results:** In 608 college students, 246(59.3%) were males and 169(40.8%) females. The prevalence for bullying in low, moderate and high categories was 57.2%, 21.1% and 21.7% respectively. Whereas 47.7%, 28%, and 24.3% of victimization in adolescents was prevalent in low, moderate and high categories. Hierarchical regression analysis found that gender, family system, and institution type are significant risk factors for predicting bullying-victimization syndrome and contributed to 19% of variance explained. Significant differences existed between gender, in which male students suffered more by bullying-victimization syndrome as compared to female students ( $\chi^2=103.50$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, adolescents living in joint family system were significantly victimized more than the one living in nuclear family systems ( $\chi^2=5.55$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). There were significant differences in bullying behaviours of the students studying in public and private colleges ( $\chi^2=4.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Students studying in public colleges expressed more bullying behaviour than students studying in private colleges.

**Conclusion:** The phenomenon of bullying and victimization is prevalent in the adolescents studying at college level. Demographic variables of gender, family system, and institute type served as risk factors for bullying and victimization syndrome.

**Key Words:** *Adolescent, Adolescent Health, Bullying, Peer Influence, Victims.*

**Introduction**

A recent survey with 17.2% depression and 21.4% anxiety in adolescents between eleven to eighteen years in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>, set an alarm for investigation of possible factors playing role in contributing to emotional distress in Pakistani youth. In early adolescence, peer group influences played a significant role in the mental health, inclusion of the phenomenon of bullying and victimization in the

present study is necessitated. Empirical research has posited the point that emotional distress, depression, and even suicidal ideation are linked with bullying-victimization syndrome in adolescents.<sup>2-3</sup> In addition, frequent fights and harassment has been found to shrink academic achievements of the adolescents<sup>4</sup>, effect their future careers indirectly and making concerned issue worth studying.

Internationally, the phenomenon of bullying-victimization syndrome is widespread. The peak prevalence rate of bullying and victimization in 11 to 15 years old children across 40 Baltic and European countries was found to be 45.2% in boys, and 35.8% in girls.<sup>5</sup> In 1,529 Chinese adolescents with fifteen years mean age, 6% showed high traditional bullying-victims prevalence and 2% showed high *cyber bully-victims* prevalence rate in males with high

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interparental problems<sup>6</sup>, thus acme the importance of gender, and family support. A systematic list of identified risk factors for bullying and victimization in the review of literature, relevant to the present study were found to be age<sup>7</sup>, urban/rural setting<sup>8</sup>, family system<sup>9-10</sup>, socio-economic status<sup>9-11</sup>, and gender.<sup>7-8</sup> Thus, literature review has highlighted the importance of various socio-demographic variables as playing role in bullying and victimization of the adolescents. In Pakistan, research based on study of prevalence and demographic correlates of bullying were based on the sample of either school children or university early adult students. Negligence is observed in identifying crucial factors of peer violence in early adolescents studying in colleges. These college students comprised part of youth and are approximately 29% of the general population. Therefore, sample of college students cannot be ignored for investigation of bullying and victimization that might affect their prognosis for mental health in adulthood. Thus, implications of the findings of the present study would point out towards conducting effective intervention plans in college students, screened for risk factors, identified in the present study. The objectives of the present study included investigation of the prevalence of occurrence of bullying and victimization in college adolescents. Moreover, socio-demographic risk factors have also been explored to understand the phenomenon in detail in Pakistani youth.

### Materials and Methods

The present cross-section research was conducted at the Department of Psychology, University of Gujrat, Gujrat. The data was collected from February to May 2019. Stratified random sampling technique was used and two strata were identified as private and public college domains. A list of institutions (both public and private) in Sarai Alamgir was taken from District Office, Gujrat. Randomly two public and two private colleges were selected from the provide list. Taro Yamane Formula<sup>14</sup> was used to calculate the sample and 608 students were contacted randomly in their classes. Moreover, the students exhibiting any mental or physical disorder were excluded. Ethical approval was taken from Advanced Studies and Research Board with reference no: UOG/ASRB/Psychology/15177. Inclusion criteria focused on the students who were more than 16 and

less than 19 years of age. The students with age below 15 and above 20 were excluded from the study. Demographic sheet along with Urdu version<sup>12</sup> of Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI)<sup>13</sup> with 36 items and two subscales of bullying and victimization, each having three components verbal, social, and physical aspects was used in the present study. It is Likert type scale with six categories of responses having scored one to six. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of APRI on the present sample was 0.88, showing strong index of acceptance. Prior to taking informed consent from the students, formal permission was taken from the principals and concerned teachers. The students were approached in the classrooms. Written informed consent with introduction to the research study was taken. Confidentiality was maintained and they were informed of their right to withdraw at time from the study. Any queries and concerns were addressed appropriately, and satisfactory answers were given.

The parametric data obtained was analysed in SPSS-21. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for low, moderate, and high levels of bullying and victimization. Inferential statistics was used to calculate the significant results with p value less than 0.05 level. A hierarchical regression analysis, conducted in two steps to analyse the effects of socio-demographic variables along with self-regulation on bullying and victimization of adolescents. Before conducting hierarchical regression analysis, the categorical variables such as gender, class, profession, residential area, family system and intuition type were dummy coded where boys, 1<sup>st</sup> year, arts group, rural area, joint family, and public served as a reference point and the remaining served as a dependent category. Chi-square was calculated to investigate the association of predicting variables such as gender, family system, and institution type with three levels (low, moderate, and high) of bullying and victimization syndrome in adolescents.

### Results

The high prevalence rate of bullying is 21.7% and victimization is 24.3% in 608 college students, selected by stratified sampling technique in private-public colleges of Sarai Alamgir (Table-I). In Step-I of hierarchical regression analysis, socio-demographic

variables such as age, class, line of professional studies (such as arts, science), residential area, and family monthly income with ambivalent research findings were entered. In Step-II, empirically significant socio-demographic variables such as gender, family system, and institution type were entered. Consequently, two models emerged. The first model showed that age, class, profession, residential area, and monthly income did not significantly predict peer relationship of adolescents. The second model showed that gender ( $\beta = -.427$ ,  $p < .001$ ), family system ( $\beta = -.090$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and institution type ( $\beta = -.127$ ,  $p < .001$ ) significantly predicted the relationships of adolescents with their friends, explaining 19% variance in the scores of bullying and victimization ( $F = 17.90$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The negative signs in gender, family system, and institution type showed that girls, nuclear family, and private colleges have less impact on bullying and victimization as compared to boys, joint family, and public colleges (Table- II). Chi-square analysis showed significant gender differences in bullying ( $\chi^2 = 103.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and victimization ( $\chi^2 = 82.49$ ,

$p < 0.001$ ) as boys suffered more than girls. Similarly, significant victimization occurred in adolescents living in joint families ( $\chi^2 = 5.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as compared to nuclear counterpart. Public colleges ( $\chi^2 = 4.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) exhibited significant bullying than private colleges in adolescents (Table-III).

**Table III: Association of Predicting Socio-Demographic Risk-Factors for Bullying and Victimization in Adolescents (n=608)**

Socio-Demographic Variables	Categories	Bullying			$\chi^2$	Victimization			$\chi^2$
		Low	Moderate	High		Low	Moderate	High	
Gender	Boys	130	86	114	103.50***	123	79	128	82.49***
	Girls	218	42	18		167	91	20	
Family System	Joint Family System	218	88	94	3.75	178	115	107	5.55*
	Nuclear Family System	130	40	38		112	55	41	
Institution Type	Public Colleges	180	71	82	4.20*	150	94	89	2.82
	Private Colleges	168	57	50		140	76	59	

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \* $p < 0.05$

**Table I: Levels, Frequencies, and Percentages of bullying and Victimization in Adolescents (n=608)**

Levels	Bullying		Victimization	
	F	%	F	%
Low	348	57.2	290	47.7
Moderate	128	21.1	170	28.0
High	132	21.7	148	24.3

f=frequencies, %=percentages

**Table II: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Socio-Demographic Variables in Peer Relationship in Adolescents (n=608)**

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		95% CI	
	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	Model 1 Lower-upper	Model 2 Lower-upper
Constant	44.562		46.616		24.559, 64.565	28.559, 64.673
Age	.418	.034	.553	.045	-.732, 1.568	-.486, 1.593
Class	-.361	-.018	-.490	-.024	-2.288, 1.565	-2.230, 1.251
Profession	.570	.026	.654	.030	-1.208, 2.349	-.955, 2.263
Residential area	-.056	-.002	.578	.026	-1.850, 1.738	-1.050, 2.207
Monthly income	-1.735	-.022	1.817	.023	.000, .000	.000, .000
Gender			8.745***	-.427		-10.239, -7.251
Family system			1.941***	-.090		-3.504, -.378
Institution type			2.601***	-.127		-4.112, -1.090
R	0.04		0.44			
$\Delta R^2$	0.002		0.19			
F	0.235		17.90***			
$\Delta F$	0.235		47.28***			

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## Discussion

The findings of the present research showed that the average percentage of bullying is 22.25% and victimization is 17.45% which implied that the high bullying prevalence rate (21.7%) in college students of Sarai Alamgir and this result is relatively like findings from other districts. A cross-sectional study conducted (2020) in five districts of Punjab namely Lodhran, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur, Faisalabad, Multan; and two districts of Sindh namely Thatta, and Nawabshah showed that 26.6% children were bullied at school and 17.9% were bullied away from school. 18.6% children were victimized at school and 16.3% away from school<sup>15</sup>. However, 24.3% victimization prevalence is high in college students of Sarai Alamgir as compared to other provinces of Pakistan. Still this frequency of occurrence of bullying-victimization problem in our study is relatively low as compared to prevalence rate of Faisalabad (2021) which was reported to be 49% bullying and 36% victims in adolescents with mean age fifteen years.<sup>16</sup> Yet a controlled randomized trial (2017) of school children in Hyderabad showed relatively high bullying-victimization percentage in boys and girls, reported as 72.6% and 46.4% respectively.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in district Gujrat, 42.6% school children reported victimization and 50.5% reported being bullied.<sup>18</sup> The findings implied that

high prevalence of violence against children and adolescents in Pakistani schools and colleges, contributed to poor emotional-behavioural physical and mental health in youth.<sup>19,20</sup> Thus, alarming condition of increasing incidences of bullying and victimization implied for the introduction of counselling services at college level to handle and manage the affected cases with proper psychotherapeutic intervention. Though in comparison to the other cities of Pakistan, District Gujrat has showed relatively low prevalence of bullying and victimization yet has set an alarm to take notice of the situation by screening youth for possible mental issues on one hand, and introduce coping strategy based interventions on other hand. Socio-demographic variables such as age, class, line of professional studies (such as arts or science), residential area, and monthly in-come were found to be insignificant predictors of bullying-victimization syndrome in early adolescents. The results are consistent with the findings of the previous studies. No significant differences were found with respect to age, and urban or rural area in cyber bullying across Sindh, Pakistan in adolescent<sup>21</sup>. Age has been found to be non-significant predictor of bully-victim cases in the students studying under Pakistani universities.<sup>21</sup>

In present study, socio-demographic variables such gender (girls versus boys), family system (joint versus nuclear family) and institutional type (private college versus public college) are found to be significant predictors of bullying-victimization syndrome in early adolescents. Findings of past research revealed that 950 university adolescents in Pakistan show significant gender differences with reference to traditional bullying-victimization phenomenon in which boys are high in bullying and low in victimization as compared to girls.<sup>9,22</sup> The patriarchal pattern of Pakistani society would serve as plausible explanation for such a discrepancy of aggression expression in the form of fights and harassments in adolescents. Female students also exhibited victimization, yet the prevalence is low than male students.

In addition to gender, family context and values are found to be associated with the bullying phenomenon in adolescents<sup>23-24</sup>. The research findings of the present study show that adolescents

experienced significant victimization while living in joint family system as compared to nuclear family system. Perhaps family's over intrusion or negligence has caused sufferings for the adolescents as they would have become more dependent on the circle of the friends for their secondary need satisfaction and might have become prone to their victimization. Moreover, earlier research indicated that students studying in public schools are more victim of bullying as compared to private counterparts in Pakistan<sup>25-26</sup>. These findings are consistent with the results of the present study with implications to launch strategic changes in the environmental elements of the government schools that foster reduction of fights and victimization issues in the adolescents.

### Conclusion

There is 21.7% bullying and 23.4% victimization prevalence among adolescents studying in various colleges of Sarai Alamgir. Being male, living in joint family system and studying in public colleges serve as risk factors for high experiencing of peer related violence in the form of bullying and victimization. Male students face significantly more incidences of bullying and victimization as compared to female students. Victimization is significantly high in joint family systems as compared to nuclear family systems of the adolescents. The students of public colleges show significant high incidences of bullying as compared to private colleges. Therefore, policy makers should initiate steps for recruitment of psychologists and school psychologists in public colleges of Punjab and enforce laws for better handling issues of grievances.

### Limitations and Suggestions

The present quantitative research has not explored the perceptions of the students regarding the concepts of bullying and victimization. In future, qualitative study could be designed to gauge the issue in-depth and enrich narration could be published for devising intervention strategies to sooth traumatic experiences of youth as a result of bullying and victimization. The current study has only focused on Sarai Alamgir. Further, study might use multistage cluster sampling technique to collect data from various cities of Punjab and get a better picture of the study variables in detail. Some important factors effecting the bullying and victimization are missing. Personality variables long with parental

interaction could be studied to understand the bullying-victimization syndrome in detail in future.

### Disclaimer

This article along with its abstract has not been published in any conference. The data for the article was taken from MPhil thesis of Sidra Batool, conducted under supervision of Ms. Sameera Shafiq, Lecturer, department of Psychology, university of Gujrat, Gujrat.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Authors declared no conflicts of Interest.

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**DATA SHARING STATEMENT**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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