

Relationship between Bullying and Students' Academic Achievement from the Teacher's Point of View in Primary Schools

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Abstract

Background: Bullying is an international issue that occurs in all types of schools, whether public or private, primary or secondary, urban or rural. It causes fear, lowers academic performance and absenteeism, and can even lead to victims taking their own lives. The study's primary goal was to determine the connection between school bullying and students' academic performance.

Methods: A quantitative (descriptive cross-sectional) study was conducted at governmental primary schools in Al-Basrah City, Iraq, and the study period extended from December 20, 2023, to March 25, 2024. A purposively selected sample of 275 teachers participated in the study.

Results: The findings demonstrate that bullying was prevalent among elementary school pupils (49.8%). According to teachers, bullying had a significant effect on children's educational attainment (69.8%). Bullying has a direct correlation with academic performance.

Conclusion: The study examined the relationship between school bullying and academic performance, highlighting a positive correlation between bullying and academic achievement.

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Introduction

School bullying is a prevalent health issue that impacts children's and adolescents' physical and mental well-being.¹ Bullying can occur anywhere, including in educational settings. According to a 2017 study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), out of 100,000 children surveyed in 18 countries, nearly 67% reported experiencing bullying. Of these, 25% were bullied due to their gender, 25% due to their race, and 25% due to their physical appearance, with the remaining 25% citing additional causes. In America, among 15,600 primary through high school students, 17% reported being bullied, and 19% acknowledged that bullying had taken place in a school setting.²

Bullying in schools is defined as the persistent

negative behavior from one or more classmates towards a student.³ The effects of bullying on victims can be physical, including headaches, abdominal pain, and skin bruising.⁴ It can also result in serious mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and actions, and social difficulties.⁵ Bullying is generally classified into three types: verbal (teasing, name-calling), physical (hitting, kicking, chasing), and social or relational (exclusion, spreading rumors).⁶ Cyberbullying can occur through various technological platforms, including social media and texting.⁷ Sexual bullying is defined as "any bullying behavior based on a person's gender or sexual orientation, whether it be physical or non-physical".⁸

Regarding academic achievement, the educational effects on bullied students are significant. Due to

an inability to focus in class and fear of attending school, bullied students often skip school-related activities and miss courses.⁹ Additionally, students who experience bullying tend to receive lower grades, struggle more academically, and are less likely to pursue higher education.¹⁰ International studies consistently demonstrate how bullying negatively affects learning outcomes and is linked to decreased academic accomplishment.¹¹

Teachers can play a role in preventing or reducing bullying in schools through strategies such as: 1. engaging with bullies; 2. supporting victims; 3. disciplining bullies; 4. involving other adults; and 5. ignoring the situation.¹² Research indicates that teachers with greater self-efficacy and teaching experience tend to employ more authority-based remedies. In contrast, those with greater empathy are more likely to encourage victims to be assertive.¹³ It has been observed that academic performance is harmed by bullying, with a greater impact noted on female students compared to male students.

Bullying is a complex issue affecting schoolchildren, impacting all involved—whether as bullies, victims, or witnesses to interpersonal violence.¹⁴ One study suggests that teacher support did not significantly buffer the effects of bullying on academic performance or students' subjective well-being. This indicates a potential gap in understanding how different forms of teacher support might interact with various types of bullying and their subsequent effects on students. Further research could explore specific strategies or types of support that may be more effective in mitigating the negative impacts of bullying.

Methods

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design and was conducted from December 20, 2023, to March 25, 2024. The research was conducted in primary schools in Al-Basrah City.

Sample Size and Sampling

A purposive, non-probability sample of 275 male and female elementary school teachers was selected. These teachers were chosen from 400 schools located in the Al-Basrah City Center. The sample size was determined using a formula derived from Steven K. Thompson (2012) to ascertain the appropriate sample size relative to the population size.

To establish the content validity of the study, 8 experts were invited to review the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha test. Data analysis was performed

using SPSS version 26.0.

Measurement

The questionnaire was adopted following a thorough review of relevant research and existing literature. The study tool comprises three components:

- **Section 1:** Gathers participants' demographic details, including age, gender, educational attainment, years of experience, and includes the question: "Have you ever dealt with a student exposed to school bullying?" with response options of "yes" or "no."

- **Section 2:** A bullying in school scale consisting of 8 items, with response options of "agree" (1), "not sure" (2), and "disagree" (3).

- **Section 3:** A questionnaire assessing instructors' opinions on how bullying in schools affects students' academic performance. This section contains ten items with three possible responses: "agree," "disagree," and "not sure." This scale is based on the World Health Organization's educational assessment framework.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Demographic characteristics were collected through direct interviews with each participating teacher, using an adopted and developed questionnaire format. The data collection took place from December 20, 2023, to March 25, 2024. Approximately 15-20 minutes were allocated to each respondent to complete the questionnaire.

Descriptive statistical tests, specifically frequency and percentage analyses, were utilized to examine the gathered data. Additionally, the mean and standard deviation for the total score, along with the correlation coefficient and probability, were calculated. All of the figures were created by the author using the Excel program.

Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the Basrah Education Directorate. Additionally, informed consent was obtained from each participant. It is important to note that this study focuses on teachers' perspectives and does not include pupils' views.

Results

According to the results presented in Table 1, 275 teachers participated in the study, which investigated the relationship between bullying and students' academic achievement. Of the participants, 88.4% were female, and 11.6% were male. By age, 40% of the teachers were between 30 and 39 years old. Regarding their educational attainment, 50% of participants held a Bachelor's degree. When asked if they had dealt with children experiencing school bullying, 76.7% of teachers answered "yes."

Table 1: Teachers' Sociodemographic Data

No.	Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
1	Age (year) M±SD= 38±9	20 – 29	52	18.9
		30 – 39	110	40
		40 – 49	69	25.1
		50 – 59	44	16
2	Sex	Male	32	11.6
		Female	243	88.4
3	Level of education	Diploma	132	48
		Bachelor	140	50.9
		Master's or above	3	1.1
4	Years of experience M±SD= 12±10	1 – 5	119	43.3
		6 – 10	37	13.5
		11 – 15	24	8.7
		16 – 20	35	12.7
		21 and more	60	21.8
5	Deal with bullied child at school	Yes	211	76.7
		No	64	23.3

No: Number; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

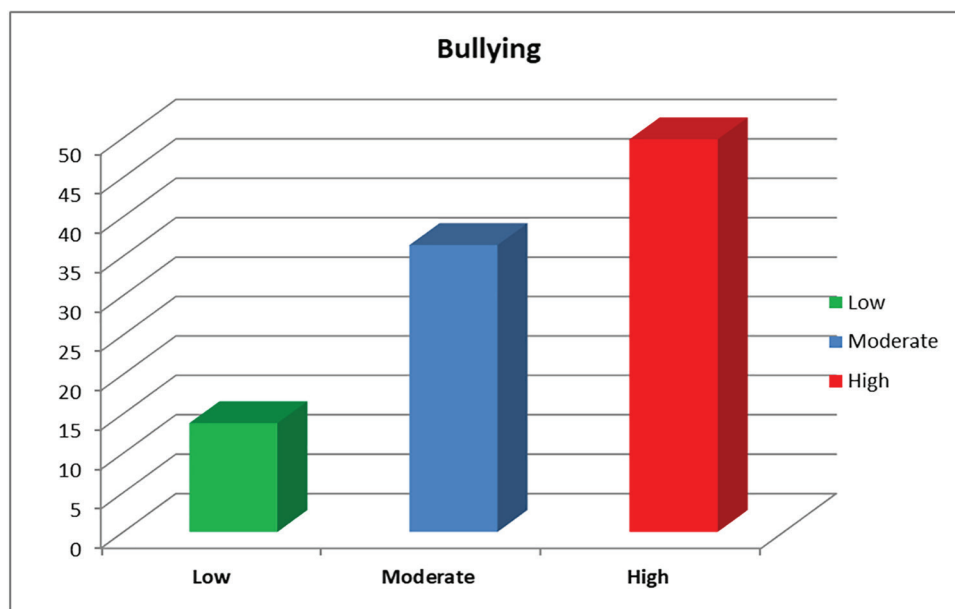


Figure 1: Levels of Bullying at Schools

Table 2: Assessment of the Level of Bullying at Schools among Children

List	Bullying	Mean	SD	Assess
1	There is a lot of bullying in the school	2.41	.803	High
2	Teachers sometimes humiliate you in front of the	1.69	.833	Moderate
3	Every day, the school saw numerous instances of bullying.	2.23	.860	Moderate
4	Bullying occurred in every school building.	2.22	.848	Moderate
5	Older children frequently use bullying in school.	2.37	.824	High
6	Lack of teacher intervention encourages bullying	2.19	.936	Moderate
7	Is physical bullying most common in school?	2.25	.879	Moderate
8	Teachers' bullying discourages students from going to class	2.60	.745	High

SD: Standard Deviation; Low: 1– 1.66; Moderate: 1.67 – 2.33; High: 2.34 – 3

This Figure 1 indicates that 49.8% of teachers reported that children were exposed to high levels of bullying at schools.

This Table 2 demonstrates that children at schools are exposed to moderate to high levels of bullying, as

indicated by the mean scores of bullying-related items reported by teachers.

This Figure 2 shows that 69.8% of teachers reported that bullying has a high level, 24% of teachers have a moderate level, and only 5.2% of teachers have a low level.

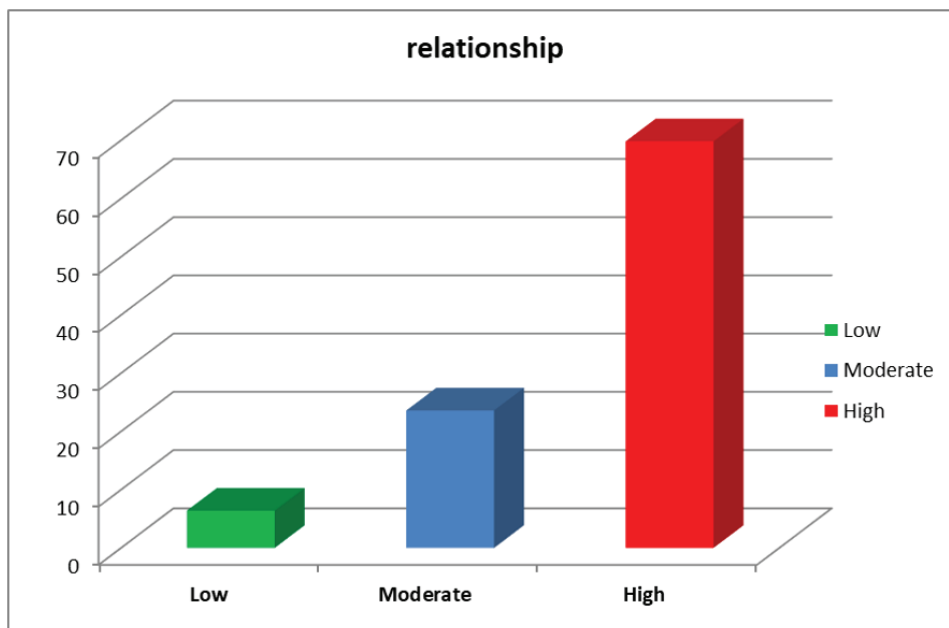


Figure 2: Levels of Bullying and Relationship on Students' Academic Achievement

Table 3: Significant Relationship among Levels of Bullying at Schools reported by Teachers and their Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variables		Bullying			Significant Relationship
		Low	Moderate	High	
Age (year)	20 – 29	7	15	30	r = 0.180
	30 – 39	13	35	62	P-value= 0.003
	40 – 49	8	31	30	Sig = HS
	50 – 59	10	19	15	
Sex	male	2	11	19	r= 0.070
	female	36	89	118	P-value= 0.247 Sig = NS
Level of education	Diploma	20	60	52	r = - 0.206
	Bachelor	18	40	82	P-value= 0.001
	Master+	0	0	3	Sig = HS
Years of experience	1 – 5	15	38	66	r = 0.144
	6 – 10	4	13	20	P-value= 0.017
	11 – 15	3	6	15	Sig= S
	16 – 20	6	15	14	
	21+	10	28	22	
Deal with a bullied child	Yes	26	76	109	r = - 0.110
	No	12	24	28	P-value= 0.068 Sig = NS

r: Correlation Coefficient; P: Probability; Sig: Significance; S: Significant; N.S: Not significant; H.S: Highly Significant

This Table 3 indicates statistically significant relationships between school bullying reported by teachers and their age, level of education, and years of experience, with p-values of 0.001, 0.003, and 0.017, respectively.

Discussion

Bullying in schools is a systemic issue affecting all school districts in the US. According to a 2016 report by the National Center for Educational Statistics, one in five students has experienced bullying at school. Bullying is characterized by a persistent pattern of aggressive behavior, often involving a power imbalance and malicious intent. Victims of bullying frequently feel

helpless and threatened.

Numerous studies have explored the prevalence of school bullying and its detrimental effects on students' educational outcomes. A lack of awareness and understanding about the dangers of bullying contributes to its increased occurrence. In the short term, bullying can impair victims' academic performance, induce exam anxiety, lead to school avoidance, and be associated with increased risks of depression, substance abuse, and self-harm. Over the long term, its effects are profound and enduring, negatively impacting mental health development throughout an individual's life. For bullies, such behavior can increase suicidal ideation and aggressive

tendencies, potentially leading to emotional disorders.

The findings from this study suggest that students experience severe bullying, as indicated by their responses to items related to the bullying domain. It is evident that bullying adversely affects students' academic achievement, as they often struggle to concentrate in class, feel intimidated, and attempt to avoid school, all of which hinder their academic progress.

The researchers recommend that teachers and parents foster positive values in children and students. Using mass media can help raise awareness among teachers and parents by fostering relationships rooted in empathy and respect. Additionally, parents can teach their children how to avoid becoming either a bully or a victim. Future research should focus on the psychological impacts of bullying and develop effective coping and defense strategies.

Conclusion

This study primarily examined the relationship between bullying and students' academic achievement from teachers' perspectives. Existing research indicates that school bullying is not merely a regional concern but a global public issue, posing serious threats to students worldwide. Although various preventive measures have been introduced to reduce bullying in schools, its prevalence remains high, underscoring the need for further research to develop more effective public health intervention.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential competing interests.

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