

Exploring Victimization due to School Bullying among Adolescents

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School bullying or peer victimization, i.e. repeated, intentional negative acts against peers who are relatively weaker than the perpetrator, has been recognized as a prevalent phenomenon affecting one in three 13-15 year olds globally (UNICEF, 2018). The present study helps explore the process of victimization due to school bullying using interview narratives of seven participants who have been frequently victimized (five males and two females, mean age 12.43 years). The findings indicate that victimization results from interplay of the situational factors and the characteristics of the individual having a reciprocal nature which explains their repeated targeting. These findings can be used for social action research in the areas of school psychology as a guide for development of bullying prevention programs to be used by teachers, counsellors and social workers.

Keywords: Victimization; School Bullying; Peer Victimization; Peer Nomination; Adolescence

School bullying refers to intentional assault or threats to cause fear, distress, or harm; involving imbalance of power (real or perceived) between the bully and the victim; and repeated assault or threats between the same children over time (Olweus, 1994; Oldenburg, et al., 2015). Thus, this involves two components- the person who engages in the aggressive act (bully) and the person who is at the receiving end of this aggression (victim). Apart from these two, there is another category of children who are both victimized as well as who bully others. They are also known as the reactive victims (Kim, 2006) who are similar to a reactive aggressor. They show aggressive behaviour to others, but at the same time they are victim of aggression. Aggressive victims distinguish themselves from bullies, because they don't systematically choose weaker children as target of their aggression. They may use aggression because of losing self-control. Typically, a physically stronger or socially more prominent person uses (or abuses) her/his power to threaten, demean, or belittle another using a variety of aggressive behaviours. However, bullying does not take place in isolation, it is a contextualized phenomenon that does not follow a linear trajectory. It does not stem from the individual's temperament alone, rather it results from an interplay of multiple factors. Likewise, a linear

explanation of the process of victimization is highly unlikely.

According to a recent report by UNICEF in 2018, slightly more than 1 and 3 adolescents experience bullying by their peers in and around schools. Lavanya and Prasad (2014) reported 14% to 27% students experience school bullying. The prevalence of school bullying appears to peak at age 7 (grade 2) and at ages 10 to 12 (grades 6 to 8). Boys reported more direct victimization while girls were more likely to be victims of relational bullying. Playful teasing is a normal part of the general school environment. Friends call each other by names, there are occasional fights as well, and yet not all students are considered as victims of school bullying. In India, school bullying was not recognized as a problem till very recently. The limited research on bullying in the Indian context seems to reflect that the schools are in the grip of this problem, though the challenge has not been completely comprehended or confronted (Malik, 2014). The Central Board for Secondary Education issued Guidelines for Prevention of Bullying and Ragging in Schools (CBSE, 2015) and stated that the responsibility of preventing any undesirable aspect of bullying and ragging rests jointly and also individually on all stakeholders, which includes the head of the institution, teacher, non-teaching staff, students, parents

and local community. The guidelines indicated that a systematic response to the bullying problem is needed within the schools.

According to the Hidden in Plain Sight report (UNICEF, 2014), victimized children are often marginalized and experience loneliness. During middle school years, these children are more likely to suffer from behavioural and affective disorders (Schwartz, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2015). Being victimized is linked to a lot of problems both in short as well as long term, where the presence of positive student–teacher relationships, and feeling safe at school serve as protective factors (Gloppen, McMorris, Gower, & Eisenberg, 2018) while students who face peer rejection, or are disliked by their peers, have fewer friends in school are at a higher risk for being victimized due to school bullying (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). According to Bonanno and Hymel (2010), absence of or low levels of perceived family support is linked to increased victimization and suicidal ideation among adolescents. Duncan (2011) adds abuse, neglect and overprotective parenting are also linked to victimization of adolescents. Research has documented that frequently victimized students, tend to have more somatic complaints, dysregulated stress response, low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness and withdrawal, anxiety and heightened depressive symptoms among other mental health problems, poorer health and learning outcomes (Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2013) reduced academic achievement (Davis, et al., 2018); school avoidance (Hutzell & Payne, 2012), heightened risk for suicide and suicide attempts (Turner, Finkelhor, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2012); and externalizing behaviours including aggression, delinquency, and substance use (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

Many students report silently suffering great physical and psychological pain, humiliation, and stress due to bullying. Undetected bullying can be traumatizing for the students. Thus, it is imperative to get to the root of this problem as this understanding will form the base for any future interventions that can be implied to tackle the issue. The present research was taken up to understand the first-hand account of the entire process of being victimized and not just the effects of frequent victimization.

This information is required to know exactly what the victim goes through, and why he/she is unable to escape this while majority of their peers can easily manoeuvre their way out of the bullying situations without getting affected. The present study attempts to answer the following questions- Is it because of the characteristics of the students that they become easy targets or does context have any role to play in their victimization? Do these students make any attempts to ensure their safety? Are there any after-effects behaviourally, emotionally or psychologically for the victim? Why is it that the same students face repeated victimization? To answer these questions, a qualitative study was designed that followed an emic approach wherein emphasis would be given to the exploration of the participants' lived experience as a victim of school bullying so as to uncover the what and how of their experiences.

Methods

Participants

To identify the students who are being frequently victimized, students from classes 6-8 (N= 877; 481 males and 337 females; 59 students did not specify their gender; age range 10 to 14 years, mean age 11.89 years) of a public school in Delhi, India responded to the peer nomination survey. This school was purposely chosen because of its central location as well as vast reach to obtain a representative sample of the population of Delhi, as students from all socio-economic sectors as well as geographical and cultural backgrounds residing in Delhi, study in this school. Any student, who received Percent Victim Score of 45 (arbitrarily chosen) or above, based on the 'victim' items (Items 2 and 6) in the Introducing My Classmates Questionnaire, was selected. Thus, the students who were nominated by at least 45% of their classmates as victims were selected. The selection criterion was brought down to 45 because greater agreement can be reached in terms of who is a bully, but variations are bound to be there while ascertaining who is victimized frequently. Thus, seven participants- three from class 8, three from class 7 and one from class 6 (five males, two females, mean age 12.43 years) were selected using this criterion for in-depth interviews. The group comprised of five submissive victims and two reactive victims.

Tool Used

Introducing My Classmates (for screening and identification)- by Gottheil and Dubow (2001), is an 8-item peer-nomination measure consisting of a series of stories about fictitious child characters and students are asked to nominate all the classmates, that they feel are like the child in the story. It is meant for youth: 8-12-year-old. Victim score is derived by adding up all the nominations that a given student received from his or her classmates on the respective victim item. These scores are then divided by the total number of raters and multiplied by 100 in order to obtain Percent Victim Score. The method of peer nomination was chosen as research shows that students tend to over-report victimization on self-report measures (Baly & Cornell, 2011; Cornell & Mehta, 2011) and there is convergence between peer nominations of bullying victims with other self-reports and teacher reports of bullying experiences (Phillips & Cornell, 2012). This tool does not differentiate between bully victims and victims, same child can be nominated either as a bully or victim or both.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (in-depth interview)- To gain in depth information required for the exploration of victimization process, a non-directive, open-ended interview schedule was devised to elicit information regarding the relational aspects of the participant with his/her friends, classmates, teachers, parents, as well as the participant's experiences in school, home environment specifically, among others. This format allows the researcher generate theory and insights to the participants' perception of their experiences (Patton, Hong, Patel, & Kral, 2017). Questions like- 'tell me about yourself', 'describe your typical day in school', 'tell me about your friends', 'what do you like to do in school?', 'who do you not like in school?', 'tell me about your family', 'what is your routine like at home?' etc. were asked. Probes like "tell me more about this; what happened next; could you elaborate" were used.

Ethical Concerns

The research design was approved by the internal ethical review board of the Department of Psychology, University of Delhi. The researcher had partnered with the school administration

to obtain parental consent. The participants responded to anonymous peer nomination forms in the screening phase after they had given their assent. They were informed that their participation is voluntary, and those who did not wish to participate were allowed to do so. The interviews were conducted after taking prior assent from the participants. They were informed that their participation in the interview is voluntary and it would be recorded and if at any point they wanted to discontinue with the interview, they were allowed to do so. Special arrangements were made to safeguard the identity of the students shortlisted for the interviews.

Procedure

The peer nomination survey was carried out through group administration in all classrooms from grades 6-8, to identify the students who are victimized. During rapport formation, the students were informed that they would be participating in a psychological research regarding their school life and words like school bullying, peer victimization, were carefully avoided during the data collection process so as to avoid any defences and socially desirable responses. It was made sure that during the administration, no teacher or school staff was present in the classroom, so as to gain confidence of the participants. After the analysis of anonymous peer nominations, seven participants were selected for interviews.

All the shortlisted participants were told that they had been selected through a random selection procedure (and not on the basis of the peer nomination survey; a time gap of over 3 months was taken between screening and interviews). All the interviews were conducted in the school premises at locations preferred by the participants based on their comfort (like the library, behind the centre stage, near the staircase). Each interview began with establishment of the rapport with the participant, followed by the question- "tell me about yourself" and based on the response given by the participant to this question, the rest of the interview questions were asked. All the interviews varied in their duration (30 to 60 minutes) and the students were allowed to converse in both English and Hindi so as to gain their real experiences. The participants were

encouraged talk freely about their experiences in school so as to obtain a rich data. For the analysis, firstly all the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the transcripts were verified by an independent reviewer (second author) for controlling subjectivity. From the transcripts common aspects were coded as sub-themes based on mutual consensus between the authors, which were then grouped into major theme clusters which were later connected to produce a more comprehensible process of victimization.

Results and Discussion

Victimization is the term used to refer to the ones who are the target of bullying by others. Despite the heterogeneity observed within the small sample of seven participants in terms of their age and gender, sex and age of their perpetrators, commonalities were observed in their subjective experiences of victimization. Taken together as a group, all the participants reported negative attitudes towards fighting. When asked about what item from 'Introducing My Classmates' best describes them, the participants used the victim items to describe themselves. Almost all participants showed hesitance before sharing their feelings and views. One of the participants made the researcher promise that she will not disclose anything told by her to either her parents or to anyone in school. Similar findings were obtained by Malhi, Bharti and Sidhu (2014) who found that despite the high prevalence of bullying, surprisingly majority of the bullied students did not report their victimization to the school personnel or to their parents. Based on these common aspects, themes emerged from the narratives which are summarized in Table 1

The major theme clusters include the 'within individual characteristics'; 'relational dynamics'; 'situational triggers'; 'initial targeting'; 'failed attempts to escape/avoid/stop'; 'repeated targeting'; 'behavioural'; 'emotional'; and 'cognitive' after-effects of victimization. Based on these theme clusters, the following model has been proposed to better explain how this process unfolds in a cyclical fashion

The first research question sought to identify the reasons behind why certain students are targeted more frequently than their peer. 'Within

Victimization due to School Bullying

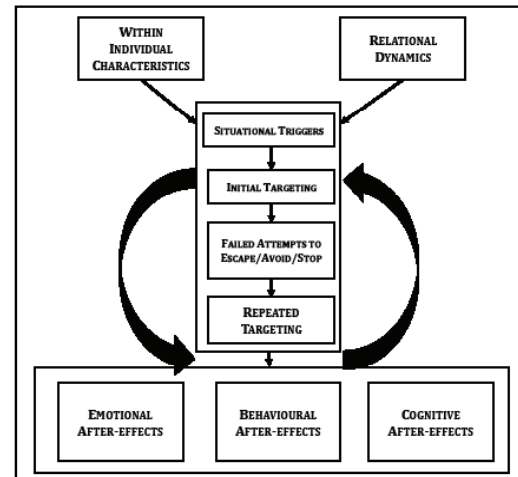


Figure 1: Victimization due to School Bullying

individual characteristics' refers to the attributes or the qualities that are present in the child prior to the exposure to bullying instances. It is believed that these characteristics could serve as the antecedents to them being victimized. These include- lack of assertiveness, poor academic ability, physical characteristics, engaging in less physical activity (especially boys), often misunderstood by their classmates etc. For instance- one participant repeatedly talked about her poor performance in mathematics and associated her poor academic performance with all her problems in school, like she said, 'they didn't like because I am low average student and they do not like the below average student'. Example of lack of assertiveness can be found in this incident as reported by one of the participants when she was talking about how she is unable to take a stand for herself, 'ABC (name changed) ... I don't like him, as in, he talks like a rogue (rude, hurtful, offensive) to me... and whenever he needs something to be done, he hands it down to me, ordering me to do it for him... if I make a mistake, he gets angry... now should I finish my work or his work!' This incident reflects upon the inability of the participant (victim) to take a stand for herself and her rights. Here, she is forced to do things against her own wishes, and these acts in turn affect her performance in school. Physical characteristics

Table 1: Major Theme Clusters from the Interview Narratives

Theme cluster	Sub themes			
Within individual characteristics	Lack of assertiveness	Poor academic ability	Engaging in less physical activity (especially boys)	Physical Characteristics of the student
Relational dynamics	Less number of friends	Having less power status in social group	Harsh parenting	Difficulty in making friends
Situational triggers	Negative class environment	Problems in adjusting to class	Often misunderstood by their classmates	
Initial targeting	Teasing, made fun off	Name calling	Dragged into fights	Rumors or gossip about self by others
Failed attempts to avoid/stop/escape	Crying	Not doing anything	Receiving end of the aggressive acts	
Repeated targeting	Teasing, made fun off	Name calling	Dragged into fights	Rumors or gossip about self by others
Behavioural after-effects	Giving up, unable to take it anymore, act out aggressively	Increased absenteeism at school	Avoid/ignores the perpetrator	Social isolation and rejection
Emotional after-effects	Scared, anxious	Upset	Regret and anger after retaliation	Embarrassed
Cognitive after-effects	Pessimism and willingness to improve	Negative view of self, self-doubt; helpless	Self-blame	Problems in concentrating

like body built or wearing spectacles provided the further reasons behind these students to be picked on. For instance, one participant said, 'sometimes they say things like that... like they call me Fat! I don't like it... I know I am fat but I don't like it'. Another participant recalled how she was addressed by the word 'chasmish' when she started wearing spectacles. She is also mocked at because of her sneezing problems. One of the male participants while talking about his likes and dislikes said, 'I don't do anything... I keep sitting mostly'; 'I don't play well... but I can play'. Similarly, another participant when asked what he would like to change about himself to improve his conditions, said, 'I would like to be a little more active', this participant earlier had said that he doesn't like to play. It was seen that these boys were often picked on because of their lack of interest in physical activities or sports, unlike their peers. So, these 'within individual

characteristics' were serving as the breeding grounds for these participants to be picked on subsequently. Among physical characteristics of victimized children, being overweight is a prevalent reason that adolescents are teased or bullied in school (Griffiths & Page, 2008; Puhl & Latner, 2007). In case of male victims, lack of physical activity could be considered as a contributing antecedent to them being picked on as it contradicts with the typical behaviour of school going boys.

Just like 'within individual characteristics', 'relational dynamics' (nature of interpersonal relations that these students share with their peers and family) like lesser number of friends, difficulty in making friends, having less power status in social group, and harsh parenting also serve as the antecedents to victimization. Interpersonal relations provide a source of emotional, social and physical support which can

have important implications for the well-being of the targeted child. None of the participants had had more than 4 friends in their life so far; some even claimed having none to only one friend. For instance, one participant shared her desires, 'I want to become the best friend of my entire class, which I am not... and I also want to be intelligent, which is not possible... this will make everything alright... but this is not happening... here you cannot talk to anyone in class nicely. It goes like if I approach someone and sit with them, they question me "why are you being clingy? Go away from here!"' Another participant said, 'I have two friends... when they get absent, there is nothing for me to do, and I don't feel like playing, I don't like anything at that time'. The participants also reported that they don't have friends even in their neighbourhood, and they have always had lesser number of friends. Previous research with shows that children who can maintain friendships are less likely to be victimized (Clary, 2011). It was found that even at the home front, these students had no relief as their relationship with their parents were not supportive. 'Harsh home environment' included strict parenting as well as lack of support from parents in case the student reports school related problems at home. For example, while talking about his life at home, one of the participants talked about how he gets scolded and often beaten at home for trivial things such as poor handwriting and being late for breakfast. One of the participants became overwhelmed and started crying while she spoke about her estranged relationship with her mother; she said, 'my mother probably cribs as to why I was born to her... I don't even score well... why am I like this?' Another participant said, 'I told my family how some students trouble me in the bus, but my father scolded me and asked me to stay quiet. He wants to maintain his cordial relations with them, but they trouble me a lot.' Close relationships serve as protective factors for these students, as they help in downplaying the negative impact of being a target of bullying. This single condition can help prevent a child from being traumatized by the acts of bullying, as well as for a few lucky ones, it may help them to put an end to the frequent victimization. It was observed that within this group of participants, only a few who had one close friend (it could also be one of the parents or a sibling), showed less

intensity of depressive symptoms as compared to the ones who did not have anyone with whom they could share their personal feelings. Similar findings were reported in a longitudinal study by Schwartz, Dodge, et al. (2000), which followed pre-schoolers into middle elementary grades and collected measures of home environment, peer victimization, group social acceptance, and number of close friendships. Results indicated that early harsh, punitive, and hostile home environments predicted later victimization by peers, but only for those children with few close friendships. Research also suggests that peers avoid befriending victims as they fear becoming rejected or victimized themselves, thereby leaving them alone (Boulton, 2013; Sentse, Dijkstra, Salmivalli, & Cillessen, 2013).

Thus, any individual with the above-mentioned characteristics is more likely to be picked on, but it is no guarantee that she/he will be picked on invariably. The interviews further revealed certain 'situational triggers' are crucial for these students to be targeted repeatedly, i.e. apart from these antecedents, there are certain situational factors which precipitate regular playful teasing in the classroom into school bullying. These include 'negative class environment', and 'problems in adjusting to class'. Problems in adjusting to class can be found from the instances stated above. Most of these students reported either they did not like their classmates, or their classmates did not like them. While commenting about his class environment, one participant said, 'my class is very bad... all kinds of bad things are here... stealing... abusive language... they trouble me a lot... make fun of and call names based on name and caste. They also make fun on the basis of religion... they do that to everybody.' Another participant reported that problems started for him ever since he joined his present class in Grade 6. He said, '4th- 5th was a good time, but when I came to class 6th, our classes were shuffled... and all the rogue (rude, mischievous) type boys were meeting me... only a handful were helpful... that year went by very badly... many students used to hit me at that time... actually what these students used to do is that they would hit me, and then put the blame on me. And the teacher also didn't know what had happened in reality, so that's why she would also scold me

sometimes... there was nothing I could do.'

A student with the above-mentioned characteristics, when exposed to the 'situational triggers' was more likely to experience 'initial targeting'. It refers to the various ways in which these students were picked on. It included instances of being called by names, being hit and punched. Some of them were also left out on purpose. Some of these instances have already been highlighted in the participant's narratives stated previously. The victims, thereby happen to be passive recipients of aggressive behaviours by various perpetrators, i.e. these students become the target of teasing, name calling, or being made fun off, rumours or gossip about self by others. Some drag these students into fights unnecessarily, this behaviour of others towards these students goes on repeatedly and continuously, they also tend to become the scapegoats. One participant reported that somebody hid his bag in order to tease him. Some other students went to the extreme, as the participant recalled, 'three kids locked me inside the toilet for 5 minutes, and then they unlocked it and ran away. I think my classmates did it... sounds were familiar.' Another participant reported that his classmates described him as 'weird'. He also reported being made fun off and gossiped about as he had feelings for a girl in his class, which were not reciprocated. Likewise, another participant found herself at the centre of gossips in school.

The second research question sought to identify whether these targeted students make any attempts to stop/avoid/escape being bullied. What differentiates these students from other students who are picked on is their reaction to the targeting. It was seen that these students did make attempts to stop, avoid or escape bullying, but all their efforts went in vain. An example of 'failed attempts to avoid/stop/escape' bullying can be found in the narrative of this victim (a submissive victim), 'I don't fight... if someone fights with me, I leave that place and do not say anything and come back to my seat.' When asked about how she responds to the negative instances, another participant said, 'if they are teasing me or scolding me, then I am mostly just standing quietly... because as it is, I do that with everybody else as well' when she was explaining why she identifies herself with

a victim. Also, these students identified the probable causes as to why other students make fun of them repeatedly. Like one participant said, 'they (bullies) gain pleasure out of this (targeting this student)'; another said, 'because I get irritated, that is why they tease me more'; another one of the participants said, 'the students who do not study well, displace their anger for the teacher on to weaker students... and many students are happy to see others in trouble... they really enjoy it.' These descriptions indicate that certain consequences of engaging in bullying behaviour have reinforcing value for the perpetrator, irrespective of its consequences for the victim, thus they could also act as maintaining conditions, whereby the likelihood of recurrence increases. All these can account for 'repeated targeting' of these students, which is same acts as in 'initial targeting', however with higher intensity and frequency. It was found (previously discussed) that all their efforts were not effective. Some of the victimized students resorted to drastic actions that are unlike their usual conduct in school. When the constant attacks become too much to bear for the victim, they may choose to respond aggressively, as was seen in case of two of the participants. Hoover and Oliver (1996) stated that when unsuccessful attempts are made to prevent being bullied, the student will ultimately stand up to the bully as it seems the only alternative when nothing else seems to be working. This leaves the target scarred but renewed with self-confidence. This is precisely what was reported by one of the participants, as he reported that he was relatively happier than he used to be, ever since he started answering back to the perpetrators in their language. Whether the students respond passively or aggressively, they seem to fail in their attempts to put an end to their frequent victimization, which makes them more vulnerable to repeated attacks. As was seen in the excerpts from the interviews, most of the participants engaged in emotion-focused coping strategies to deal with their frequent victimization. These strategies have been largely found to be ineffective (Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011).

Because of such repeated targeting, these students are more likely to be face difficulties behaviourally, emotionally as well

as psychologically. Being victimized was cited as a reason by these students to experience a range of negative emotions from feeling scared, upset, sad, anxious, embarrassed, regret after retaliation, feeling alone to anger as well. In terms of one of the participants, 'I feel very mortified... I feel embarrassed when they do such things with me.' The same participant (a reactive victim) also said, 'ma'am they make me very angry and that's why I hit them back. This gives me 0.01% relief that now no one will tease me, but it also makes me sad as for how long can I continue to do this?' Another participant (another reactive victim) also opined, 'I feel sad when someone troubles me'; 'I don't feel good when I answer them back.' Another participant said, 'I feel very scared in school'; 'I get very nervous during exams.' One of the participants also felt embarrassed as she said that her entire class laughs at her as she made a mistake.

Frequent victimization also seems to affect how the students perceives him or herself (psychological after-effects). It was found these students tend to have a negative view of self, self-doubt, self-blame, increased worry, and pessimism and willingness to improve. Some participants also feel discriminated against, and as a result of this discrimination, they tend to lose hope. For example, while describing herself, one of the participants also reported that she feels that she is discriminated against at home as well as school. She also has a negative view about herself (indicating a low self-esteem) as she called herself as 'unlucky' and how she has now stopped taking active part in class activities for the fear of making a mistake and being subsequently laughed at by her classmates. Another participant who had a negative view of herself wondered, 'people say that I can never get on the stage... it makes me feel very bad that I feel I lack something, and I should do something to fulfil that lack.' This participant emphasized upon this (that she lacks the qualities that are preferred by other students) as the root cause of her problems. She also said, 'I am usually lost in class... I am mostly just wondering why my friends think so negatively about me.' Similarly, another participant described how he constantly worries about the negative actions of others which leads to incomplete work; he said, 'when I am in the classroom and I see other students

talking about me, I feel very embarrassed, everyone is just gossiping about me and I keep on staring into blank, in the meantime the class is over and I have noted nothing in my notebook.'

While the experiences discussed so far are not clearly visible to an outside observer, however, the 'Behavioural' after-effects of victimization like the student does not feel like going to school, increased absenteeism, avoids/ignores the perpetrator, social isolation and rejection, giving up, unable to take it anymore, acting out aggressively should be taken as indicators of harmful effects of being victimized. A participant reported how she is shunned by her classmates whenever she tries to approach them. She also narrated that in sports period she is often not selected to play for any of the teams and she has to stay all alone. Thus, she often faces peer rejection and isolation, which leads to her being alone most of the time. One of the participants also reported that when he was in Grade 6, he was so disturbed by the frequent victimization he faced, that he did not feel like going to school. Another participant recounted how difficult it is to ignore the perpetrators, and ultimately, he is left with no other option but to behave as per their norms, even if it goes against his wishes. For instance, he said, 'it is very difficult to ignore them... last year when we were on school trip, I ignored them completely... as a result when they used to play I did not enjoy at all as I was alone... then also they were teasing me and then I retaliated. If I ignore them, then also they tease me and continue teasing me. I don't like to talk back to them but out of compulsion I have to do it.' Another participant said, 'I try to ignore sometimes, but when it crosses the limit, then I start hitting them back.' Findings reported in the bottom half of the victimization cycle, were consistent with the empirical evidence which suggests that victimization is associated with low school enjoyment, perceptions of school as unsafe, school avoidance and absenteeism, low academic ability and achievement, (Card, Isaacs, & Hodges, 2007; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010). In the Peer Victimization research brief, prepared by University of Arizona (Card N. , 2012), it was reported that poor academic achievement is likely a consequence of victimization; if children are worried about being victimized, they are less focused on academic work. Empirical evidence

has shown that negative effects have been reported on the development of self-esteem in the victims and on their concentration and learning (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

Conclusion

The present research shed light on the first-hand account of those victimized due to school bullying. It was revealed that these students tend to possess certain characteristics (like lack of assertiveness, poor academic ability, engaging in less physical activity etc) which when combined with troubled or unsupportive 'relational dynamics' make these students more susceptible to negative actions by their peers. However, not everyone succumbs to school bullying in this manner. Only the students who apart from these characteristics are exposed to 'situational triggers' like negative classroom environment among others tend to be the victims of 'initial targeting'. This 'initial targeting' happens with a lot of students, but only the students who make 'failed attempts to avoid/escape/stop' the bullying, are likely to be targeted repeatedly. When exposed to such 'repeated targeting' the consequences can be severe for these students which in turn make them more susceptible to be picked on again and again. These few unfortunate students who go through this cycle again and again, are more likely to experience lasting impact on them in the form of severe consequences 'emotionally', 'cognitively' and also 'behaviourally'. Similar results were obtained in a grounded theory research on victimization, by Thornberg, et al. (2013). They suggested that basic process of victimizing in school bullying consists of four phases: Initial Attacks (when the harassment begins, the reasons for it like appearance or behaviour of the victims; these initial attacks acted as a catalyst that triggered a long period of bullying); Double Victimization (an interplay and cyclic process between external victimizing and internal victimizing); Bullying Exit (a turning point that led to an end of the external victimizing); and After-effects of Bullying (lingering internal victimizing and acquiring life skills). The point of departure from the model proposed by Thornberg, et al. (2013) is the contention that instead of separate phases, the present model suggests the cyclical nature of victimization due to school bullying, that better explains the why the same students

are picked on again and again, while their peers manage to manoeuvre their ways around the regular teasing in schools.

Limitations

Despite having a large screening sample and stringent measures employed to identify the participants for interviews, the present study has a major drawback as the present sample included responses from just seven participants from one school. Inter-rater consensus was used to ascertain the themes from the interview narratives and not inter-rater reliability which is a better measure to obtain statistically significant results in qualitative research. The analysis is based on the retrospective and the ongoing experiences of the participants. Therefore, it is difficult to delineate the timeline of events. Another limitation could be that in order to provide a meaningful structure to the themes generated from the interviews, extrapolation of these themes with support from empirical evidence has also been employed to some extent.

Implications

The present findings can be incorporated in the development of intervention modules aimed at reducing the impact of school bullying. The above model provides for three gateways (Relational Dynamics, Situational Triggers, and Failed attempts to escape/avoid/stop) which can act as intervention points for ensuring the protection and prevention of these students from being victimized repeatedly. This implies that interventions aimed at improving the relationships of these marginalized students with their parents as well as their peers can help provide them the much needed social and emotional support to minimize the ill effects of victimization. Interventions can also target at improving the school climate to eliminate the situational triggers that precipitate the aggression between peers to the level of school bullying. Likewise, interventions can also focus on empowering and enabling the victimized students by teaching them effective problem-solving strategies, assertiveness training and other social skills. Further research is required to warrant the above claims.

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