Bullying in Private Sector Universities in Lahore

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the presence of bullying in private institutes of higher education in Lahore. Studies done around the globe suggest that bullying continues from the early stages of schooling into the final years of study in universities. Students who fall victim to bullying in university indicate that they have been bullied before as well. This particular study plans to use questionnaires to collect information from students about bullying so that its effects on university students can be gauged accurately. Along with this, a comprehensive case study of a bullied student as well as interviews will be taken to understand the issue in more detail.

Keywords: bullying, universities, Lahore, effects

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Background and Context

The educational years of an individual’s life are some of the most important years of his life as a whole. It is in these years that he gains the knowledge required to excel in his professional career as well as the confidence required to deal with the potential challenges that adulthood presents. In this formative period, a person’s personality is constantly shaped and refined. Thus, it is crucial that this process be as smooth and fruitful as possible. One of the biggest challenges to this process is bullying. Bullying can be simply defined as repeated hostile behavior of one individual or group towards another individual or group. Usually, this hostility is a result of a power imbalance and occurs between peers.

Statement of the Problem

In the past, and even now in the present, bullying has often been described as an issue faced by only very young children. This is an incorrect notion because bullying continues throughout the life of a victim. Thus, it is also present during the victim’s time in university and young adulthood. It is pivotal that this reality be understood and accepted by people. This is because it is only after this that it will be possible to formulate solutions for this complex problem.

Scope of the Study

This study will focus on bullying in private universities in Lahore. This can be used as a sample of sorts for the rest of the higher academic institutions in the country. Bullying is an issue which rarely gets the attention it deserves in Pakistan. The evidence of this is that literature or research pertaining to the issue is almost non-existent in the country. It is common knowledge that, usually, any complaints by victims are swept under the rug by administrative authorities.
Most of the perpetrators get away with a slap on the wrist at best. Thus, it is necessary to bring light to these underlying problems.

**Significance of the Study**

Bullying has, incorrectly, been described in times gone by as “banter” or “playful teasing” that is a part of “growing up”. This view is absolutely mistaken and efforts must be made to make society more aware about the consequences of bullying. The act of bullying is an unacceptable one as it causes significant emotional and, in some occasions, physical distress to the victim. This intimidation can leave psychological scars that victims have to bear for a long time. Bullies are also negatively affected by their actions and suffer as a result. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that bullying be combatted authoritatively and with conviction. Firstly, it is necessary that the general public be fully aware about the context and scope of the issue. Studies like this aim to do just that by informing the public about the issue. This can then lead to society debating the issue more thoroughly and, potentially, finding solutions to the bullying problem.

**Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to highlight that bullying is a major issue faced by young people in institutes of higher education. More specifically, attempts will be made to find out whether bullying is similarly prevalent in private sector universities in Lahore as has been indicated by previous research done in foreign universities. It is also an aim of this study to comprehensively explain the effects of bullying on victims. Lastly, this research paper will also present potential solutions to the bullying problem.

**Research Questions**
Primary Question:

1. Is bullying present in universities? If so, how does it affect students?

Secondary Questions:

1. What are the types of bullying?
2. What are the issues that prevent bullying from being dealt with effectively?
3. What are the possible solutions to the bullying problem?

Hypothesis:

Bullying is a major problem in private sector universities in Lahore and is not dealt with properly.

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**Literature Review**

Bullying is an issue that has had a negative impact on people for years. Still, it is only very recently that the issue has gotten the attention it deserves. Previously, it was wrongly assumed that bullying only affected very young children. It is true that almost all the research done on bullying in the past indicates that it begins during the very early stages of a child’s
education. However, studies have shown that the children bullied during their time in school are very likely to face bullying if they enroll into institutes of higher education. (Adams & Lawrence, 2011)

Chapell et al. (2004) conducted one of the earliest studies on traditional bullying within higher education in the United States. A survey of 1,025 students was conducted and an alarming 60.9% reported that they had witnessed bullying and 24.6% reported being victims of bullying in university. Surveys and research have shown similar findings. A very recent research has suggested that bullying is even present at some of the most prestigious of institutions in the United Kingdom. (Guardian, 2018) The research showed that students were not the only ones responsible for bullying. Senior professors were also included among 300 people alleged to have bullied students and colleagues.

Farrington (1993) perhaps most accurately described bullying as an act between perpetrators and recipients. He described it as an act that occurs because of a power differential and imposed negative actions. In addition, bullying is repetitive in nature and continues over an extended period. The victims face bullying in the form of exclusion from group activities, hurtful jokes and sometimes even physical abuse. Participants of a study on bullying agreed that both bully-centered motives, such as power and attention, and victim-centered motives, such as the victim’s race or appearance could account for bullying. There was a consensus that bullying is the result of the desires of the bully as well as the traits of the victim. Crucially, however, a bully’s desires for power and attention are ascribed a more decisive role. (Perry and Blincoe, 2015) Another one of the causes offered up for bullying is ostracism. (Dixon, 2007) Ostracism is often confused with outright rejection but is actually much more complex in nature. It casts out people who do not conform to the norms of a group. Initially, directly or indirectly, the
victimized individual is pressured to change their behavior. This process could involve temporary exclusion from the group and difficult behavior. If the individual conforms, then the behavior stops. Otherwise, the victim is shunted out of the group.

Bullied students often experience that they do not have a secure location within which they may be able to relax and just be themselves. Victims are afraid someone will say something hurtful and often skip certain classes to avoid meeting certain people. In general, they experience that they have an inability to connect, or communicate in a positive manner with other individuals or groups. Victims find it harder to make friends. (Adams & Lawrence, 2011) Victims of bullying have been consistently found to be at higher risk for internalizing problems, in particular diagnoses of anxiety disorder and depression in young adulthood and middle adulthood. (Wolke & Lereya, 2015) Furthermore, they are also more susceptible to attempt suicide and fantasize about it. Affected students also report having constant headaches, body pain and slow recovery from illness. Perhaps most damagingly, victimized students are found to have lower educational qualifications and are poorer at managing their finances.

In Sinkkonen et al.’s (2014) university study, only 26 of the 147 participant victims reported seeking help, as did less than one-third of the bullying victims surveyed in the Student Experiences Report (2008). Not knowing to whom incidents should be reported was a common reason given for the lack of action (Student Experiences Report, 2008). The lack of a structure to help victims in need is a common theme amongst most universities. Most students feel that institutions fail to help them adequately. Even if they report their experiences, universities do not adequately support or resolve the issue. Universities commonly group together aggressive behaviors such as harassment, hazing, cyberstalking, and incivility (AERA, 2013). A sizable group of students does not report bullying because they do not know whom to report to. There
should be a proper department that helps victims so they know who to contact when they have a problem.

There are a number of things that need to be put into place to deal with bullying constructively. Firstly, bullying has to be discussed regularly in order to generate awareness about it. Counseling and courses specific to the topic need to be developed to support abused students (Webber, 2017). Another way to eradicate bullying in universities is through Year Seminars (FYS). Year Seminars (FYS) are known to be foundational in students’ successful university experiences (Gardner, 1986). These specific academic curriculums are most commonly part of general education requirements and tend to be interdisciplinary. Common learning outcomes for FYS courses include identity within a peer group, student and faculty bonding within the seminar course, and education on specific skills associated with success in university. With the help of these, a student is better prepared to deal with university in general. Some universities have already taken positive steps to understand and solve the issues faced by victims. For example, in recent years, the University of Oulu has conducted interviews of students who have been bullied on campus. The management team of education in the university has discussed the results of these surveys and will, hopefully, come up with solutions. The University of Oulu guideline titled Prevention of bullying and harassment at the University of Oulu can also be found on the university's website under the section on Student Wellbeing/appointment of people to help students deal with bullying.
Methodology and Expected Findings

The methodology for collecting data for this study will involve the use of an online form/questionnaire. This questionnaire will contain multiple choice questions related to bullying and the experiences of bullying that a participant may have faced. Along with this, participants will be allowed to write about their experiences with bullying in the form of an essay if they
want to after they have attempted the questionnaire. A case study of a bullied student will also be conducted. This case study will explore the topic of bullying from the perspective of someone who has experienced it for a considerable length of time. This research expects to find that bullying is similarly present in universities in Lahore as well. The bullying is expected to be mostly of the verbal kind, including insults and derogatory nicknames.

Limitations of the Study

The questionnaire’s sample size will be relatively small. Thus, the variability in the responses could be quite high. Bullying is also quite a sensitive topic and not many people are open to admitting that they have been victims of bullying. Due to this, there may be a lack of honesty from people while filling in their answers. Furthermore, even fewer people are willing and comfortable in regards to writing about their own experiences. Consequently, the essay portion of the questionnaire is likely to have generic responses with very few, if any, narrations of personal bouts with bullying.

Delimitations

The survey was only handed out to students presently enrolled in private sector universities in Lahore. This allows the study to depict the current state of bullying in these universities. If the survey was filled out by alumni, they may offer outdated views on the topic. This is because the present environment of their universities might be different from the time they were studying in them. Thus, it is possible that the prevalence of bullying may have varied.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

The participants in the survey were assured of anonymity while filling out their responses and writing their essays. The case study was also conducted after informed consent from the
participant. The name of the participant was also changed in the paper because of his request for privacy.

Case Study

For the purpose of understanding the topic in greater detail, a young adult named Hassan Khan* was contacted. Hassan is a university student from Lahore who has faced bullying throughout his time in educational institutes. His experiences of bullying have had a significant
effect on him and he has learnt a great deal through them. Therefore, his opinions were of great value to this research.

Hassan was asked a series of questions for this case study. The questions asked of him and his responses are narrated down below.

Question: How would you describe the experience of being bullied?

Answer: First of all, bullying is very humiliating and it hurts to be picked on. Also, when a victim is younger, it is especially difficult to understand why he or she is being singled out. I was the same and I didn’t understand why I was being targeted by certain individuals.

Question: What have been the effects of bullying on you and your life?

Answer: The very first thing bullying does is that it makes you feel incredibly week. It damages your self-esteem and causes you to have all sorts of self-doubts. What can further exacerbate the issue is a lack of support from those close to you. Parents play a crucial role when it comes to this. Unfortunately, my parents didn’t consider bullying a huge issue and I suffered as a result. I also had a lot of difficulties in the other relationships in my life as well because of this.

Question: What do you mean by that?

Answer: It’s really difficult to develop relationships and the issues resulting from bullying definitely are a hindrance. Not only this, the relationships that I did cultivate were of a very specific type. What I mean by that is I became heavily reliant on other people’s support in my attachments. For example, one of the closest relationships I had when I was a young teenager was with my older sister. She was very protective of me and I relied very heavily on her during difficult situations. This is true to this day for most of my personal relationships.
Question: Have you overcome any of the problems you faced as a result of being bullied?

Answer: The major change I have noticed in myself is that I no longer crave people’s validation anymore. Previously, my isolation and loneliness meant that I would go out of the way to seek people’s validation. However, as I have grown up I have realized that the only validation one should seek is from one’s own conscience and self.

Question: Has your physical health been affected by bullying?

Answer: Yes. I have had eating issues and I have been prone to eating erratically. Along with this, during some tough times, I also battled serious sleep problems and often suffered from nightmares because of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Question: Have you encountered bullying in university? If so, can you elaborate on its nature?

Answer: I have. However, the way bullying occurs is different to when I was fourteen or fifteen years of age. Bullies are lot more clever in how they carry out their deeds. I have experienced it in the form of ‘unintentional’ exclusions from group activities and ‘harmless’ taunts. Thus, the bullying is a lot more veiled and disguised.

*Hassan Khan is not the actual name of the victim. It has been used in order to maintain the victim’s anonymity.

Results

A total of 102 university students filled out the survey. The majority of the questions garnered expected responses which backed up the hypotheses of this study. The first question
asked the students if they had experienced bullying. 17 of them answered that they had been bullied while 18 others were unsure. The majority, however, responded that they had not been bullied. The second question was perhaps the most important. It posed the question whether the students had witnessed bullying first-hand. 88 people responded that they had. The following question asked responders if they clearly understood what bullying was. 85 individuals said they did. Interestingly, 15 individuals were unsure. A crucial question asked whether universities did enough to help bullied students. Worryingly, 74 students said that institutes failed to help victims effectively. Encouragingly, however, when asked whether they would prevent an act of bullying from taking place, 79 out of the 102 students responded that they would. Similarly, 98 students agreed that universities need to do more to help victims of bullying. Two questions produced very varying responses. The first question enquired whether victims became outcasts as a result of trauma. 51 individuals said yes. However, the other 51 answered no or were unsure. The second question probed whether bullies themselves were affected by their actions. 36 people replied with yes, 37 with no and 29 were unsure about their response. The final multiple choice question asked students whether bullying culture was present in other universities apart from their own. Expectedly, the majority replied in the affirmative. In the essay portion, the majority of people criticized the act of bullying and agreed that it needed to be dealt with in a better manner. One student said, “Frankly, it's disgusting to think it's still actively happening, and Universities don't do much to help the victims out in 2019.” Another added, “Bullying is a menace that needs to be ardently dealt with lest it would create serious esteem related obstacles for the victim in the future.”

**Discussion and Analysis**
If the responses to the survey (attached in Appendix I) questions are studied, a clear pattern emerges. When asked whether they had observed bullying, a majority of the students replied that they had. Interestingly, when asked if they had been bullied, only a small minority admitted that they had. Now, it could true that only 17 people were victims. However, it is to be noted that 18 students were unsure. It is very likely that they did not understand the nature of how they had been bullied. Also, bullying usually leaves a victim feeling violated and ashamed. It is a possibility that some of the students were dishonest in their answers. Students, as expected, wanted more to be done to eradicate bullying. Interestingly, a lot of them blamed institutes for not doing enough to help victims. Although it is unfair to put the complete responsibility of dealing with bullies at the feet of educational institutes, it is important that universities take strict action against perpetrators. On a more positive note, most students said that they would take steps to stop an act of bullying from taking place. It is very important that young people take responsibility and help their peers in their time of need. Thus, the positive attitude of the majority of the respondents can go a long way to helping victims. More complex questions, understandably, drew varying responses. Students were really conflicted whether bullies themselves suffered as a result of their actions. This question is a very interesting one. At this moment, it would be difficult to answer it with any sort of conviction. It is important that more research be done regarding the effects of bullying on the bullies themselves.

The case study also corroborated a lot of the secondary research used in this paper as well as the results of the survey. It pointed out that the nature of bullying changes but it is still present in universities. Not only that, victims suffer a lot because of the actions of bullies. There are harmful effects on the mental and physical health of a victim. Lastly, victims become isolated
and go into their shell. This leads to isolation and can have an irreversibly damaging effect on the self-esteem of an individual.

The interview (attached in Appendix II) of a renowned psychologist in Lahore also highlighted many of the same factors of bullying. Dr. Amina did add, however, that discontent is a major reason why bullies behave the way they do. Bullying was also described as an issue which had long-term effects on an individual which could only be combatted through counseling.

**Conclusion**

This research paper strongly supports the statement that bullying is rife in private universities in Lahore and it is high time that this problem be acknowledged. Only once this problem is acknowledged will we see constructive steps be taken to resolve it. If not, the bullying
will carry on and keep damaging the well-being of young adults who will have to deal with their trauma for years to come.

**Recommendations**

It is important that universities in other areas of the country also be put under the microscope. Not only this, government institutes should also be investigated. As previously mentioned, the effects of bullying on bullies have also got to be investigated. This research could prove helpful to understanding the psyche of bullies and in turn could lead to prevention of bullying in the future.

**References**


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*Around one in six students have experienced bullying*. Retrieved from: 
https://www.oulu.fi/university/node/51028


**Appendix I**

**Questionnaire**
1) Have you witnessed bullying during your time as a student?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

2) Have you experienced bullying yourself?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

3) Are you clear about what constitutes as bullying?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

4) Would you stop bullying from taking place?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

5) Are bullied students given enough support from academic institutions?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

6) Do you think bullied students become outcasts?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.
7) Do you think more needs to be done to help victims?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

8) Are bullies themselves affected by their actions?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

9) Is bullying culture also present in other universities?
   a) Yes.
   b) No.
   c) Not sure.
   d) Decline to answer.

10) Kindly give your views on bullying down below.

Appendix II

This study also contacted Dr. Amina, a leading psychologist in Lahore, for her views on the bullying issue. She stated that one of the main reasons for bullying in Pakistan was a low level of
contentment and a high level of frustration. She also stated that there was a lack of counselling services available to people to deal with the issue. When asked if bullied children are susceptible to bullying at older ages, she replied yes. Her view was that early experiences have far-reaching consequences and leave a deep imprint on one’s psychology. She described that it was very common for victims to suffer from anxiety issues and eating disorders because of what they had been through. In her opinion, it was absolutely imperative that educational institutes promoted healthy activities that showed the true face of bullying to curb bullying from the root.