

# **Perceptions of Adolescents on School Bullying: A Qualitative Inquiry**

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**Psychology**

By

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this thesis, “**Perceptions of Adolescents on School Bullying: A Qualitative Inquiry**” is a bonafide record of research work carried out by Ms. **Sindhu D M** under my supervision and guidance and that no part of this has been presented before for the award of any degree, diploma, associate-ship, or fellowship of other similar title or recognition.

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## DECLARATION

I, Sindhu D M, hereby declare that this Ph.D. thesis titled “**Perceptions of Adolescents on School Bullying: A Qualitative Inquiry**” is an original research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. Eslavath Rajkumar, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Central University of Karnataka. This thesis is submitted to the Central University of Karnataka for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology. I also declare that this thesis or any part of it has not been submitted to any other University for the award of any degree or diploma previously.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**APA** - American Psychological Association

**FGD** - Focus Group Discussion

**HIV** - Human Immunodeficiency Viruses

**LGBTI** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Intersex

**LGBTQ+** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or questioning

**NCPCR** - National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organization

**RTE** - Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act

**SDI** - Socio-Demographic Index

**SMS** - Short Message Service

**UN** - United Nations

**UNESCO** - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNICEF** - United Nations Children's Fund

**US** - The United States of America

**TC** - Transfer Certificate

**WHO** - World Health Organization

**WRVH** - World Report on Violence and Health

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** During adolescence, the period which typically spans from 10 to 19 years of age, individuals undergo significant and rapid development in various domains, including physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects. Additionally, this is a distinct stage of development where young people are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior and be victims of violence. These experiences can have adverse effects on their overall psychological and social development, as well as their long-term health. One of the forms of violence experienced by adolescents is school bullying which is regarded to be a highly prevalent issue on a global scale, denying millions of children and young individuals their fundamental rights to education. The occurrence of school bullying in India is a widespread concern, as evidenced by elevated levels of bullying among adolescents attending educational institutions. The phenomenon of school bullying is underexplored in the Indian context and hence the current study is a first step toward comprehending school bullying in India. Given the significance of capturing students' understanding of school bullying, aims at exploring and understanding students' perceptions of school bullying.

**Method:** The present qualitative study used an exploratory research design using purposive sampling. Twenty-eight participants who lived in South India were selected and semi-structured interviews with students belonging to the were conducted to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Subsequently, patterns were established to identify common themes emerging from the data.

**Results:** The analysis yielded six data-driven themes: Comprehension of Bullying (Characteristics, Reasons, Process, and Consequences), Conceptualization of Bullying (Intentionality, Repetition, Power Disparity, and Morality), Roles in Bullying (Motivators to

Become a Bully, and Reasons for Victimhood), Forms of Bullying (Inflicting Harm, and Culture-specific Forms), Occurrence of Bullying (Inside School, and Around School), and Prevention of Bullying (Preventive Measures).

**Conclusion:** The study was able to provide an in-depth look at adolescents' understanding of school bullying, its manifestations, and the preventive strategies suggested by participants. Additionally, the current study also indicated the predispositions affecting bullying, implying that society must detect, address, and eliminate bullying in educational institutions as soon as possible. Thus, learning about the children's experiences aids in the development of a more effective intervention approach and action plan to prevent school bullying from accelerating further in the Indian community.

Keywords: Adolescents, Perceptions, School Bullying, Violence.

## **CHAPTER - I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education serves as the fundamental foundation of any society. According to the United Nations (UN, n.d.), investing in this particular aspect is the most effective way for governments to construct healthy, prosperous, and equitable communities. According to Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every individual is entitled to the right to education.

Education is not just a fundamental entitlement but also a means of personal growth that grants access and broadens possibilities and liberties. Individuals who discontinue their education prematurely are susceptible to unemployment, poverty, early marriage, and pregnancy. Several variables that contribute to high drop-out rates include poverty, gender disparities, disabilities, family crises, armed conflicts, and the perception of limited benefits from investing in education.

The Indian Education System is among the most extensive globally, comprising about 250 million children served across 1.5 million schools by 8.5 million teachers. The 86th Amendment Act of 2002 established Article 21-A, which establishes the right to free and mandatory education for all children between the ages of six and fourteen as a fundamental right (ClearIAS, 2023). The enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE, 2009) was carried out to put into effect this basic entitlement. The RTE Act stipulates that children have the entitlement to receive free and mandatory education till they complete their elementary education at a local school. According to Kumar (2023), the education system in India has experienced substantial transformations in recent decades. The Indian education system, despite its extensive history in learning and knowledge, has encountered various

obstacles, such as inequitable educational opportunities, obsolete curricula, and insufficient financial resources.

Millions of students are currently enrolled in classrooms worldwide, yet they are not receiving a high-quality education, leading to a global learning crisis (Theirworld, 2020). Despite the objective of achieving universal access to education and ensuring that all children are enrolled and acquiring knowledge by 2030, there is a staggering population of 260 million children who are not attending primary or secondary school. If immediate measures are not taken, within ten years, a staggering 825 million youngsters, which accounts for half of the global youth population, would lack the fundamental skills required for future employment opportunities. Hence, it is crucial to resolve the worldwide education problem and unlock the untapped capabilities of the upcoming generation.

Twenty significant barriers, as identified by Theirworld (2020), prevent many young people from attending school or receiving a high-quality education. Each of these hurdles is a significant challenge for youngsters attempting to overcome them. Among the various factors such as child labor, child marriage, and hunger, one of them is violence. Children are exposed to various forms of violence, not limited to conflict and military occupation, both within school premises and during their commute. Instances of gang violence, bullying, and many manifestations of discrimination might result in students opting to discontinue their education. Approximately 246 million girls and boys experience harassment and abuse while traveling to and attending school annually, with females being especially susceptible. 50% of students in Africa reported experiencing bullying at school with sexual abuse affecting a staggering 18 million adolescent

girls between the ages of 15 and 19. This traumatic experience frequently results in their discontinuation of education and perpetuates harmful cultural norms like early marriage.

As per the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), violence against children (aged below 18) encompasses various types of violence directed towards individuals, irrespective of whether it is committed by parents or other caregivers, romantic partners, peers, or strangers. Approximately 1 billion children between the age group of 2 and 17 have been subjected to physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect within the last year on a global scale (Hillis et al., 2016). The occurrence of violence throughout childhood has a lasting effect on an individual's overall health and well-being throughout their entire life. Goal 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to "terminate the mistreatment, exploitation, trafficking, and any kind of violence and torture inflicted upon children." The majority of violence inflicted upon children encompasses at least one of six primary forms of interpersonal violence, which typically manifest at various stages of a child's growth and development. The types of violence encompassed are Maltreatment (including violent punishment), Emotional or psychological abuse, Youth violence, Sexual violence, Bullying (including cyberbullying), and Intimate partner violence (also known as domestic violence). When perpetrated towards an individual based on their biological sex or gender identity, any of these forms of violence can also be classified as gender-based violence. The perpetration of violence against children has long-lasting consequences on both their physical and mental health, as well as the overall welfare of children, families, communities, and nations. Violence perpetrated against children can have several detrimental effects, including causing fatalities, inflicting severe physical harm, hindering the development of the brain and nervous system, fostering negative coping mechanisms and health

risk behaviors, resulting in unintended pregnancies, contributing to various non-communicable diseases, and impeding opportunities and the well-being of future generations.

Violence, as defined by the World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH), includes "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (WHO, n.d.-a). Thus, violence can be understood as the 'intentional' application of physical force or power, which may have a significant probability of causing harm and is a subset of aggression. Aggression can be conceptualized as a comprehensive category encompassing activities that are deemed unacceptable. Thus, the concept of aggressive conduct encompasses actions specifically aimed at causing pain or injury to another person motivated to evade such treatment (Baron, 1977). Specifically, bullying and school violence are commonly regarded as specific manifestations of aggressive behaviors (Roland & Idsøe, 2001; Smith et al., 2002).

### **Adolescents and Developmental Challenges**

During adolescence, the period which typically spans from 10 to 19 years of age, individuals undergo significant and rapid development in various domains, including physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects. Therefore, it may be argued that this particular stage holds significant importance in the overall progression of human growth and maturation. Individuals build a repertoire of behaviors, encompassing physical activity, dietary choices, sexual activity, substance use, and other related factors, that may either safeguard or jeopardize their overall health and well-being. Although commonly perceived as a period of optimal health, it is

important to acknowledge that a significant number of injuries, illnesses, and fatalities can nonetheless transpire throughout this particular time (WHO, n.d.-b).

According to the WHO (2021), a noteworthy proportion of teenagers, specifically 1 in 8, have disclosed experiencing sexual abuse, hence exerting a considerable impact. The occurrence of violence directed towards teenagers has been found to elevate the likelihood of experiencing adverse outcomes such as substandard academic performance, school abandonment, physical harm, mental health disorders, contraction of Human Immunodeficiency Viruses (HIV), and other sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health complications, premature pregnancy, as well as many communicable and non-communicable diseases.

According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018), half of students aged between 13 and 15 years globally experience violence both in and around school. This violence has a short-term effect on their academic achievement and a long-term effect on their futures. Thus, adolescence is a distinct stage of development where young people are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior and be victims of violence. These experiences can have adverse effects on their overall psychological and social development, as well as their long-term health. The spectrum of violent experiences that can occur during adolescence is extensive, encompassing exposure to parental intimate partner violence, child abuse, exposure to aggressive media, physical and relational peer violence, bullying, sexual violence, cyber-aggression, and other related incidents.

India boasts the world's largest population of adolescents, with a staggering 253 million young individuals. Every fifth person in India falls within the age range of 10 to 19 years (UNICEF, n.d.). According to UNICEF, as reported by the Deccan Herald (2011), the condition of



adolescents in India, despite having the largest adolescent population, is considered one of the worst. The percentage of students not attending school makes up roughly 40 percent of the total population of this section. Specifically, in the age group of 11-13 years, the school attendance rate is 86 percent, while for those aged 14-17 years, it drops to 64 percent. Mehta (n.d.) reports that the high rates at which students are dropping out of school are distressing, as they have a significant negative effect on the prospects of these individuals. There is a clear correlation between dropout rates and socio-economic factors, particularly poverty, as well as limited access to quality education.

According to Reuters (2019), a survey carried out by UNESCO, the cultural agency of the United Nations, in a state in India revealed that over 50% of participants avoided bullying by skipping classes, and a third stopped attending school entirely. In addition to being locked in a room, having their belongings taken, having unfavorable rumors spread about them, and being threatened with rape, they also experienced beatings, kicks, and groping. The occurrence of high dropout rates brings forth a multitude of adverse outcomes, affecting not only the individuals who abandon their education but also society as a whole. Addressing these underlying issues is crucial in reducing dropout rates and providing equal educational opportunities for all students.

### **Phenomenon of Bullying**

Schools, according to UNICEF (2018), are the most critical institutions in children's lives. It ranks second only to family and home as the foundation upon which children construct their future. Children are thought to be safe at schools from various dangers and exploitation.

However, with violence being so prevalent nowadays, children at school are also profoundly impacted emotionally, psychologically, and socially. To protect students from the long-term

effects of school violence, efforts must be made to rid schools of this hazard. However, school violence is currently widespread all over the world, posing significant threats to the well-being of students.

The following case serves as an illustration of the gravity of this issue: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold besieged the Columbine High School on April 20, 1999. Twelve schoolchildren were killed, and more were injured. Even though they committed suicide in the midst of their conflict with the police, the entire episode generated a lot of discussions. A lot of people believe that one of the main causes of Columbine High School massacre is school bullying. However, it is important to note that this incident took place in the United States of America (US). India has more stringent gun laws than the US, where the Second Amendment guarantees the right to bear arms. However, just because something is more difficult doesn't mean it can't be done. It is predicted that students will eventually take drastic measures in response to bullying and may even witness an Indian version of the Columbine tragedy (Bachchan, n.d.).

Thus, with a similar focus on intentionality is the other subset of aggression school bullying. Although bullying has been widely studied in recent decades, it has never been a new concept. It has always existed among us but only gathered attention in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While systematic research on bullying was infrequent before the 1970s, specific characteristics of bullying could still be identified. The phenomenon of bullying in individuals has been documented in literature pertaining to social history and archival records from the 18th and 19th centuries in several nations, including the United Kingdom, Japan, and Korea. Based on the information presented in these records, it can be observed that instances of bullying in the past were often prompted by

various characteristics of the victims and typically manifested as physical harassment and acts of isolation (Koo, 2007).

Even though the earliest documents date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a long gap before it was considered a serious issue again. The major contributor to the modern research of bullying dates back to the 1970s when questions about bullying were considered in Scandinavia. Thus, the studies on bullying have significantly developed and taken diverse approaches by considering the different social contexts since the late 1970s (Koo, 2007). The phenomenon of bullying during that particular era was more about physical harassment related to strong isolation, extortion, or death. Thus, bullying was characterized as one or a few physically strong boys harassing the weaker ones (Koo, 2007). However, it is essential to understand that bullying was then called “mobbing” (Pikas, 1989). Mobbing describes the behavioral pattern of collectively harassing a victim (Koo, 2007). The collective reaction to the victim can be because the perpetrators share similarities in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to a large degree (Lindzey, 1954, as cited in Koo, 2007). However, bullying differs from mobbing as it comprises a single individual attacking an individual or a group, as well as a group of individuals attacking an individual or a group (Pikas, 1989). Thus, mobbing can be considered a subset of bullying (Koo, 2007).

The most popular questionnaire currently used across different nations was given by Olweus (Olweus, 1978, 1993). In his questionnaire, Olweus explains bullying as follows: The term "bullying" is used to describe a situation in which a young individual is subjected to derogatory and offensive remarks by another kid, a young person, or a collective of young individuals. It encompasses various forms of physical aggression, such as hitting, kicking, threats, and psychological tactics, including confinement, the circulation of derogatory messages, social

isolation, and similar behaviors. Instances of such occurrences are known to transpire regularly, posing a formidable challenge for young victims to safeguard themselves against bullying effectively. Frequently subjecting a young person to derogatory teasing can also be classified as a form of bullying. However, it does not constitute bullying when two individuals with similar physical capabilities occasionally have conflicts or disagreements (Whitney & Smith, 1993). This questionnaire, even though one of the most popular, only mentions the different forms of bullying, frequency, and asymmetry in power.

The denial of education to millions of children and young individuals constitutes a violation of their fundamental rights. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019-a), a survey by Plan International, conducted in 144 countries, revealed that 246 million children and adolescents were found to experience violence around and in school every year. Additionally, a recent report by UNESCO (2023) has determined that over 30% of students worldwide have been identified as victims of bullying. This data suggests that school bullying can be regarded as a highly prevalent issue on a global scale (UNESCO, 2019-a). The report also confirms that 32% of students (i.e., one in three students) are victims of bullying at least once a month. Boys are often victims of physical abuse, whereas girls are psychological bullying. It is also reported that girls are bullied disproportionately, mainly those perceived as not conforming to the prevailing social, gender, and sexual norms (UNESCO, n.d.). Though students are bullied differently, the most common reason is because of the victim's physical appearance, followed by race, nationality, and color (UNESCO, 2019-a). It has been identified that children with disabilities and those who are transgender, gay, and lesbian were found to have a high risk of being bullied (Dawkins, 1996; Hunter, 1990; Rigby, 2002).

Bullying is thus characterized by aggressive behavior with the intention of causing distress or injury to others (Olweus, 1993). The phenomenon commonly referred to as bullying is a recurring occurrence characterized by an inequitable distribution of power or dominance between the individual being targeted and the individual engaging in aggressive behavior (Limber, 2002; Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying manifests in various ways: social exclusion, physical aggression involving teasing and derogatory language, victimization based on religious beliefs, disabilities, ethnic background, racial identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Additionally, cyberbullying occurs through electronic means such as text messaging, email, and various social media platforms. According to a study conducted by Nansel et al. (2001), it has been found that instances of bullying are prevalent throughout various groups, irrespective of factors such as racial group, socio-economic background, and population density. This includes individuals residing in rural, suburban, and metropolitan environments.

According to Gordon (2019), four distinct types of bullying have been identified by researchers based on a thorough analysis of bullying. The most obvious kind of bullying is physical, in which the victim is intimidated and controlled by the bully's use of force. This kind is more common in schools and is more straightforward to recognize. In contrast, relational bullying involves the target being shunned from a group, having falsehoods spread about them, etc., is frequently ignored. Bullying is found to be used more frequently by girls than by boys. In verbal bullying, the bullies inflict harm, denigrate, and dehumanize the victim through insults. Bullying typically occurs when adults are not present. Similarly, bullies harass, threaten, and humiliate their targets by taking advantage of the anonymity and distance afforded by online platforms. Because there is little chance of being discovered, they turn to cyberbullying because it feels safe and allows them to say things they otherwise would not. The setting in which bullying takes

place can reveal the type of bullying behavior. Bullying can happen at home, on school property, outside the school, or even on a cell phone. Thus, it is safe to say that the relationships that are made in school are what lead to bullying (Calmaestra et al., 2016).

### **Definition of Bullying**

The word ‘definition,’ according to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), means a statement that explains the meaning of a word or phrase while describing its features and limits. A definition, thus, has the potential to provide clarity and act as a compass in providing potential directions for any reader to proceed (Open Oregon Educational Resources, n.d.).

Olweus (1993) provided a widely recognized and frequently referenced description encompassing other overlooked characteristics. This definition serves as a valuable tool for examining the prevalence of a phenomenon and facilitating cross-cultural comparisons while also carrying significant implications for both academic research and practical applications. The researcher delineated three primary attributes defining bullying: negative actions, repetition, and power imbalance (Cheng et al., 2011). However, not all the researchers agree with the above definition. According to the findings of Guerin and Hennessy (2002), few researchers propose that a bully's behavior does not have to be motivated by the intention to cause harm or hurt to the victim to be classified as bullying. The categorization of an action as bullying may be contingent upon the victim's subjective interpretation of the perpetrator's behavior. The further argument is that the behavior need not necessarily be repeated if one incidence is sufficient to cause long-lasting fear in the victim (Monks & Smith, 2006).

Notably, the definition provided analyses the physical actions that bring out psychological effects but do not encompass the moral dimension. Emphasizing the moral aspect, Besag (1989)

defined bullying as “a behavior which can be defined as the repeated attack – physical, psychological, social or verbal – by those in a position of power, which is formally or situationally defined, on those who are powerless to resist, to cause distress for their gain or gratification.” Thus, the understanding of bullying has come a long way, from physical strength to oppress or harass someone to adding moral components to the definitions. However, the problem with the definition does not stop here.

Ahmed et al. (2022) define school bullying as interpersonal aggression directed towards individuals within educational institutions or extracurricular settings, whereby individuals or collectives of students exploit their authority to inflict harm upon others or specific groups. With students being the primary benefactors of any research on school bullying, it is vital to note that they contradict the researchers’ definition. The students’ definitions varied as they referred to the actions as “unintended” or “without any cause” (Cheng et al., 2011; Monks & Smith, 2006).

With school bullying being a culture-specific phenomenon, exploring the unique features of bullying across different cultures is essential. It is also crucial to analyze whether school bullying has manifested in the same way as stated in the definition in a given nation and over a period of time. If the behavior has evolved differently, then it is vital to analyze the change and redefine the behavior based on the needs of the time (Koo, 2007). With almost half-an-century-long research in school bullying, the current research is plagued for various reasons – with a lack of proper consensus on terminology and definition being significant contributors (Evans & Smokowski, 2016).

Understanding the importance of a universal definition, the National Academies (2016), in their report, noted that “a lack of consistent definition hinders our ability to understand the true magnitude, scope, and impact of bullying over time” (Gladden et al., 2014). Though the committee has provided directions to navigate, a true definition has not been conceived. Even though there has been a fair share of attempts have been made to understand school bullying by analyzing the age difference, gender difference, student-parent, and student-teacher (Byrne et al., 2016; Monks & Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2002), varied terms used instead of a universal one has marked difficulty in pursuing to understand the behavior. This adds to the complexity and marks an ongoing challenge to compare the results across the studies and amalgamates the measurement of bullying and aggression (Evans & Smokowski, 2016).

Additionally, in their study, Vessey et al. (2014) discovered a scarcity of evidence that substantiates the reliability, validity, and responsiveness of current measures used to assess youth bullying. This finding underscores the necessity for further evaluation of the definitions to establish the psychometric properties of these measures and carries substantial implications for the assessment of youth bullying as well as the development and evaluation of interventions implemented within educational settings. According to the literature conducted by Cascardi et al., (2014), the absence of a clear definition of bullying can have negative consequences. In such cases, students who witness bullying episodes and the victims themselves may feel deterred from reporting these incidents. Additionally, they may also express disagreement with the classification of their behaviors as bullying as determined by teachers. Hence, it is possible to approach all acts of aggression similarly, even if significant data supports the effectiveness of comprehensive prevention programs implemented at the school level, explicitly addressing bullying incidents (e.g., Olweus, 2005).



Given the identified constraints, the researcher conducted a scoping review, and the following definition is proposed: School bullying is defined as any behavior perpetrated by a student or group perceived to possess strength, with the aim of deriving gratification, and with the deliberate intention of inflicting physical, psychological, emotional, moral, or spiritual harm. This harm may manifest in various forms, including physical, verbal, relational, and/or cyberbullying, and is directed toward a student perceived to be weaker based on differences in social status, identification, and belief. Importantly, this harm is inflicted without due regard for the victim's opinions and emotions and occurs within or in close proximity to a school environment, perpetrated by the individual(s) who are recognized within the school community.

### **Bullying among Adolescents**

According to WHO (2021), interpersonal violence, which encompasses school violence such as bullying and sexual violence, has been identified as the fourth most significant cause of adolescent injuries and fatalities among adolescents. According to the global school-based student health survey, a significant proportion of teenage boys (42%) and adolescent girls (37%) were reported to have experienced exposure to bullying.

According to Horton et al. (2015), their research on the depictions of school bullying as reported by teachers and students revealed that the conventional understanding of school bullying, which primarily focuses on negative behaviors and deliberate aggression, fails to fully capture its complexity. The examination of school bullying within the adolescent demographic holds significance due to its correlation with a multitude of mental health concerns experienced by both individuals who are victimized and those who engage in aggressive behavior (Varela et al., 2021).

According to parental reports by Bischoff (2022), high school students experience the highest prevalence of school bullying compared to other age groups. Approximately 60% of parents with adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 reported instances of their children experiencing school bullying. However, it is worth noting that middle school-aged children were not much less affected by this issue. According to the findings, a majority of parents (56%) whose children fall between the age range of 11 and 13 years old indicated that their offspring had encountered instances of bullying.

The enduring consequences of being a victim of school bullying can exert a substantial influence on academic accomplishments, financial gains, and psychological well-being (Gorman et al., 2021). Gaining insight into the many forms of school bullying behaviors and how adolescents interpret and experience such acts of aggression can facilitate the development of strategies to safeguard individuals who fall victim to these harmful practices (Andrade et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a significant correlation exists between engagement in suicidal behaviors and encounters with school bullying, underscoring the imperative nature of preventive measures (Blakeslee et al., 2021). School bullying is a pervasive issue of international significance that raises apprehensions regarding the safety of children (Shahrour et al., 2020).

### **Phenomenon of Bullying in India**

The modern school system, according to Khan et al. (2022), is recognized as a progressive and proactive social organization that helps students acquire ethics and vital values for their total personal growth. The family system in India is rapidly changing, as evidenced by the exponential increase in the number of nuclear families leading fast-paced lives, as well as a general rise in cases of teenage pregnancies/abortions, marital discord, single parenthood, incidents of

alcoholism and drug abuse, and lifestyle diseases. As a result of these changes, the educational system is under increased social, psychological, and economic pressure to fulfill its goal of also providing a safe environment for kids. Anand (2010) believes children should grow up in a pleasant, pro-social atmosphere.

But unfortunately, India is not exempt from the problem of bullying in schools. The nature and gravity of the problem at hand in the context of India are demonstrated by the next two cases, as reported by the Times of India (Tiwari, 2022). A 15-year-old student at a Delhi private school told her therapist that she had endured years of bullying from her peers because of her height, skin tone, and academic standing. The teenager, who was being teased by some of her teachers and was struggling with low self-esteem, resorted to cutting her wrist. She was constantly bullied and felt “horrible about herself,” so the physical pain served as a diversion from her mental anguish.

However, on February 24, 2022, one of the most severe cases of bullying was exposed when a 16-year-old Class X student in Faridabad jumped from the top story of his apartment building. In a powerfully moving note, he left for his mother, he declared, "This school has killed me," revealing his anguish over the severe bullying he had endured and the institution's inability to put an end to it. This expanding scope of bullying is being attributed to children's easy access to unfiltered information. Because of their easy access to phones, children start consuming TV and social media at a young age, which leads to them becoming opinionated, individualistic, and intolerant of differences.

The Anti-Bullying Laws in India define bullying as “any repeated or intentional behavior that causes harm to another person physically or mentally. It includes acts of aggression, intimidation, and discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, disability, or sexual orientation” (School Dekho, 2023). The prevalence of bullying often differs because of the method chosen for the study and the type of intervention introduced. However, it is noteworthy that the prevalence of violent behavior among adolescents surpasses that of other countries (Mehta & Pilania, 2014). The occurrence of school bullying in India is a widespread concern, as evidenced by research findings that demonstrate elevated levels of bullying among adolescents attending educational institutions. The incidence of bullying in India varies between 25.6% and 43%, with verbal bullying being the predominant manifestation (Rana et al., 2018; Sethi et al., 2019). Bullying is linked to adverse outcomes for one engaging in aggressive behavior and the other being targeted, encompassing physical and psychological manifestations (Thakkar et al., 2021). However, the concept and dimensions of school bullying in India are still evolving.

### **Consequences of Bullying**

Bullying exerts a substantial impact on the mental well-being of youngsters. Research has indicated that individuals who have experienced bullying tend to exhibit adverse psychosocial functioning, which encompasses various negative outcomes such as elevated rates of depression, feelings of social isolation, heightened anxiety levels, contemplation of suicide, diminished self-worth, and increased absenteeism from educational institutions (Craig, 1998; Hodges & Perry, 1996; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996; Salmon et al., 2000; Slee, 1995).

Despite the extensive research conducted on the repercussions above, there remains an understudied alternative pathway of consequences. The study conducted by Ttofi et al. (2012)

showed that adolescents who experienced victimization reported the lowest scores in terms of self-concept, thus exhibiting an increased susceptibility to developing conduct problems and hyperactivity and are particularly prone to experiencing academic challenges. Additionally, this study examines existing research that underscores the adverse consequences of school bullying on children's internalizing behaviors, such as depression, and their externalizing behaviors, such as engaging in offending activities. According to Vivolo et al. (2011), scholarly investigations suggest that the repercussions of bullying last into adulthood, resulting in enduring adverse consequences such as engaging in antisocial conduct, substance misuse and addiction, and involvement in criminal activities.

This trajectory encompasses instances where certain individuals who have experienced victimization fall into a specific subgroup within the context of bullying known as "bully-victims," wherein the victim assumes the role of the attacker. According to Lee et al. (2021), individuals who experienced recurring instances of bullying were also discovered to be susceptible to antisocial conduct and depressed symptoms. According to the Center for the Advancement of Health (2003), it was observed that male victims displayed antisocial behaviors inside the school environment, while female victims exhibited such behaviors within their home setting. Lee et al. (2021) propose that the transition from victimhood to aggression can be comprehended by examining the diminished levels of life satisfaction exhibited by individuals who have experienced victimization. Furthermore, these individuals are regularly subjected to peer deviance and drug utilization, factors that can potentially augment their propensity towards aggressive conduct. According to Garaigordobil (2017), individuals exhibiting elevated levels of antisocial conduct demonstrate increased engagement in various roles within the context of bullying, including that of being victims. Furthermore, there is a correlation between the act of

carrying weapons and engaging in both perpetration and victimization of bullying (Valdebenito et al., 2017).

### **Need for the Study**

Thus, bullying in schools is not a new phenomenon (Tiwari, 2022). The Anti-Bullying Laws in India, according to School Dekho (2023), place a strong emphasis on the necessity of preventative measures to guarantee a secure learning environment for all students. It has mandated all educational institutions to create and execute anti-bullying policies that delineate the repercussions of bullying as well as preventive measures. It is also encouraging students to report bullying incidents to the authorities at their school or to their teachers. The law protects the victims and witnesses by guaranteeing confidentiality, and they have several options for obtaining justice, including the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), local police, and school administration. The offenders, if proven guilty of bullying, may be subjected to disciplinary measures, suspensions, or even expulsion from their educational institution. In extreme circumstances, the offender may be imprisoned and charged with a crime. Even with laws governing school bullying, the issue on hand is unfortunately not taken seriously and is frequently overlooked owing to a lack of awareness about its harmful effect on an individual's psychological and emotional health in India. As a result, bullies continue to discriminate against or harm people who vary in caste, gender, religion, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, medical conditions and disability, or physical appearance, among other things. Thus, this adds to the importance of studying school bullying in India (Youth Ki Awaaz, 2017).

According to Spadafora et al. (2022), one of the concerns stakeholders are attempting to address is, "Do adolescents use bullying for purposes not considered by researchers?" Thus, a qualitative study would assist in filling the gaps. A recent study suggests that bullying, generally, is employed sadistically for enjoyment and recreation with no other stated reasons (Runions et al., 2018). Sadistic aggression, however, may serve numerous unsurpassed aims beyond the current sense of gratification, including retribution and dominance seeking (Pinker, 2011). Thus, vengeance intentions appear to play a key role in bullying (Thornberg & Delby, 2019).

According to Sagar and Sen (2021), the concept and dimensions of school bullying have developed over the last few decades, and the research is still in its early stages. The segregation of social, regional, or cultural bullying is especially pertinent in the context of the Indian population, which comes from a variety of social, religious, and cultural origins. This is especially crucial in understanding victimization and the progression of mental disorders associated with bullying (Atwal & Wang, 2019; Rodriguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). This would help us understand bullying better and build more focused anti-bullying interventions. Thus, developing and implementing unique and culturally relevant measures to combat bullying at school becomes even more crucial.

Furthermore, while studies have provided factual evidence that bullying is goal-driven aggression that can be used to achieve a variety of evolutionary relevant goals, they do not provide thorough information about adolescents' perceptions of the functionality of bullying (Spadafora et al., 2022). As a result, a qualitative investigation may be utilized to look into unresolved questions. A more in-depth qualitative inquiry to identify a diverse set of aims would also improve our knowledge of key aspects of the context and social ecology of adolescent

bullying, as well as allow for the investigation of intentions that may not be readily accessible in response to quick, restricted quantitative responses.

Given the aforementioned necessity, the current study used a qualitative approach to comprehend the phenomena of bullying among adolescents in the Indian setting.



## **CHAPTER - II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A literature review is an essential element of research because it allows one to see what prior study has been carried out concerning a particular issue. Though there are several reasons for completing a literature review, one of the most important is to create a baseline of what is already known before delving deeper into the issue. Typically, the review is a search for previously published or presented information that may be relevant to projected new research.

While there may be other reasons for performing a literature study, the following are two significant results. First, analyze the present level of research - A search of pertinent sources of data can help discover what is already known about the issue and how thoroughly it has been investigated. Second, identifying crucial issues that require additional investigation - Aids in the discovery of fresh perspectives that need further examination by examining what has already been written on the topic at hand. Based on the evaluation of the literature, new research is conducted to supplement the current studies by attempting to find and address previously unresolved questions.

Thus, the current chapter summarizes, examines, and explains the known studies on the issue of school bullying. To facilitate the review process, relevant studies were identified using a variety of sources, including databases (ProQuest, PsycNet, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis) and metasearch engines (PubMed, Science Direct, Springer, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library). Google Scholar, Research Gate, and JSTOR were also used to find relevant papers. Several datasets were integrated into the study using terms such as "Bullying," "Peer victimization," "School bullying," "School violence," and "Traditional bullying."

The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyze and assess previous conceptual and empirical studies on the topic at hand. The chapter begins by discussing the many theories used to explain behavior. It is followed by investigating the methodological constraints and results for prospective studies that prior research has shown to identify and characterize the research gap. According to Cherry (2020), theories serve as the foundation for future research. They provide a structure for understanding thinking, human behavior, and development. A better comprehension of oneself and others is aided by a greater understanding of the hows and whys of behavior among human beings. Because theories are dynamic, they may change and adapt to fit new information based on current discoveries. While concepts are typically presented as inflexible and timeless, when new evidence is studied, they tend to change. New concerns and ideas can be investigated when emerging results are obtained and incorporated into the original theory. Thus, the importance of theories lies when they are used to generate hypotheses, which are subsequently tested. For a more profound comprehension of bullying dynamics, an overview of several theories is provided.

### **Theories of Bullying at the Individual Level**

#### ***Social Learning Theory***

Social learning theory argues that infants acquire behaviors when specific activities are repeated. Typically, witnessing violent or antisocial conduct would not alter someone's behavior. A child's conduct is likely to be impacted if they continually observe violent or antisocial behavior by others, such as their parents, siblings, and peers (Gleitman, 1981, as cited in Mishna, 2012). Thus, learning by observing is the foundation of the social cognitive theory of bullying. Human behaviors are created by a reciprocal interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental determinants. Appreciated aggression and unpunished aggressive behavior,

according to Bandura et al. (1960), are more likely to be replicated. Having parents who routinely dispute or fight, for example, provides a paradigm at home that children may replicate with classmates whom they perceive to be inferior in some manner (Baldry & Farrington, 2005). Thus, aggression can find its rewards through increasing dominance or social position, according to social learning theory. Proactive violence, for example, may contribute to increased popularity, social prestige, power, and other concrete advantages (Bernstein & Watson, 1997; Crick & Dodge, 1996; Fite & Colder, 2007; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003).

### ***Coercion Theory***

Coercion theory (Patterson et al., 1992; Patterson, 1982; Reid et al., 2002) is based on social learning and operant conditioning concepts. It explains how aggressive (bullying) and antisocial tendencies emerge in children by examining family dynamics and interactions. Based on extensive behavioral research on moment-to-moment interactions in families, the theory illustrates how inefficient parental reactions to poor conduct result in escalating unpleasant and aggressive behaviors in children in the immediate future. It also shows that many repetitions of such coercive cycles result in a steady degradation of aggressive behaviors in terms of diversity and intensity, which corresponds with a loss of parental control over aggression.

Thus, the theory is defined as a "model of the behavioral contingencies that explain how parents and children mutually 'train' each other to behave in ways that increase the likelihood that children will develop aggressive behavior problems and that parents' control over these aversive behaviors will decrease." These exchanges are distinguished by parental requests for compliance, the child's unwillingness to comply despite the rising complaints, and, eventually, the parent's submission. "The fundamental behavioral mechanisms by which aggression emerges and

stabilizes over development are coercive interactions" (Granic & Patterson, 2006; Patterson et al., 1984).

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Theory***

Cognitive behavioral therapy, according to Regehr (2001), is a therapeutic method based on the integration of cognitive and behavioral ideas. Although formerly thought to be independent cognitive and behavioral theories are linked by the shared element of "adhering to a learning model of human functioning." According to this theory, perception and interpretation of events influence our behavior, which further aids in understanding behavior in families and individuals (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002; Farmer et al., 2002). An individual's way of thinking influences how that person responds to the world in a reciprocal interplay between personal and environmental factors. According to González-Prendes and Resko (2012), it is believed that these "meanings, judgments, appraisals, and assumptions associated with specific life events are the primary determinants of one's feelings and actions in response to life events and thus either facilitate or hinder the process of adaptation."

### ***Attribution Theory***

According to Harvey and Weary (1984), attributions are fundamental to how people think about or perceive their surroundings, and they assist people in achieving insight and, consequently, control over their position. Attributions are said to "directly influence behavior or mediate the relationship between other factors and behavior" and pertain to how individuals make meaning of their own and others' activities. Individuals usually attribute causality to either internal or external factors. Although there are several theories of attribution, they all focus on "the 'how' and 'what' by which people process information in attempting to understand events, judge those events, and act on those events" (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008).

Individuals with hostile attribution bias impute hostile intent to others, particularly in unclear settings (Kenny et al., 2007; Nasby et al., 1980). Dodge and colleagues' research (Dodge et al., 1986; Dodge, 1980) demonstrated that aggressive and passive children both respond violently when they believe their peers' actions are maliciously hostile, but neither group of children acts aggressively when they believe their peers' actions are benign. These findings suggest that both aggressive and passive children can discern whether the intentions of others are hostile or benign and, more importantly, may respond accordingly.

However, significant discrepancies were detected in response to situations that children considered confusing. Aggressive children reacted angrily to ambiguous conditions, but passive children did not. Because of hostile attribution bias, the aggressive children misread the situation and exaggerated the hostile intent of others by behaving more aggressively. People make mistakes, but the child's hostile attribution of others' motivations may not be an error and may represent truth. If a person is frequently victimized by others, they may identify that they are a victim, indicating that the prejudice is correct. In this case, perceiver accuracy occurs because perception matches reality (Kenny et al., 2007). Furthermore, biases can lead to erroneous but favorable attributions when people make positive attributions, such as when it comes to friends or family.

However, when it comes to attribution biases, cultural variations must be taken into account. Specific factors like parental social influence, ethnic group affiliation, and peer experiences all play a role in contributing to biases in young individuals (Verkuyten, 2002).

### ***Social Skills Deficit Model***

According to the social skills deficit model, aggressive children have difficulty with some aspects of processing social data at one or more of the following stages of assessing and responding to social situations: (i) perception of social situations, (ii) comprehension of observed social cues, (iii) goal choice, (iv) response tactics generation, and (v) response choices (Sutton et al., 1999). For example, when it comes to the hostile attribution bias, these children are more prone than their passive peers to interpret ambiguous circumstances as hostile intent and violent behavior.

A counter-argument to the above viewpoint is that children who bully might possess sufficient adaptive abilities to thrive. This emphasizes the need to not assume that children who bully have unique needs. Indeed, bullies may be very skilled and exhibit highly developed characteristics that are desirable and necessary for relationship growth, such as social abilities and exuberance (Bukowski, 2003; Hawley et al., 2007). Such individuals, according to Sutton et al. (1999), may utilize their abilities for personal gain, such as leading a group, starting a gang, or manipulating others. Even though prior studies may have overestimated bullies' social cognitive skills, they are discovered to have the ability to adopt social views and decipher emotional information, as well as to select specific victims to bully to escape discovery and, consequently, repercussions.

### ***Theory of Mind***

Mishna (2012) claims that there is no obvious relationship between social skills or a "theory of mind" and bullying involvement. Theory of mind and social skills, on the other hand, are considered neutral since they may be used for prosocial or antisocial purposes (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001; Björkqvist et al., 2000; Gini et al., 2007; Hawley, 2003). One point of view holds that an individual's principles, rather than talents, determine behavior and provide insight

into bullying. This is consistent with Kohut's (1981) idea of empathy, which holds that empathy is "neutral" and can be employed for either reasonable or bad means or objectives. Although empathy implies knowing aspects of someone's inner feelings, it does not always involve using this information about others to benefit them.

### ***Theory of the Moral Self***

Children, according to Bandura (1986, 1991, 1993), must learn moral rules to guide their conduct. Individuals frequently act in ways that are compatible with their beliefs and boost their self-esteem. As a result, most people avoid acting in ways that violate their moral standards and diminish their sense of self. Moral disengagement, according to Bandura (2002), can serve as a link between an individual's ethical standards and their behavior, which may or may not be congruent with those principles. Boys who engage in bullying behavior tend to employ moral disengagement tactics more than their peers who do not bully, according to the findings (Almeida et al., 2001; Gini et al., 2007; Menesini et al., 2003).

### ***Humiliation Theory***

Subedi (2020) defines humiliation as "the act of humiliating or underestimating people." It typically occurs when a strong individual publically exposes another person's misery. However, humiliation undermines the fundamental human rights concept of respect for individuals and their dignity. It is consequently critical to appreciate humiliation since its impact impacts both the victim and the immediate surroundings instantly, eroding social cohesion and the school atmosphere. Bullies use humiliation as a strategy to bring down victims and undermine their self-esteem.

### ***Social Capital Theory***

Coleman (1988) describes social capital as a valuable asset that prioritizes children's current and future well-being. Interaction with one's social network accumulates social capital or the benefits gained from social relationships. Access to information, social credentials, social influence, and reinforcement of self-identity are all benefits of an individual's social ties with their network (Lin, 2001). It is worth emphasizing, however, that children with higher social capital resources and mutual benefits are more prone to participate in bullying behavior. Surprisingly, these benefits will also impact their social and emotional outcomes, including prosocial behavior. Adolescents with social ties to their classmates, for example, would have easier chances of attending after-school social activities where they may meet high-ranking peers. Being a part of a social group can help to validate one's self-worth and provide support (Evans & Smokowski, 2016). Thus, kids who see others in their social network engaging in prosocial activity and feel they would be approved or rewarded if they participate in prosocial behavior themselves are more likely to protect their friends in bullying situations. Evans and Smokowski (2015) demonstrated this by discovering that friends, teachers, ethnic identity, religious orientation, and future optimism were all predictors of prosocial bystander engagement.

### **Theories of Bullying in the Social Context**

#### ***Dominance Theory***

According to Mishna (2012), dominance theory is a relational variable that ranks people based on their access to resources. According to Long and Pellegrini (2003), toys in childhood and sex in adolescence are a few examples of "power" based on the developmental stage. Competition arises when a new group is formed or when new members join the group, creating tension in the group. Thus, the members fight for "power," and competition lessens once power and a



hierarchy are established. Aside from aggressiveness, dominating individuals may use nonaggressive social methods such as alliance formation and appeasement.

As a result, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) created the notion of social dominance theory. Bullying is an aggressive method used to achieve and preserve control for the one who bullies, according to dominance theory (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001). According to Subedi (2020), people bully others to obtain social status, wealth, and popularity. In the classroom, for example, some pupils may demonstrate dominating behavior with the assumption that others would adore them. They prefer to make coalitions with bullies as their leaders in such instances. Furthermore, these types of groupings are more prone to start harassing other kids or groups. People with certain leadership abilities may use their attractiveness and dominance over others to advance in social position or reputation and build power. Thus, guys who use a combination of aggressive and attachment strategies are valued higher by their male peers and desired more by their female peers (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001). Long and Pellegrini (2003) discovered that bullying is a method for achieving dominance, particularly among men. This supports the existence of high levels of social competence among individuals who harass and gain power.

### ***Developmental Theory***

The cognitive process of child growth and development highlights the theoretical framework of Developmental Theory. However, social systems are highly intertwined with development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cairns & Cairns, 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1994), for example, noted, "piecemeal analysis, fixed in time and space, of isolated aspects is insufficient and even misleading, for the elements of social status and structure are interdependent, organized into complex patterns, and subject both to random and lawful variation". Cairns and Cairns (1995) also stress the need of not ignoring "the feedback that exists between behavior and biology,

between individuals and peers, and between parents and their offspring." Thus, the emphasis is on the importance of expanding the idea of development to incorporate developmental changes across generations.

Bullying, according to this viewpoint, begins in early childhood when individuals seek to assert themselves at the expense of others to establish their social superiority. According to Rigby (2003), verbal and indirect forms of bullying tend to be more widespread in the early stages than direct and violent forms. However, not all the researchers agree with the same. According to Sharp et al. (1994), physical bullying is more widespread in early infancy and becomes less noticeable as the kid matures. Thus, this emphasizes the critical need to include socio-environmental influence into consideration.

When detecting and managing bullying, as well as devising interventions that target specific circumstances at each level of the system, the stage of development of the children who bully and are bullied must be properly recognized. Stevens et al. (2000) discovered that training programs that focus on the use of active listening to help victims benefit younger children, whereas questions of assertiveness against perpetrators benefit older students. This is supported by Smith and Shu's (2000) findings, which discovered that older children were more likely to report using successful bullying strategies, such as ignoring the attacker. Younger children, on the other hand, were more prone to use unproductive strategies such as crying or fleeing. Similarly, developmental components of the entire student populace, as well as school qualities must be considered, as these factors impact the type of victimization encountered by children and youth, as well as their reactions and impacts of victimization (Finkelhor, 1995; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Bullying was decreased in elementary schools but not in high schools, according to research that looked at a school-based anti-bullying intervention in 18 schools. The

researchers found that improved interventions in secondary schools were required, which accounted for both the children's developmental phases and components, as well as significant school elements (Stevens et al., 2000).

### ***Ecological Systems Theory***

An ecological systems framework helps in understanding the reciprocal influences of all components of an individual's environment on growth. According to this perspective, bullying processes are seen to transcend beyond the children who bully and are bullied. Bullying is observed in the social circumstances of the peer group, the classroom, the family, the school, as well as the greater community and society. Individual characteristics and development, as well as interactions between bullies and victims, must be considered alongside these levels and their reciprocal interactions (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Cairns & Cairns, 2013; Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Olweus, 1978, 1994).

"Interactions" refer to "interactions between actual people, such as child/parent, student/teacher, student/peers, or teacher/parent, as well as interactions within nested subsystems that influence development, such as the individual, family, community, and school" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2000; Sontag, 1996). Thus, all levels of the system interact and influence one another throughout time. Each person is embedded in an ecological framework of family and peer connections, which is nested inside neighborhoods, schools, and other institutions, operating within communities, society, and different tiers of government (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Subsystems range from 'the most intimate or individual (microsystem) to settings in which the child is a participant, such as a school and family (mesosystem), to settings in which the child may not specifically engage, such as interactions between the family and parents' companions

(exosystem), and, finally, to the culture or societal system, which includes predominant values and customs (macrosystem)' (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

A variety of theories may be utilized within an ecological systems framework to address system dynamics as well as interactions between layers. Even though the person is normally at the center of the ecological systems framework, Benbenishty and Astor (2005) have constructed a framework in which the educational institution is at the center. Indeed, this version stresses the usefulness and versatility of an ecological systems framework, as does the system's expansion to incorporate the "techno-microsystem" (Johnson, 2010), in recognition of the huge importance of communication technologies.

### ***Bullying - Relationship Problem***

Pepler and Craig (Craig & Pepler, 2007; Pepler et al., 2006) expanded on the systems ecology theory by emphasizing bullying as a relational issue rather than one associated with a single individual child's hostility or susceptibility. They assert that a child who bullies others frequently learns how to dominate and injure others by using power and rage. At the same time, the victim becomes progressively trapped in an abusive relationship from which he or she becomes progressively unable to escape. The unequal power dynamic between the bully and the victim is their distinctive feature, which tends to become irreversible over time. Bullying incidents are commonly viewed as a child who bullies is motivated by feelings of power as well as components such as peer attention. In contrast, the victim gets progressively disturbed, ashamed, and stigmatized, often in the company of others, increasing the child's sensitivity and isolation (Craig & Pepler, 2007; Cummings et al., 2006, Pepler et al., 2006)

### ***Theory of Response to Group and Peer Pressure***

Bullying may also be explained via the lens of peer pressure. It contends that bullying is better understood in the context of the entire school community's actions and attitudes. Students' perspectives, as well as those of other persons such as teachers and support professionals, influence how bullying happens in school.

According to this theoretical perspective, when bullying behaviors are explicitly or indirectly supported by peers, it encourages "bullies" to engage in more aggressive bullying. Bullies, on the other hand, will learn to behave nicer toward the victim if peers and others convince them that their behavior is socially inappropriate (Subedi, 2020).

### ***Organization Culture Theory***

According to Subedi (2020), most bullying tendencies are learned or acquired in the community, society, or even school, rather than being inherited. Bullying and school culture therefore have a bidirectional influence on each other by either fostering or preventing bullying (Goldweber et al., 2013). Because bullying has a detrimental influence on the school environment, parents and school employees are less likely to appoint an arbitrator to intervene on their behalf. It has been suggested that aiming to minimize or eradicate bullying in schools without changing school culture is practically difficult (Evans et al., 2014). As a result, it is vital to create a safe, collaborative, and openly caring environment. This is critical for school, where children devote greater amounts of time than with their parents because childhood is a period of significant behavioral effect.

### ***Theory of Restorative Justice***

Restorative justice theory, according to Gavrielides and Coker (2005), is defined as a criminal justice system that focuses on mending the harm caused by criminal activity. The emphasis is on restoring bullies via reconnection with victims and with society. As a result, it emphasizes that crime is more than merely breaking the law in society. This attempts to enable conversation between bullies, victims, and other relevant parties to reach a settlement that is satisfactory to all parties involved. This holds bullies accountable to others, such as parents, teachers, and the community as a whole. Furthermore, it seeks to teach bullies how to live law-abiding lives as an alternative to criminality. It helps to keep repeat offenders from causing more harm. This strategy's ultimate purpose is to achieve transformative changes in society by not only bringing justice to victims but also seeking to reform bullies and transition them from such aggressive habits to healthy citizens.

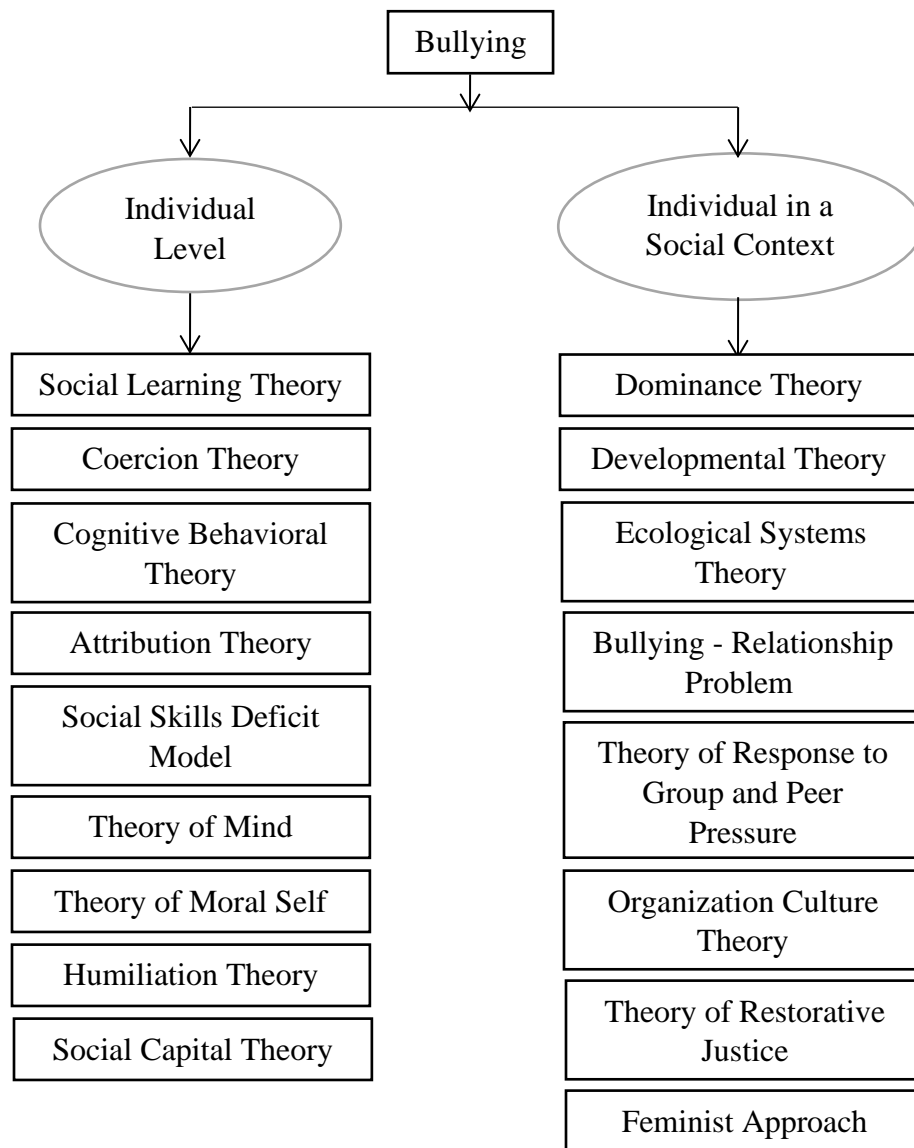
Academic research has shown that restorative justice theory benefits offenders by making them less likely to re-offend. It has the highest rate of victim satisfaction and offender responsibility in any justice system. Unlike other systems that primarily focus on victims, this technique encourages a new way of life for offenders rather than just stigmatizing or shaming them.

### ***Feminist Approach***

There are several points of view and definitions in the field of feminist thought (Archer, 2009). The underlying framework of feminist knowledge, on the other hand, is an openly political approach that sees the person as a social and political subject (Callaghan & Clark, 2006). The origins of relationship aggression, according to Currie et al. (2007), can be traced back to individual, aggressive girls or a systemic issue related to power. As a result, the meanness that exists within a society that encourages aggressiveness is referred to as 'emphasized femininity'

(Connell, 2013). As a culturally dominant way to 'do' girlhood, 'emphasized femininity' demands that girls be pretty, warns them about the dangers of being 'fat,' and urges them to behave in ways that attract male attention. It is underlined that, while girls may police the bounds of femininity through public talk about girls' appearance and sexual autonomy, they do so through a male gaze. This underscores the fact that guys do not need to be physically present to influence the behavior of girls but rather must be present 'in girls' heads' (Hey, 2001; Holland et al., 1992).

Figure 1. Theories on Bullying



To conclude, the above theories have explained and given a framework to comprehend the phenomenon of school bullying. They have analyzed school bullying in human behavior, thought, and development. They have also explained how the developmental process, family, peer, and society as a whole promote, foster, and prevent school bullying.

### **Understanding School Bullying**

Bullying, according to UNICEF (n.d.), is a pattern of behavior, not a single incidence. Bullying generally occurs among children who have a perceived higher social status or position of power, such as those who are more prominent, stronger, or popular. Bullying disproportionately affects the most vulnerable children. Children from disadvantaged groups, impoverished families, children with multiple gender identities, children with disabilities, or migrant and refugee children are usually among them. Bullying can take place in person or online. Bullying on social media occurs via Short Message Service (SMS)/text, instant messaging, email, or any other online channel where youngsters often participate. Because parents may not continually watch what their children do on these sites, determining whether or not they are influenced can be difficult.

Bullying is more prevalent than any other issue in schools. It has been demonstrated in studies to have unfavorable academic connections and to have an influence on students' well-being.

Bullying risk is influenced by a variety of factors, including students' perceptions of bullying.

Schools may address this problem by using evidence-based whole-school measures such as anti-bullying rules, social and emotional learning, bystander intervention, and peer support.

Psychologists can also offer expert advice on how to deal with school bullying. Understanding the nature and causes of bullying, as well as effective prevention techniques, can assist schools in taking effective action against this problem (Lynch, 2015; Purdy, 2015).



Bullying is one of the most pernicious school behaviors, endangering young people's self-concept, involvement in school, life, and general well-being (Burke, 2022). Thus, understanding school bullying is critical as it affects public health. Specific subgroups of adolescents, such as those with disabilities, youth of color, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or questioning (LGBTQ+) youth, are more likely to be bullied. It is critical to understand the various factors that lead to bullying, the risks and benefits of elevated engagement, and the components of practical solutions. Schools and communities may apply evidence-based policies to reduce bullying involvement by understanding the intersection and divergence between peer antagonism and bullying engagement and the developmental trajectories and risk factors involved with bullying. This can result in better short- and long-term outcomes for kids and a more positive school atmosphere and culture (Rose et al., 2022).

Approaching school bullying requires a variety of tactics. One strategy is to move the emphasis away from individual accountability and toward the institutional and social causes of damage (Lohmeyer & Threadgold, 2023). Bullying is seen as a type of social violence in this approach, which stresses the moral and emotive components of the issue. Another strategy is to establish whole-school measures that address bullying awareness, prevention, and management (Wurf, 2021). These tactics have been shown to considerably lower bullying levels while also providing an effective foundation for schools. Furthermore, positive psychology provides a strength-based approach to bullying prevention, emphasizing pro-social conduct and the implementation of practical solutions in schools (Burke, 2022). Humanizing interactions at school, promoting optimistic viewpoints, and developing leadership abilities in individuals are also vital (Saiko et al., 2022). Schools can, thus, play an important role in bullying prevention by improving

monitoring, enforcing appropriate consequences, offering counseling, and adopting written policies (Suroyo et al., 2022).

### **Roles Involved in Bullying**

Bullying prevention initiatives begin with providing a knowledge of the many roles involved in bullying to improve students' attitudes and behavior. The following are the many roles engaged in the bullying process: Victim (the victim of bullying), Perpetrator and accomplices (the bullies), Ally (the target's defender), Bystander (a person who is aware of what is going on), Audience (who gathers and watches), and Cheerleader (actively promotes violence).

Each of these positions is a personal choice, and each influences the persistence of bullying. The perpetrator, cheerleader, or ally takes the lead and publicly encourages or discourages bullying. They make the decision to act. The bystander and audience play what looks to be a passive position but is not. They make the deliberate decision to do nothing. Taking no action in either direction is not a neutral attitude. Inaction is a choice to let the bullying continue.

### ***Initiator or Bully***

Students who harass others frequently do it to obtain prestige and respect among their classmates. When they intimidate their targets and when the peer group colludes by not questioning the starter or reporting the bullying to the staff, their bullying behavior is encouraged.

Bullying may be beneficial since it raises the initiator's social status while reducing the targets. A school's culture heavily influences the amount to which this occurs.

### ***Target or Victim***

Bullying literature has identified two types of targets (Olweus, 1993). The first, and by far the most numerous, grouping is passive targets. These children are typically apprehensive, insecure, and lack assertiveness. Of course, there is a symbiotic link between these attributes and being bullied. That is before being targeted, these individuals may be insecure and worried, and these qualities are likely to worsen as a result of the bullying.

A second, smaller class of targets, referred to as "provocative" targets, display both worried and aggressive behavior (Olweus, 1993). These youngsters may also be referred to as hyperactive. They are frequently harassed and despised by their classmates as a whole. Provocative targets frequently bully youngsters in their vicinity. As a result, they might be targets as well as bullies. Students of all ages are at a higher risk of being bullied (i.e., being targets) for a variety of reasons, including being unassertive or withdrawn (e.g., detached students with low self-esteem), differing from the vast majority of culture of an educational institution in terms of ethnicity, cultural or faith, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socioeconomic status; having a disability, special education needs, or mental health issues, or academic achievement (being perceived as a high or low achiever), or having recently transitioned into a school (through natural progression through schools, changing to a new school because of behavioral issues at a previous school, or moving to the area from another city or country).

### **The Process**

- The *perpetrator and accomplice* choose a victim who they believe is weaker and more vulnerable than they are. They decide to tease, belittle, threaten, dominate, and harm the victim before cornering and attacking.

- *Cheerleaders* actively promote the attack by vocally congratulating the bully, making suggestions for what to do to the victim, laughing and applauding, and verbally insulting the victim. The offender and the cheerleaders feed off one another, escalating the violence. Cheerleaders are readily tempted to cross the line and become accomplices.
- A *bystander* is aware of or sees the bullying while the *audience* stands by and watches it occur. In both circumstances, they take no action to assist the victim. Their decision permits the violence to continue, and their silence turns them into collaborators.
- An *ally* or defender is a bystander or audience member who decides to intervene to halt the bullying. It might even be a supporter or accomplice who changes their mind and recognizes that what they are doing is wrong. The ally intervenes and advocates for the victim by ordering the bully to stop, assisting the victim in getting away from the situation, and reporting what happened to an adult.

### **Fluid Nature of Bullying**

Every student, according to Bullyingfrenz (n.d.), can play at least one of these roles (target, instigator, or bystander) at some point throughout their school career. Every student will transfer at least once, escalating their chances of being targeted. Pupils can be in two categories at the same time. For example, a student may be both a target and an initiator. This is why it is vital to engage every kid in bullying prevention efforts and to ensure they understand their rights as well as their duties. Everyone can do their part to keep bullying at bay. Bystanders must recognize that successfully responding (by discouraging, interfering with, or reporting bullying) may be a highly effective technique for minimizing and even avoiding, the impacts of bullying.

## **Types of Bullying**

Bullying, according to Vinney (2021), is most often recognized in its verbal and physical forms of aggressive conduct that schoolchildren suffer from their classmates. However, it is recognized in predominately four types: physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. These sorts of bullying overlap, and a bully may attack a victim in multiple forms.

### ***Physical Bullying***

This involves inflicting hurt, creating damage, or taking someone's property. It includes striking, kicking, pinching, spitting, biting, tripping, shoveling, or threatening another person, using crude or nasty hand signals, touching someone who doesn't want to be touched, making someone scared of being hurt, stealing, or damaging property.

### ***Verbal Bullying***

This includes saying or writing harsh things. Calling others names, malicious mocking, making fun of someone, being hurtfully sarcastic, passing crude remarks, insults, or jokes about an individual and their family because of their ethnic background, heritage, faith, disability, or sexuality, rude remarks about someone's body or physical characteristics such as their weight or height, detrimental comments about the way someone looks or behaves, obscene sexual remarks, taunting, and threatening to cause harm are all examples of verbal abuse.

### ***Relational Bullying***

This involves jeopardizing someone's affiliations or reputation. It includes ignoring or leaving an individual out on intent, telling others not to be companions with someone, propagating rumors about someone, damaging relationships, and friendships, humiliating someone in public, disclosing data or pictures that will damage the other person, and telling lies or narratives about someone to make individuals dislike them.

It is crucial to note that bullying doesn't happen if any of these types of bullying acts occur only once or as part of a disagreement between equals (however wrong). Bullying happens when these actions happen (or have the potential to happen) repeatedly. Bullying, on the other hand, is not characterized solely by its acts.

### ***Cyberbullying***

Cyberbullying is described as bullying (relational and verbal bullying, as well as physical threats) that incorporates the use of digital technology in some way. It is becoming more prevalent as technology is becoming more ubiquitous in young people's lives. Because of the accessibility of technology, cyberbullying could happen at any time – even a student's own home may not even be a haven from bullying. While it happens regularly at home and after school, its impact may also be seen at school.

Students are increasingly communicating with others in ways that parents are unaware of and are unsupervised. Because of the nature of technology, digital material may be quickly shared and accessed by a huge number of people and is hard to delete entirely. Although cyberbullying shares certain traits with 'traditional' bullying, it can be more complicated and harder to cope with. An offensive image or a disparaging word, for example, might quickly spread over the internet. The recurrence noticed in offline bullying is worsened by the material reaching a much broader audience and exerting a much more lasting effect than its creator may have anticipated. Regardless of age, physical strength, or social status, the capacity to attack someone online while staying anonymous creates a power imbalance. It is critical to emphasize that it can also occur between people who have never met in person and have no shared friends.

Unlike physical bullying, it has fewer constraints. This is due to the ease with which digital information can be shared, viewed, spread, and stored in multiple locations; automatically

created and shared, stored in a way that only specific groups can access; uploaded, and shared at any time of any hour of the day or night; and left as an indestructible record (for example, photos posted on the internet). Cyberbullying, unlike other forms of bullying, has particular characteristics that make it challenging to deal with in isolation. Imposing restrictions on technologies only sometimes helps it. Rather than restricting access, it is more helpful to foster an awareness of safe and responsible online conduct and teach youngsters how to deal with unfavorable online experiences.

### **Occurrence of Bullying**

Bullying may take place both in person and online. Physical, verbal, and relational bullying can occur in person; verbal, relational, and physical assaults and threats can occur online. Children who are bullied online are often bullied in person.

Bullying can be evident to others (overt) or hidden from those who aren't participating in it actively (covert). Overt bullying encompasses both physical activities like striking or kicking and verbal abuse like name-calling or insults. Bullying that is not visible to others or occurs while no one is looking can be cruel. It might include using repetitive hand gestures, whispering, weird or terrifying glances, excluding someone, or restricting where they can sit or who they can talk to. At times, the initiator can disregard it as “merely having fun”.

Cyberbullying is usually concealed because it takes place on devices, websites, and programs that parents are unaware of or do not have access to. It's also easy to remain anonymous. The barriers between the physical and online worlds are becoming increasingly blurred as young people become increasingly dependent on digital technologies. As a result, it is necessary to evaluate all possibilities and take all complaints of bullying carefully. It is important to recognize that bullying can occur among friends at times. Some children and teenagers may be

hesitant to seek treatment because of friendship loyalty and the complexities of an on-again, off-again connection.

### **Reasons Why Bullying Occurs**

Bullying can happen for a multitude of reasons. Individuals are often bullied because they are distinctive, intelligent, or popular. It can be caused by variances in skin color, gender identity, religious beliefs, impairments and abilities, weight, height, or anything else that distinguishes one child from another. Sometimes they're simply at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Students who bully may have difficulties and be depressed. They may be bullying others as a remedy for a lack of attention, influence, or affection in their own lives. These students crave power and appear to enjoy causing harm to others. They typically do not understand the feelings of the people they bully.

Bullies typically bully to dominate people and elevate their social status. Bullying is usually driven by the idea that such behavior is acceptable. They may be oblivious that they are bullying, or they may be unaware of how much hurt and anxiety they are causing. Some common reasons for bullying others are seeking a sense of power among peers, gaining attention or becoming popular, being scared, so they attempt to frighten others to hide their feelings, being discontented and choosing to take it out on others, experiencing bullying themselves, getting what they want, mimicking someone they admire, making themselves less miserable when they are feeling bad about themselves, or being envious of someone else because they are convinced another person is better than them.

While bullying can affect every student, certain kids are more likely to be bullied than others. Students with disabilities or special educational needs, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Intersex (LGBTI) students and those suspected of being LGBTI, and students from cultures,



races, or religions other than the dominant culture, race, or religion of the school are all vulnerable groups.

### ***Prejudice***

Bullying can also involve children remarking on and assessing the personal characteristics and differences of other pupils. These unfavorable remarks might be about appearance, weight, sex, gender, sexuality, ability or disabilities, culture, race, religion, and socioeconomic position. This sort of bullying is connected to preconceptions that kids acquire about the significance of variety in the community from their family group and larger social community.

### ***Fitting In***

Social norms exist both among student groups and across the educational institution. School workers and other adults in the community, including parents model the norms of the school. Students who 'stand out' as being different from the norms of their social group are more likely to be bullied. Students may use bullying to enforce group standards on how to dress and act. Student group norms and opinions on who has a "higher" social status are influenced by society's notions about power and prestige. This occurs as children and teenagers learn and copy the norms, attitudes, and prejudices of their school and the greater community.

### **Predictors of Bullying**

Numerous studies have been undertaken to study the causes of bullying and victimization. Bullying occurs in a social situation where people are constantly interacting with one another. As a result, it is critical to consider both individual and contextual factors.

### ***Bullies***

According to Cook et al. (2010), the most important predictors of bullying for bullies were externalizing behavior, which was connected with bullying favorably, and other-related cognitions, which were associated with bullying negatively. Other factors showing modest associations, indicating a diminished influence, were self-related cognitions, chronological age, and internalizing behavior. The contextual factors that had the greatest impact on bullying were community characteristics and peer influence, both of which were negatively linked.

### ***Victims***

According to Cook et al. (2010), the most important predictors of victimization for victims were peer status and social competency, and both were negatively associated (that is, as status and competence increased, the probability of being a victim decreased dramatically). Age, other-related cognitions (thoughts, ideas, or attitudes about others, such as normative beliefs about others, empathy, and perspective-taking), and academic success were all poor predictors, signaling little to no influence. Positive school climate and community characteristics, which were both shown to be negatively related to victimization, were identified as contextual predictors of victimization. Peer impact and family/home environment were unsuccessful predictors.

### ***Bully-victims***

According to Cook et al. (2010), the greatest individual-level predictors of bully-victims were self-related cognitions and social abilities, both of which were negatively associated with bully-victim status. Externalizing behavior, internalizing behavior, and further-related cognitions were three other variables that somewhat predicted victim status. The least effective predictors were family environment and peer status. Peer influence, family/home circumstances, and school

climate were all context-specific variables that were negatively associated with the social standing of the bully-victim.

### **Impacts of Bullying**

Being a bully, victim, or a bystander, all have negative consequences. Gini and Pozzoli (2009) did a meta-analysis on bullying and psychosomatic issues. They observed that kids who were victimized, bully-victims, and bullies were more likely to have psychosomatic disorders than their classmates who were not engaged.

Physical symptoms (headache, stomachache, backache, dizziness) and psychological symptoms (bad temper, nervousness, low mood, trouble falling asleep, morning fatigue, feeling isolated, loneliness, and feeling helpless) are prevalent among bullied youth and bystanders (Due et al., 2005; Salmon et al., 1998; Williams et al., 1996). Victims and spectators are also more likely to have negative school attitudes, behavioral problems, difficulties focusing on academics, worse grades, avoidance of activities, and nightmares (Ferguson et al., 2007; Polanin et al., 2012).

Victimization can also have a negative influence on academic activity, causing a victim to miss class and perform poorly (Limber, 2003; Seeley et al., 2011). Bullying also raises one's chances of being aggressive later in life by one-third (Ttofi et al., 2012).

While bullies have fewer mental health and social problems than the victims (Ferguson et al., 2007; Salmon et al., 1998), data suggests that being a bully increases the likelihood of future violence by around two-thirds (Ttofi et al., 2012). It significantly increases the probability of being convicted of a criminal offense as an adult, of drug use, and of having a low employment position when compared to non-involved peers (Farrington & Ttofi, 2011; Olweus, 1997; Sourander et al., 2006; Ttofi et al., 2011). They are also more prone to have sexual relationship problems and become prone to consuming drugs (Cook et al., 2010).

Bullying can have long-term negative consequences for individuals. As adults, victims exhibited a higher prevalence of agoraphobia, generalized anxiety, and panic disorder than non-victims (Copeland et al., 2013). They are also more likely to be bullied at work (Schäfer et al., 2004).

While bullies were more likely to acquire depression, panic disorder, agoraphobia, and suicidality as young adults, they were also more likely to develop antisocial personality disorder.

Cook et al. (2010), citing several studies, state that bully-victims have the greatest risk of hardship because they are more likely to carry weapons, be jailed, and continue to be hostile and aggressive to others.

### **Preventive Measures**

Bullying prevention and response need a dedication to creating a safe environment in which children may grow socially and academically without fear. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2011) suggests that students use the following measures to decrease bullying:

#### ***Reporting Bullying and Cyberbullying***

Bullying must be reported to a trustworthy parent or adult by children. Children typically do not report cyberbullying because they are concerned that their phones or laptops will be confiscated by their parents. Parents should not confiscate their children's phones as a result of bullying charges but rather explore the situation by offering a safe space for the youngster to express their feelings. It is vital that youngsters understand that bullying is wrong and should be dealt with by an adult.

#### ***Restraining from Bullying Back***

Even though it may be tough not to retaliate, it is important for the students to realize that two wrongs do not equal a right. Instead of exhibiting any signs of anger or sadness, the children should move away or politely tell the bully to cease bullying.

### ***Avoiding Being Alone***

The most important of all, when possible, children are suggested to avoid circumstances where there are no other students or teachers. It is advised that they go to the restroom with a friend or have lunch together. It is recommended that kids report bullying of themselves or other students to their teacher, coach, administrator, and/or parents.

### **Qualitative Studies on Bullying in India**

Malik and Mehta (2016) in their study found that boys were more likely than girls to participate in bullying behavior, according to teachers. The data also revealed that when provoked or mistreated, boys were more likely to behave aggressively (verbally/ physically). Girls, on the other hand, admitted that they engaged in covert aggressive behavior when their reputation or image had been tarnished if they were emotionally injured in a relationship. However, occurrences of physical punishment at home were found to be similar across the two genders. The study employed structured interviews with class teachers and semi-structured interviews with six students in their study on a random sample of 137 adolescents from a coed school aged 12-14 years from an Indian school.

In their study on bully-victims, Kodapally et al. (2021) found that children with overprotective parents were shown to be more vulnerable to bullies and to have less competent social skills.

Despite having a well-adjusted familial connection, they were more likely to suffer from social anxiety, making them easy prey for bullies. Parents who used permissive or blind parenting to support their children in all circumstances were additionally determined to be raising a bully. As a result, parents of victims and teachers observed reluctance on the side of the bully's parents.

The study also identified two categories of teachers: those who interfere, either by physical punishment, counseling the bully, or reporting to parents, and those who do not. The most often

reported reasons for not interfering in bullying behavior were a lack of knowledge of bullying as a harmful behavior, insufficient competency to spot a bully, teachers' severe academic burden, and the expectation that kids will outgrow bullying. However, physical punishment and expulsion from school were proven to be unsuccessful in preventing bullying since there was no change in social behavior. Furthermore, it was discovered that schools feared that corporal punishment, in addition to being ineffectual, would bring unfavorable publicity to the institution. One of the study's primary results was that the schools lacked explicit anti-bullying policies and monitoring procedures. However, it was discovered that some of the teachers had received child psychology training via a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Furthermore, the victims were found to carry a belief that they could deal with bullying and that it was stupid to disclose it to their parents or instructors. Furthermore, while victims complained of being mocked by their classmates, an underlying notion of reporting bullying to parents and instructors as a show of weakness was seen. These occurrences were also said to have traumatized them. The children, on the other hand, indicated that they grew to acclimate to it. At some time, adolescents learn to accept the bullying and acquire a sense of powerlessness because they believe the bully is more powerful than them. The study employed in-depth interviews with four key informants: one female class teacher, two male adolescents aged 13 years (bully-victims), and a female parent (mother of a bully-victim).

Using a focus group discussion, Nazir (2019) discovered that the majority of the participants had a hazy understanding of bullying, but upon additional discussion determined that the students were not aware of terminology but were aware of the behavior and had experienced it themselves. Participants did, however, express ignorance and misunderstandings concerning bullying. The adolescents also expressed difficulty distinguishing between teasing or jokes from

classmates or friends and bullying. Students also believed that moderate bullying or friendly play, such as teasing or name-calling, was not detrimental and would not have an impact on academic progress. However, if the severity of bullying is higher, such as beating or stealing money, adolescents find it detrimental and affects people in a variety of ways. Thus, students typically evaluated the magnitude of any behavior to identify it as bullying. Finally, many students implied that bullying was motivated by their physical appearance. The most prevalent grounds for bullying include but are not limited to, being skinny or overweight, wearing tested glasses, or being tall or short. The study was carried out on 11th and 12th-standard students. Shiba et al. (2018) found that more boys reported bullying others and being bullied. The most prevalent type of bullying emerged to be spreading rumors, followed by exclusion from the group. Following hitting, shoving, and punching, just a few respondents reported bullying in the form of harsh SMS messages received from their bullies. Furthermore, both bullies and those being bullied have been found to have lower psychosocial adjustment than their peers. The study employed a predesigned pretested semi-structured schedule to measure bullying in their cross-sectional study.

Rana et al. (2022) investigated beliefs and opinions about bullying, as well as strategies to reduce it in schools, using a pretested guide, and discovered that the family environment had a significant influence on bullying, with overpampered youngsters with overprotective parents being easy targets. Furthermore, they discovered that power dynamics were relevant, with seniors bullying juniors and students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds bullying those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Bullying is reported to be more common in less monitored areas such as unoccupied classrooms, restrooms, hallways, buses, and playgrounds. They also discovered that teachers and school officials ignore the problem, with teachers failing

to take harsh action against bullies. The most common forms of bullying were found to include name calling, hitting, tossing and ripping books, and creating videos of victims. Bullying has been linked to behavioral issues in both bullies and victims, as well as anger issues in bullies. Preventive strategies proposed include raising awareness and holding video sessions about bullying, training sessions for parents and teachers on how to deal with bullying efficiently, and monitoring high-risk areas. The data collection was carried out using six focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 30 participants, including two FGDs with parents (n = 10), two with teachers (n = 10), and two with students (n = 10).

### **Recent Developments in the Area of School Bullying**

Recent advances in the field of school bullying include an emphasis on the long-term effects of bullying victimization and perpetration on mental health, both in childhood and adulthood (Wang, 2023). The relevance of whole-school interventions in minimizing bullying victimization is also emphasized; however, their effectiveness in reducing bullying perpetration is limited (Ma et al., 2023). Furthermore, research has pointed out the need to address the unique risk factors encountered by disadvantaged groups, such as adolescents with disabilities, youth of color, and LGBTQ+ children, who are more likely to be bullied (Rose et al., 2022). Strategies for combating bullying in schools should include raising teacher awareness of the problem and establishing a safe place for students to voice their negative experiences (Sagar & Sen, 2021). In addition, there is an acknowledgment of the changing nature of school bullying, with new areas of investigation including cyberbullying, sexting, social media shaming, and teacher-student and student-teacher bullying (Astor & Benbenishty, 2018).

In India, recent breakthroughs in the field of school bullying include a rising acknowledgment of the incidence and impact of bullying on children's mental well-being (Sagar & Sen, 2021). To



successfully minimize bullying victimization and perpetration, studies have also highlighted the necessity for whole-school interventions that engage schools, families, and individualized interventions (Malik & Mehta, 2016). Bullying behavior differs by gender, with guys expressing their anger more clearly than girls (Mehta & Pilania, 2014). Furthermore, the causes of bullying in India vary, with characteristics such as low academic performance, skin color, and caste listed as causes of bullying (Skrzypiec et al., 2015). Furthermore, culturally relevant strategies and interventions to address bullying in the varied Indian community are required. As a result, the current study represents the first step towards establishing a cultural knowledge of bullying towards developing culturally sensitive strategies and interventions to address bullying in the diverse Indian population.

### **Rationale of the Study**

According to Patton et al. (2017), most empirical research on bullying is quantitative and looks at the prevalence of bullying, risk, and protective variables, and adverse effects. In contrast, there is a little qualitative study on children's and adolescents' experiences with school bullying. Thus, the most efficient way to gain a more profound knowledge of school bullying is to investigate the nuanced settings of bullying by establishing a better understanding of bullying within a specific environment (e.g., schools) and further broaden and improve the validity of quantitative study findings with the help of qualitative studies.

Furthermore, while qualitative studies have been conducted in the Indian setting to study school bullying, their approaches to the phenomena have differed substantially (Kodapally et al., 2021; Malik & Mehta, 2016; Nazir, 2019; Shiba et al., 2018). Previous studies have investigated bullying from the viewpoints of parents and teachers, and while only some of them have focused on children, understanding of school bullying has been limited. Given the significance of

capturing students' understanding of school bullying (Horton et al., 2015), the current study is a first step toward comprehending school bullying in India.

Bullying is one of the significant risk factors for mental disorders among adolescents (Kodapally et al., 2021). Additionally, bullying has also been recognized as a substantial risk factor for anxiety disorders and a risk factor for depression in adolescents and children (Copeland et al., 2013; Kelleher et al., 2008; Silberg et al., 2016). In India, according to Drishti (2019), depression and anxiety disorders were found to be the most common mental disorders, with their prevalence increasing and being relatively higher in the southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka), based on their Socio-Demographic Index (SDI), which is a composite measure of per-capita income, mean education, and fertility rate in women younger than 25 years and is calculated on a scale of one. Furthermore, the same high SDI South Indian states were found to have the highest frequency of depressive disorders, with Tamil Nadu having the highest prevalence and anxiety disorders being more frequent in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. In addition, these states have documented a greater prevalence rate, with reported figures reaching as high as 97.1% (Ranjith et al., 2019). Given the greatest incidence rate of mental diseases and bullying, data was collected in the high SDI South Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka.

## **CHAPTER - III**

### **METHOD**

Scientists universally use essential data collection techniques to derive conclusions from the amassed data. The methodologies utilized by scientists have evolved substantially over a prolonged duration, functioning as a defined framework for producing, organizing, and communicating information. The scientific method comprises a set of fundamental assumptions, established rules, and methodical procedures that scientists utilize to carry out their research endeavors (Wright, n.d.).

Moreover, according to Cozby et al. (1989), the scientific method requires the utilization of objective methodologies that are free from any personal bias or emotional impact exerted by the researcher. The scientific method encompasses a structured methodology that scientists use to systematically collect and assess data, draw conclusions grounded on the evidence, and communicate their discoveries to the scientific community and the wider public. These regulations promote objectivity by putting data to the scrutiny of peer scientists and the wider public.

Hence, the following section presents a thorough approach that delineates the processes utilized in carrying out the research. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of several key components, including research design, participants, measurements, data collection process, and analysis, with a detailed examination of each area.

## **Research Question**

How do students perceive school bullying?

## **Objective**

To explore and understand students' perceptions of school bullying.

## **Operational Definition**

In data collecting, an operational definition refers to a clear and concise description that provides explicit details about a particular variable. Using operational definitions is a vital requirement in data collection across several domains.

**School Bullying:** Occurs when a student or group viewed as strong intentionally inflicts harm for gratification. This can be physical, verbal, relational, or cyberbullying against a student perceived as weaker. Importantly, this harm is administered by the individual(s) recognized within a school community without respect for the victim's thoughts and emotions in or near a school.

## **Research Design**

Research design, usually called research strategy, is a systematic framework devised to address a specific set of inquiries (McCombes, 2019). The framework encompasses a set of methodologies and protocols for systematically acquiring, examining, and comprehending data. Put simply, the study design includes the methodology employed by the researcher to explore the primary issue at hand in the research endeavor. The attributes of a research design impact the nature of the data to be collected and, subsequently, the outcomes obtained. The research design determines a study's various components, which might vary depending on its kind (Creswell, 2015).

This qualitative study utilizes an exploratory research design. Its focus is on exploring the meaning of individuals' lived experiences and helps us to gain deeper insight into their world. A wealth of unprocessed information is collected through statistical methods or alternative approaches in this endeavor that studies the connections within disciplines. Exploratory research, described by Blaikie (2009), finds the qualitative approach particularly suitable. This approach, known as the "bottom-up" method, involves deriving meaning and identifying patterns from collected data. The field of study delves into constructs within cultures and examines the significance of human experiences by analyzing beliefs, behaviors, and emotions. The qualitative approach aims to understand participants' subjective perspectives, encompassing their perceptions and emotions regarding effectiveness.

This study employs analysis as its methodology to investigate students' comprehension of school bullying phenomena. This systematic approach examines data to identify recurring patterns and extract overarching themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) define analysis as a process used to uncover, analyze, and report emerging patterns or themes in data. The process commences by organizing unprocessed data, recognizing codes, and discerning, evaluating, defining, and documenting themes and subthemes.

### **Population and Sample**

A population refers to a comprehensive group of individuals possessing distinct traits. At the same time, a sample denotes a smaller subset of the population selected to make observations and draw inferences. The sample is selected to accurately and effectively represent the target population while minimizing potential errors. To collect data, the researcher sought students from government and private schools in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.

The students had to pass a screening exam, and thus, using a purposive sampling approach to select 28 students who passed the screening test effectively. The participants were between the ages of 13 and 16. Purposive sampling encompasses a collection of non-probability sampling methodologies wherein units are deliberately chosen based on specific traits sought by the researcher for inclusion in the sample. This sampling technique facilitates identifying and selecting individuals, cases, or occurrences that can furnish optimal information for attaining the study's objectives.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which entail verbal exchanges between an interviewer and a participant. The primary objective of these interviews was to obtain information from the participants through a series of questions. While the interviewer possesses a checklist of topic areas or questions to address, the sequencing of these questions is not predetermined. However, these questions are posed in a manner that facilitates the progression of the dialogue, typically in a unidirectional way. The questions have been strategically formulated to elicit responses from the participants according to specific domains of interest to the interviewer. There exists no stipulation mandating a predetermined sequence for the posing of questions. The primary objective of this interview is to elicit responses from the informants using their own language and perspectives. Consequently, the questions are designed to be less detailed, enabling a broader spectrum of potential answers.

## **Inclusion Criteria**

According to Hulley et al. (2013), inclusion criteria refer to the essential characteristics of the specific population under investigation that researchers will utilize to address their research inquiry. To ascertain students' familiarity with school bullying, the current study utilized a screening instrument constructed using Olweus (1993) conceptualization as a foundation. The screening tool contained six questions, and only children who answered all six correctly were considered to be conversant with the notion of school bullying. The tool was validated by two experts (a subject-matter expert and a quantitative research expert), and the researcher integrated input from experts before utilizing it in the field. Therefore, the inclusion criteria for this study encompassed adolescents who demonstrated proficiency in English, could converse effectively without any inherent limitations, had successfully passed the screening test, and obtained parental consent.

## **Exclusion Criteria**

Hulley et al. (2013) describe exclusion criteria as specific attributes possessed by prospective study participants who satisfy the inclusion criteria but exhibit extra traits that have the potential to impede the study's success or heighten the likelihood of an adverse outcome. The participants excluded from the study were individuals who did not understand school bullying sufficiently, showed noticeable confusion between school bullying and ragging, were currently using prescribed drugs, have psychiatric and other neurological complaints, and expressed discomfort in speaking English. Additionally, special schools were also excluded from data collection.

The participants chosen for the study were provided with a comprehensive briefing, during which any questions or concerns were addressed and resolved. The present study gathered

sociodemographic information, such as age, gender, education, caste, perceived socio-economic level, and family type. All participants were interviewed once.

### **Interview Schedule**

According to Goode and Hatt (2006), an interview schedule is a collection of questions an interviewer poses and completes during a direct, in-person engagement with another individual. The present study employs semi-structured in-depth interviews as a methodological approach to support open-ended questions. This allows for capturing participants' viewpoints regarding the subject of inquiry and enables respondents to articulate their thoughts using their language freely. The decision to employ this methodology was motivated by acquiring precise and comprehensive data from the participants to yield concise perspectives on school bullying. The researcher constructed the semi-structured interview guidelines based on prior literature and theoretical frameworks. To comprehend the phenomenon better, this guideline offers open-ended questions. Three professionals with experience in qualitative research (a university professor, a subject-matter expert, and a qualitative research expert) validated the interview schedule. The questions were updated based on expert comments, resulting in a final interview guideline.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Before the main stage of the study, a pilot study was conducted. The purpose of this phase was to make necessary preparations for the main phase of the investigation. The initial stage of this research involved a comprehensive literature examination of school bullying and cyberbullying in India. Additionally, a complete literature study was conducted to identify various manifestations of school bullying. Developing an interview schedule for a semi-structured interview was informed by a thorough analysis of reviews and expert perspectives. The pilot



study was conducted on five individuals selected from a government school in Tamil Nadu, India. This facilitated the identification of issues with the interview schedule, which subsequently enabled the necessary modifications for the primary study.

The researcher obtained consent from governmental and private schools to carry out the study within their facilities. Once formal consent was obtained, the researcher conducted a debriefing session with the students from each class to create a positive relationship and perform the screening examination. Students who passed the screening test were given a parental consent form, which detailed the study's objectives and contained the researcher's contact details for parental approval. Data were collected only from those students who had acquired parental consent. Once the parental consent was turned in, the researcher organized a debriefing session with each participant to discuss the study objective, clarify any potential ambiguities, and build rapport. Before initiating the interview, the sociodemographic data of the participants was collected. The researcher focused on allowing the participants ample time to encourage their inclination to express their thoughts and emotions sincerely and forthcoming. The researcher adopted the role of a facilitator, allowing the participants to offer thorough accounts of their experiences while redirecting them to the main topic of conversation in the event of tangents. The researcher encouraged the participants to contribute their experiences to acquire a complete understanding. The responses were verified with the participants through paraphrasing to mitigate the risk of any potential misinterpretation. While not adhered to rigorously, the interview schedule was implemented and utilized as a reference. Before concluding the interview, a thorough review of the interview schedule was conducted to ascertain that all pertinent subjects had been addressed. Thus, more than 1000 students were approached with the screening tool. However, only 40 of the students passed the screening test and were provided

with a parental consent form to participate in the study. 32 of the 40 students gained approval from their parents. However, only 28 student interviews were evaluated during data analysis since the remaining recordings were eliminated per the exclusion criteria. Each interview ranged from 25 to 45 minutes and was recorded in audio format after obtaining approval from the participants and their parents.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility in Qualitative Research**

During the initial phase of contact, the researcher took time to explain the nature of the study and her knowledge of the subject, demonstrating credibility. As a result of the debriefing session, the researcher was also able to build trust with the students. The study was conducted in a comfortable environment ensuring the participants' comfort to have one-on-one conversations with the researcher and express their opinions. The researcher, thus, gained a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the interviews.

**Data Triangulation** - According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one method for researchers to persuade themselves and readers that their study results are worthy of attention is via trustworthiness. To achieve triangulation, the researcher cross-checked testimonies of school bullying with friends, teachers, and school administration and took notes of the same.

**Credibility** - According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), the credibility of a study is assessed when co-researchers or readers are presented with the experience and acknowledge it. Although there are several strategies for achieving credibility, one of the most suggested is peer debriefing. This involves an external check on the research process, which may boost credibility, as well as analyze referential adequacy to compare preliminary findings and interpretations to raw data

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility, the supervisor was kept updated throughout the data collection, field notes were exchanged, and issues and queries were addressed regularly.

***Transferability*** - According to Nowell et al. (2017), transferability relates to the generalizability of research and is done by providing detailed descriptions. The study's data analysis and interpretation were "thick" since they incorporated historical, situational, relational, and interactional characteristics (Bandenhorst, 2015; Freeman, 2014). The analysis reflects the 28 participants' diverse points of view. This resulted in interpretations that classified these differences into physical, emotional, social, and cultural contexts, as reported by each subject in their respective interview.

***Reflexivity*** - Tobin and Begley (2004) advise researchers to retain a self-critical record of the research process, including internal and external discourse. The 'reflexive journal' was used by the researcher to chronicle the daily logistics of the research, methodological decisions, rationales, and the researcher's comments on their values, interests, and insights about self (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher realized personal biases three times during the process: taking notes immediately following the interview, reading the handwritten notes the next day, and meticulously evaluating the interview transcription. The researcher was self-reflective but also aware of possible prejudice and bias and worked to eliminate it.

***Audit Trails*** - An audit trail provides readers with proof of the researcher's decisions and choices on theoretical and methodological concerns throughout the study, necessitating an apparent rationale for such decisions (Koch, 1994). This was accomplished by retaining raw data records, field notes, transcripts, and a reflexive journal (Halpren, 1983). To differentiate the researcher's responses from the participants' responses, notes were gathered to keep track of the researcher's

thoughts, reactions, and biases. The researcher's handwritten notes frequently underlined the participants' key points and noted body language cues.

***Dependability*** - Researchers can attain dependability by ensuring that the study process is rational, traceable, and well-documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The researcher demonstrated dependability through audit trails.

***Confirmability*** - Confirmability is concerned with demonstrating that the researcher's interpretations and results are drawn from the data, which necessitates the researcher to explain how conclusions and interpretations were reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004). By obtaining credibility, transferability, and dependability, the researcher achieved confirmability.

***Intercoder Reliability*** - To foster reliability, the supervisor examined the codes and themes on a regular basis (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Data was also shared with a subject-matter expert and an expert in Educational Psychology. Consequently, the coding disparity was removed to reach a common ground.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves systematically examining, purifying, converting, and modeling data to uncover valuable insights, provide logical deductions, and facilitate informed decision-making. The raw data underwent a manual execution of data analysis. The audio recordings were manually converted into text using Microsoft Word. The researcher utilized thematic analysis as a methodological approach to identify and extract themes from the collected data. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to uncovering, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns within a dataset, often known as themes. The procedure entails the examination of a qualitative dataset format, such as a transcript. Subsequently, the researcher proceeds to ascertain the

essential themes in the dataset. The utilization of data excerpts substantiates these findings as supporting evidence. The concept above is employed within the field of psychological research to provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under investigation.

### *Analysis of the Interviews*

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is a frequently employed method in qualitative research to organize and comprehensively describe a dataset. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2019) was used to investigate the qualitative data. To analyze the data, the following procedures were employed:

- i. **Getting familiar with the data:** The researcher became acquainted with the data by reading and rereading it, finding intriguing facts, and taking notes.
- ii. **Generating codes:** The researcher employed a bottom-up method called inductive coding to extract codes from the data. This method allowed the codes to emerge spontaneously from the raw data.
- iii. **Constructing themes:** From the codes, candidate themes are generated and assessed against the study question. All candidate themes were collectively classified to find relevant prospective themes. The narrative was then used to generate the themes and sub-themes.
- iv. **Revising and defining themes:** Attempts were made to define each theme in relation to the central narrative. Some potential themes were removed if they were unsuccessful fits to the narrative. As a result, the analysis had rich, clear, and compelling meaning-based themes. This was accomplished by reviewing all the coded data with the potential themes

and comparing them to the overall data. A visual thematic map can help to understand the relationship between themes and the primary narrative.

- v. **Producing the reports:** After revising and identifying the themes, the researcher prepared the analysis to determine how effectively the themes are individually tied to the data set and overarching narrative.

To become acquainted with the data set, the researcher read the transcript line by line numerous times. The emerging codes were assigned to the corresponding quotes/excerpts, and the generated codes were assigned to potential themes. These emergent codes and potential themes were discussed with the supervisor regularly to capture a better understanding of the phenomena. Based on meaning and repeating patterns, these codes and potential themes were developed into prospective themes to convey the participants' experiences with school bullying.

The researcher constructed main themes and sub-themes with a narrative based on descriptive and reflective notions by reviewing the gathered excerpts and looking for a logical pattern. The supervisor then examined the data again, and the researcher integrated the inputs and ideas into the study. In addition, two experts were requested to assess and offer input on the researcher's theme coding. The subthemes or themes were modified based on the feedback and recommendations received. The report was prepared based on the method and inputs. The fifth chapter, which focuses on the study's findings, briefly explains each theme and subtheme (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010).

## **Ethical Consideration**

The study was conducted with permission obtained from the Central University of Karnataka. Before engaging with the students, the Principal or Headmaster of the educational institutions was convened to be briefed on the research objectives and to obtain formal consent for conducting the study within their respective establishments. The participants were not subjected to interviews without written agreement from their parents, who were provided with comprehensive information about the study and contact details of the researcher. The participants were provided with assurances of confidentiality and were told of their option to withdraw from the study at any point. The interview was concluded if the participant desired to discontinue for any given reason. The researcher had no personal acquaintance with any participants and did not engage in any intervention throughout the study. To ensure anonymity, each participant's name was de-identified by assigning them a number. The data, which included audio interview recordings, transcripts, and analysis, was saved in a password-protected document.

## CHAPTER - IV

### RESULTS

The current study seeks to comprehend students' perceptions of school bullying. The objective is to understand how students perceive and conceptualize school bullying. Furthermore, the study also investigates the different roles associated with school bullying, as well as its various forms, occurrences, and prevention. Table 1 explains the demographic characteristics of the students. These descriptive facts give context for the participants' living situations.

*Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of The Participants of the Study*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Participants <i>n</i> = 28 (%)</b>
Age	13 years	3 (10.7)
	14 years	8 (28.5)
	15 years	12 (42.9)
	16 years	5 (17.9)
Gender	Male	14 (50)
	Female	14 (50)
Standard (Grade)	VIII	4 (14.2)
	IX	5 (17.9)
	X	19 (67.9)
Caste	General	5 (17.9)
	OBC	10 (35.7)
	SC	5 (17.9)
	ST	1 (3.5)
	Unaware	7 (25)
Family Type	Nuclear	22 (78.6)
	Joint	6 (21.4)



Type of School	Government	10 (35.7)
	Private	18 (64.3)
State	Tamil Nadu	10 (35.7)
	Karnataka	8 (28.6)
	Kerala	10 (35.7)
Residence	Rural	5 (17.9)
	Semi-urban	10 (35.7)
	Urban	13 (46.4)

Table - 1 describes the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. The majority of the participants were 15 years old (42.9%), followed by 14 years (28.5%), 16 years (17.9%), and 13 years (10.7%). The sample included equal representation of both males (50%) and females (50%). Most of the participants were studying in Grade - X (67.9%), followed by Grades - IX (17.9%) and VIII (14.2%). The sample has a major representation of students belonging to the OBC (35.7%), followed by equal representation from the General and SC castes (each with 17.9%). One of the participants belonged to the ST caste (3.5%), while a quarter of the participants were unaware of their caste (25%). The majority of the participants belonged to a nuclear family (78.6%), while the rest belonged to a joint family (21.4%). Most of the students were studying in a private school (64.3%), while the rest were studying in a government school (35.7%). The sample has an equal representation of students from states – Tamil Nadu and Kerala (each with 35.7%), followed by Karnataka (28.6%). Most of the participants were residing in urban (46.4%), followed by semi-urban (35.7%) and rural (17.9%).

Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes that Emerged from the Data (n = 28)

S No	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Comprehension of bullying	i Characteristics
		ii Reasons
		iii Process
		iv Consequences
2	Conceptualization of bullying	i Intentionality
		ii Repetition
		iii Power Disparity
		iv Morality
3	Roles in bullying	i Motivators to Become a Bully
		ii Reasons for Victimhood
4	Forms of bullying	i Inflicting Harm
		ii Culture-specific Forms
5	Occurrence of bullying	i Inside School
		ii Around School
6	Prevention of bullying	i Preventive Measures

## 1. Comprehension of Bullying

School Bullying is a widespread phenomenon. However, in order to effectively tackle and prevent, it is vital that the students are aware of the phenomenon. Additionally, it is crucial to understand how students perceive it in order to devise a culturally appropriate intervention for all the stakeholders involved in the process. Thus, this theme explores how students comprehend the phenomenon of school bullying.

### 1.1. Characteristics

This sub-theme outlines the precise qualities that functioned as indicators for children to recognize any behavior as bullying. Every day, students are exposed to a

variety of behaviors. However, not all behaviors constitute bullying at school. Knowing the characteristics that aided them in properly analyzing the situation and making suitable judgments will help in furthering the understanding that researchers hold on school bullying.

### **Body Shaming**

According to the participants, body shaming was one of the earliest indicators of bullying. Participants believed that they would be subjected to body shaming regardless of how they felt, whether they were skinny, obese, short, or tall. These statements were said in order to harm the victims and make them feel awful about themselves.

*"I am fat, and they tease me. Likewise, they tease those who are thin and short and talk in a way that hurts the other person." P - 10*

Thus, when a bully had no other motive to attack the other person, he or she would invariably turn to body shaming.

*"They make fun of them for no reason - for how they look and tease them."*  
P - 11

Their classmates were critical of the fact that they were overweight. Harassment based on physical appearance may have a substantial impact on a student's mental health, especially when there is a bigger audience.

*"When a group of kids is playing together, they would not allow a kid to join them and tease him by calling him 'fat.'" P - 19*

### **Aggravation of Others**

According to a personal account by a participant, another sign of bullying is when the other person participates in disruptive actions. They would aggravate others by calling them with their mother's or sister's names. This is especially problematic for victims when they are involved in writing or reading inside a classroom. This not only bothers the other person at the time, but it also has a negative impact on their academic performance because it may result in incomplete notes and forgetfulness, particularly if it occurs before a test.

*"Bullying is disturbing others while reading or writing by teasing others with nicknames etc. They would always disturb others by calling them with their mother's or sister's names. I have witnessed it in my old school." P -*

5

### **Challenging Teacher's Authority**

One of the actions that adolescents, particularly bullies, engage in when they believe they will be valued is rebelling against teachers. They believe it is acceptable to challenge teachers when questioned about their progress or assignments. However, persistently opposing teachers might be a crucial indicator in detecting bullies. This not only has an impact on the academic life of the student who engages in such conduct, but it also has the potential to influence the overall mood of the classroom, resulting in an unfavorable atmosphere for learning and unfulfilling learning experiences for all the students.

*"They also rebel against teachers by saying, "Why are you hitting us, miss? Do not hit us on the head" when questioned about why they are studying." P - 3*

## **1.2. Reasons**

This sub-theme investigates the various reasons why pupils believe bullying occurs. Although most students agree that bullying begins with harassment regarding other people's physical appearance, this sub-theme seeks to determine whether the rationale extends beyond the physical façade.

### **Need for Acceptance**

One of the motivations for students to bully is to be accepted by their classmates. Even if the bullies seem as if they would rather not know anybody outside their group, the participants think that the conduct (bullying) is a result of their battle to be accepted as a member of the class in general. When these adolescents fear that they are being regarded differently or that they will soon become an outcast, they resort to bullying as their last hope.

*"Bullying is basically hurting someone else to get joined in. They would do anything to be accepted." P - 1*

However, it is critical to consider the subject from a different angle. The above situation portrays that the bullies are bullied in the first place. Thus, these children are forced to engage in activities that harm others. The participant has implicitly explained relational bullying, a type of bullying in which the victim is made an outsider and refused membership in the group. This implies that it is more likely that they would not have resorted to bullying if the bully had not been bullied in the first

place. This also exemplifies the sort of victimization known as bully-victim, in which the individual who bullies others is also a victim in another circumstance. This necessitates appropriate school-wide knowledge of the phenomenon so that children do not become victims of one another.

### **Issues with Self-esteem**

The reason for self-esteem has two perceptions. According to a specific idea, students who harass others have poor self-esteem. As a result, they would engage in activities that would cause harm to others, thus indirectly promoting the bullies' self-esteem. As a result, one of the primary motivations for adolescents to bully is to improve their self-esteem while seeing their peers suffer.

*"People basically... People with low esteem seem to think, if they hurt someone else, their low esteem will rise because the other person's self-esteem will go down." P -1*

Another viewpoint holds that bullies engage in the activity on purpose in order to lower the victims' self-esteem. Participants believe that the bully will go to any length to make the victim feel bad, including participating in actions that the victim considers repugnant. Because the victims' negative feelings toward the bully have no outlet, they accumulate and negatively damage the individual. This excites the bullies and motivates them to continue their actions.

*"They will do anything and everything to make you feel low. They irritate me a lot and especially engage in those behaviors which I absolutely hate." P - 14*

Another tactic used by bullies to undermine the victim's self-esteem is to make them feel humiliated. It is critical to understand that the wider the audience, the greater the influence on the victim. As a result, bullies are frequently driven to make the victim feel embarrassed and ineffective in front of a crowd. This would eventually cause the victims to lose hope in themselves and fall deeper into the bullies' plans.

*"A group of students becoming aware of an individual and hurting and making him sad is bullying. They would make him feel ashamed and useless in front of all." P - 20*

### **Expression of Dislike**

The most straightforward justification bullies may provide for participating in bullying and yet getting away with it is by expressing hatred. It does, however, come with two separate situations. In the first scenario, the bully is devoid of any negative emotions, including hatred for the victim. However, if the bully's present mood is unhappy or furious, and they encounter someone having a good time, it irritates the bully. As a result, they project all of their feelings onto the victim, who has no understanding of why they are being victimized in that circumstance. The bully, on the other hand, would be relieved to see the other person in the same dreadful position that they are, therefore adding a companion to their misery.

*"Uhhh like... If the group is in a bad mood, they'll beat up others who would not have done anything by simply saying, "I don't like them." They would talk bad about everyone." P - 2*

In the second situation, the bully genuinely dislikes the victim and hence engages in acts that are harmful to the victim.

*"They would also hit people who they do not like. They would also hurt others." P - 28*

### **Playful Escapades with Consequences**

Students will sometimes engage in actions to keep themselves entertained. However, amusement may not necessarily be the end of the story thus, potentially leading to a problem. According to the participants, the victim in such instances is not a pre-planned target, but rather someone who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong moment. The bullies would harm the victim to feel satisfied that they had sufficiently delighted themselves and the audience. When it occurs in an open arena, however, it is simpler for the authorities - staff, teachers, or principals - to see the ruckus. Once the situation is brought to the attention of the relevant authorities, the necessary action is taken, which has a direct impact on the amount of fun the bullies have had thus far.

*"Everyone beat one person simply in the ground, and it became a problem. He was actually friends with everyone. He was the one who got caught that day. So, they beat him. I am always a bystander. I just observe what's going on. His own friends only beat him. It became a small problem since everyone was called." P - 9*

In the preceding incident, the participant behaved as a bystander, implicitly encouraging the incident to occur and worsen.

### **Betrayal by Friends**

Often, the individual who becomes a bully is not a stranger who is unknown to the victim. It is often someone the victim has mostly confided in and trusted. A simple



misunderstanding, however, might turn them against each other. Even if the friends have agreed to part ways on good terms, this does not guarantee that there will be no problems. One of the companions would carry any wounds from the friendship into the next one and spread narratives about their ex-friend. Even students who deliberately take part in disseminating rumors and insulting the victim's character seldom confront the victim with the allegations, especially if the rumors concern romantic relationships. Thus, the bullies enjoy defaming the victims for something that did not necessarily happen, and throughout most of the narrative, no one is concerned with exploring and identifying the truth in the story.

*"There are some boys who I just greet by saying, "Hi and Hello." But somebody told them that I am his girlfriend and that I had ridden the bike, posted selfies, and drank coffee with him in the coffee shop, and thus, the rumors began to spread. Instead of me- she's my best friend, and hence, she should have trusted and asked me instead, "Why did you do this?" She has also a boyfriend. But did I tell it to everybody? No, I kept it a secret. But I don't have a boyfriend, and she knows that too. But still, she did this." P - 12*

### **1.3. Process**

This subtheme attempts to comprehend the process of bullying. The participants addressed the numerous steps that victims must go through before they realize they are being bullied. Understanding the process would aid in raising awareness and, as a result, successfully preventing bullying.

## **Baiting**

Baiting is the first and most important stage in selecting a victim. Bullies meticulously choose their victims by studying their personalities and how they react to difficult situations. They like students who are not normally highlighted or observed in class and who do not raise a fuss in any scenario. This is also because they would not tell anybody else about what they are going through, and even if they were to open up, it is simpler for the bullies to threaten. As a result, they would select those who are wary of how bullies may hurt them and are easier to be silent if they proceed to reveal their experiences with bullies.

*"They will always irritate us by pointing out small things. They always want to talk and fight with us. They will do it more if we do not talk with them, saying, "She is silent, and I can do whatever I want." P - 14*

After selecting, the bullies would test their victim's reactions by pointing out all the minor things they do to anger them. They would then proceed to interact with them in order to incite a conflict purposely.

## **Deliberate Stress Induction**

Once the bullies become acquainted with the victims, they would press by persistently irritating them. At this point, anything the victim does becomes a circumstance to be mocked, or in extreme cases, the victims themselves become their fodder. This added stress would become unbearable for the victim.

*"They will make them feel stressed and pressured. They will hurt someone with actions or words to make them feel stressed and pressured." P - 6*

## **Being Selfish and Demanding**

In the last stage, the bullies compel the victims into performing duties for them. The participants are unequivocal in their belief that bullies do not ask for favors. Usually, when asked nicely, peers might be willing to assist their friends. For the victims, however, the chores are always in the shape of an order that they are obliged to fulfill. Even if it is against their own will, the victims are never permitted to refuse, which makes the bully selfish for forcing the other person to do things for them.

*"I think not all students are like that. But some people only care about their marks, and they're selfish and do not care about anyone else. That's why they treat everyone like trash, like, you know? It's the second way.*

*They do not ask as a friend but more like, demand them." P - 11*

*"When someone asks you to do something for them, but you don't want to do it. So, they forcefully hit you, but you don't want to be beaten by them. I think that's called bullying rather than a friendly encounter." P - 11*

### **1.4. Consequences**

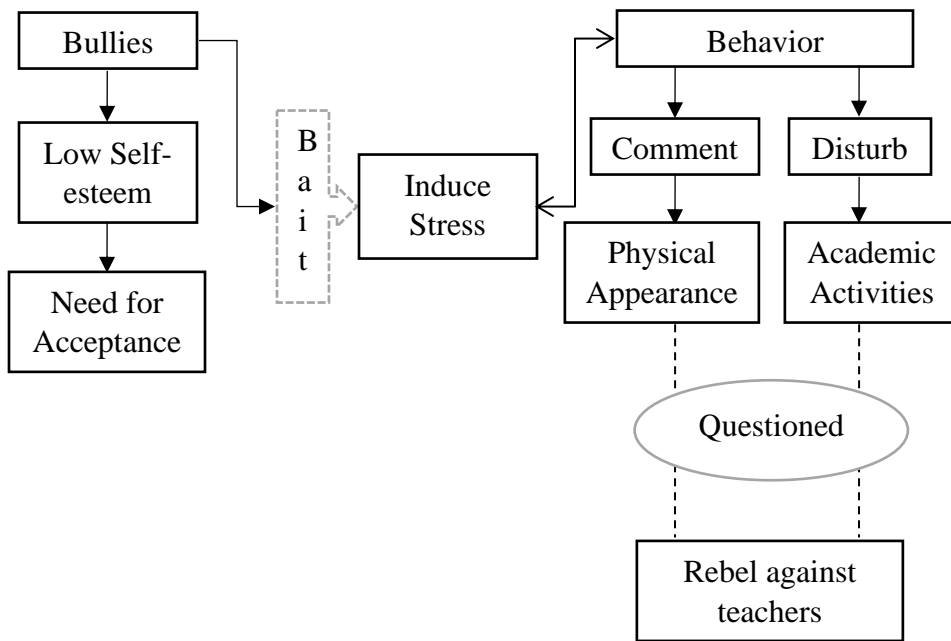
This sub-theme investigates the many consequences of school bullying inflicted on victims and how it affects them as individuals as well as their mental health.

The participants unanimously believe that being bullied has a negative impact on the victim's mental health. The accumulated emotions would lead to rage difficulties and extreme stress in them. This can further lead to depression and harm their self-esteem. Bullying might also have an impact on their academic achievement. Being unable to concentrate in class and being interrupted while taking notes might lower their rank, lowering their academic success. Additionally, they may not be as

involved in school activities and events as they formerly were. Being unable to achieve well in school would further be detrimental to their mental health.

*"Bullying leads to various problems - anger, stress, depression, and self-esteem issues. It would also have a negative effect on our school performance." P - 21*

*Figure 2. Theme - 1: Comprehension of Bullying*



***Summary of Theme - 1: Comprehension of Bullying***

Thus, the preceding theme has investigated young people's knowledge of bullying. Harassed for their physical appearance - particularly body shaming - is seen as a key indicator in classifying any conduct as bullying. Other features include upsetting others, particularly those whom the bullies believe would make an excellent victim,

and rebelling against teachers, either to retain their standing or to build their dominance among their peers.

Furthermore, bullies target and harm victims in ways that undermine their self-esteem. Another way to look at self-esteem is that bullies have poor self-esteem at their core and use bullying to increase their self-esteem and make them feel better about themselves. Bullying occurs for a variety of causes, including hatred. Whether it is enmity or just a motivation to participate in bullying, the victims must face the repercussions. Because the target is available, peers may engage in bullying for amusement. However, this does not always result in amusement because engaging in the conduct in an open arena spotlights the behavior and leaves the bullies to face the repercussions of their actions. The most noteworthy feature is that victims are frequently bullied not by strangers but by people with whom they have shared wonderful experiences or confined secrets. When a friendship ends, the secrets that were previously shared with confidence emerge in the form of rumors and threaten the victim.

Bullying is said to begin with baiting, in which bullies choose an ideal target based on their personality and reaction to the scenario. Once selected, the victim is put under strain by annoying and highlighting their actions. When bullies utilize these pressures to push chores on victims without even allowing for argument or refusal, the victims get stressed.

School bullying, thus has a negative impact on their mental health by leading them to experience despair and low self-esteem. It also has an impact on their academic success.

## 2. Conceptualization of Bullying

The student's notion of bullying may differ from the researcher's perspective. This disparity may have an impact on the primary beneficiaries, students, because the tools developed to measure and the strategies devised to address the situation may not even be compatible with them. As a result, the current theme investigates how students define the phenomenon of school bullying.

### 2.1. *Intentionality*

This subtheme delves into one of the characteristics used to classify any behavior as bullying: intentionality. The subtheme seeks to ascertain if students hold the opinion that any behavior may be labeled as bullying only if it is done on purpose.

#### **Defined Motive**

Most participants think that any behavior that occurs accidentally and the other person is truly sorry for what occurred is not bullying. However, suppose the same action is repeated with the aim to harm others. In that case, whether it be shoving, yelling, or humiliating the other person in a public place - such behavior is considered bullying.

*"When people push each other, but like, wantedly to hurt that person, not accidentally, if they push each other, or shout at them by calling names, in public places if they embarrass them...if they hurt them by punching, kicking, like that...and if they spread rumors about them, that is also bullying." P - 1*

A further concern that's arisen is that even if the other person apologizes, there is uncertainty about whether the apology is sincere. As a result, the participants

emphasize that it is up to the recipient to determine if the apology is genuine. Thus, the behavior can be concluded as bullying when the person on the receiving end of the action believes that the apology was inauthentic and that the individual engaged in the activity with the aim of harming them.

*"Some people would say that they did not mean to hurt. But it would be in their mind. They know that they are doing it on purpose." P - 6*

Another clue of whether the act in question was done on purpose is how the person acts after engaging in the aforementioned behavior. If the individual begins threatening the victim instead of apologizing, the action may be termed bullying. Threatening the individual further indicates that the conduct was done purposely to injure the other person in any manner possible.

*"When they run into you purposefully and answer "What is your problem? I would do like this only" when asked, then it is bullying." P - 7*

Participants also said that the intensity with which the communication occurs can play a major role in categorizing the described conduct as bullying. It is crucial to remember, however, that the perceived intensity is purely based on an individual's perceptions, which might lead to incorrect allegations. As a result, according to one participant, even a greeting that is more intense than the 'perceived' normal might be considered bullying.

*"If they just come and hit to say hi, then it's fine. But, if they do it with force, then it is intentional." P - 12*

### **Action-Reaction Loop**

Participants believe that acting out on behavior in exchange for perceived bullying behavior can also be considered bullying. If the other person consistently participates in conduct that stresses the individual out, the individual might respond by engaging in those actions also viewed as bullying. Even if the individual is acting in self-defense, the action can still be considered bullying. Thus, these individuals who respond to bullying by bullying back become bully-victims, a category of victimization in which the individual who was a victim originally becomes a bully and participates in acts that harm others.

*"We can call it bullying when we also get so much tensed and beat them in return. It can be called bullying when they tease us so much that we get tensed because it hurts so much, and we beat them in return." P - 7*

Even if the preceding scenario illustrates exclusively defending the bullies, it is critical to prevent the conduct from generalizing to other students.

### **2.2. Repetition**

This subtheme delves into another critical factor in identifying any activity as bullying: repetition. In this subtheme, participants discuss whether the number of occasions is necessary to label the act as bullying.

#### **Uninterrupted Persistence**

The participants agree that it is bullying when any conduct is repeated. It is also important to highlight that detrimental behaviors would not be considered bullying if they occurred infrequently, i.e., once or twice. Participants feel they can endure bullying if it occurs just once or twice. However, if it goes beyond that, it may be



causing harm to the person since it forces them into unavoidable discomfort.

Furthermore, it is important to note that if the individual at whom the behavior is directed does not see any damage in it, then no matter how frequently the activity is engaged, it is not considered bullying. As a result, in addition to the number of times the behavior is repeated, it is crucial to consider if the activity is regarded as detrimental.

*"It will be repeated. Like, if someone is repeatedly pushing you, someone is repeatedly calling you names... It's not bullying if they call you names for, like, fun, like, if you call your friend with a short name, and they're not hurt, that is not bullying. But if you call them with mean names, that hurts them, repeatedly that is bullying." P - 1*

*"We can let it go if it happens only once or twice. But if it happens repeatedly and the other person is in pain, then we can call it bullying." P*

- 9

Some individuals feel that the other person would have done nothing to deserve to be harmed by the bully. However, the determining factor to conclude the behavior as bullying is the number of individuals present in the room when the incident occurs. This is because these participants believe that as the number of audiences grows, so does the impact on the victim. In addition to generating more anguish, it would serve a significant role in distinguishing the individual from the crowd, increasing the likelihood of future victimization.

*"It's not like the person did something to deserve the beating. And hitting again and again in front of others would only put the individual down.*

*Doing it in front of others would only differentiate the individual from the rest of the crowd." P - 20*

### **One-time Occurrence**

Half of the rest of the participants agree that bullying should be regarded even if the reported action occurs only once. This is because they feel the victim's anguish during the one-time event is as severe and something they do not deserve. Again, labeling any conduct as bullying is based on the viewpoint of the other person.

*"Even if the other person did it only once if the victim sees it in a negative light and gets hurt, then we can call it bullying." P - 6*

Another point of view is that, while participants believe that a one-time incident is similarly qualified for bullying categorization, the distinction here is whether the action was purposely caused. As a result, even if bullying occurs just once, the preceding criteria are highly dependent on detecting and acknowledging it.

*"It is bullying even if they do it once. What really matters is whether it was on purpose or not." P - 14*

*"If they purposefully hurt us, even if it is once - I would still call it bullying." P - 22*

### **Chance of Repetition**

Even if the act has only occurred once so far, the participants agree that it can be considered bullying if the victim believes there is a strong likelihood that it will occur again in the future. This also depicts the victim's anxiety about being victimized again in the future, as well as the terror that is associated with it. Thus, if

the victim feels frightened and unclear about the occurrence of the behavior in the future, it may be classified as bullying.

*"If someone hurts us only once, we can let it go. But if there is a chance that they might do it again and the other person is doing it daily. So, both are bullying." P - 17*

### **2.3. Power Disparity**

This subtheme investigates whether there is a perceived power gap between the individuals involved and if there is a perceived power discrepancy, does it help in distinguishing bullying from other actions.

#### **Domination**

Bullies, according to the participants, target individuals who are regarded to be weaker than them as it is easier to impose influence over them. These can be their juniors or people who are weak for a variety of reasons, one of which being disability. Participants feel that simply attacking a perceived weaker individual, allows the bullies to easily overshadow the victim.

*"Some people who are lower - like juniors, some people who are weaker, some people with disabilities. And some people also, pick on people who have less strength but more intelligence. So, bullies seem to think this person is too intelligent and will overshadow them." P - 1*

The participants also believe that bullies specifically target those persons who are easier to dominate. This is because if they go up against people who are believed to have higher or equivalent power to the bullies, there is a significant possibility that they will lose the battle. As a result, selecting a person thought to be weaker than the

bully provides for an easier triumph. In addition, the targets include people who are thought to be more emotional than others and have health problems.

*"They will choose weak people - those who become emotional soon, have health problems, etc. are usually the targets of bullying. If they choose individuals of equal strength, they would have the strength and ability to defeat the other person. However, in the case of those who are weak and average, they cannot defeat them. So, they choose accordingly." P - 6*

They also pick those who are sensitive and shy by nature since they would not fight back against the bully and are relatively easy to manage. These people normally keep the occurrences to themselves and would not try to escalate the situation by complaining to the teachers or parents. They instead go through whatever they are exposed to without any resistance simply because they are well aware that they are unable to defend themselves.

*"If the person is shy, they would be targeted because they would neither talk back nor tell someone else. They keep it to themselves. They would not try to blow the problem but rather not react and listen to whatever is been said to them." P - 10*

### **Emotional Catalysts**

According to another participant, choosing victims is significantly influenced by the motivation for selecting that specific individual rather than their perceived strength. Thus, the cause might be an encounter that went poorly. As a result, the individual may be harmed as a result of repressed rage or hostility.

*"We would choose individuals with whom we are angry. They would choose the person even if they have the same strength as the bully." P - 27*

Again, the participants felt that being the target of bullying is not always the result of a bad interaction. The opposing point of view is that the individuals are picked at random but share the same motivation as others, namely, being motivated by anger. According to one participant, seeming to be or being joyful while the bully is not might be a reason to become a target. If a person attempts to retaliate for their acts, such as making fun of bullies, the harm done may escalate from verbal to physical.

*"When they are angry, they just cannot stand others being happy. And when someone teases them, they would hit them because of anger and would also not include them in the group." P - 28*

### **Connection with Hooligans**

Another crucial component in the power dimension is the perpetrator's apparent link with the hooligans. This power play not only allows them to threaten others so that no one else opposes them, but it also allows them to retain a position inside the school setting. This is especially useful when victims attempt to fight back against bullies and break the vicious cycle. To add another terrifying element to the already existing cycle, the bullies remind them that even if they succeed within the school, they would have to face their gang, which is made up of powerful hooligans, outside the school. This has also been the case with onlookers who have stepped in to assist the victims. They are also intimidated in the same way and told that if they aid others, they will be dealt with more troubles both within and outside the school.

*"In case we beat or scold them, they would be like, "Wait, I will bring the rowdies I know". That's when you can say it is bullying." P - 3*

Few participants believe that in order to be perceived as the most powerful person, these individuals will lie about being rowdy themselves and having ties with hooligans outside of school. And, of course, the number is crucial. Furthermore, the bully's claim would assist them in maintaining their status as the "most powerful" since no one would try to go against them to verify their claim because they are already intimidated into not going against them.

*"They are the most powerful outside... They will lie and claim to be the most powerful in the school and "I am a rowdy and I know a lot of rowdies outside". Since they keep claiming that they have a strong connection with the rowdies and the most powerful of them since childhood, I think that's why they engage in bullying." P - 3*

The researcher validated the assertions concerning the hooligans' links to other pupils in the schools. Adolescents studying at a government school where the charges were made said that the bullies did have a link with the hooligans and frequently implicated them in fights between students and even teachers. When the bully is unable to deal with the victim's or bystander's protest, they are confronted by hooligans who generally threaten them with a knife not to protest or get involved further. In another regretful event, students reported that one of the teachers was battered after the teacher stood up against the student's behavior. Furthermore, they stated that these hooligans frequently loiter around bus stops and hence they avoid getting involved with the bullies.

### **Doesn't Matter**

According to one participant, the power dimension plays no role in bullying because anybody, including those viewed as weaker by others, may become a bully if they decide to. In certain cases, even juniors exhibit authority over seniors and intimidate them. As a result, the projected power shift from seniors to juniors is thought to be less common.

*"Even kids who are small have started bullying. They bully the older kids. So, I don't think strength really matters." P - 3*

### **2.4. Morality**

This subtheme investigates the ethical implications of bullying behaviors. Thus, this subtheme seeks to examine participants' perceptions of whether bullies are aware of their wrongdoings and the negative repercussions of their actions.

#### **Aware of Consequences**

Few participants feel that bullies are aware of their wrongdoings and the repercussions of their actions. However, they continue to bully since it gives them pleasure and enjoyment in harming others. According to one participant, most bullies are aware since they have been taught at school and instructed in textbooks not to bully. However, they continue to seek personal fulfillment by causing harm to others.

*"Most bullies actually do that. Because even in school books, it is said not to bully. But people just keep bullying because they find it fun. They find it engaging to hurt others. 70% of them know what they are doing is wrong and they are aware of the negative outcomes." P - 1*

According to another participant, individuals may not be fully conscious of their conduct and the repercussions if they cease after one time. If the individual continues to bully more than once, it might be concluded that they are aware of the fact that what they are doing is wrong. But they keep doing the same thing in order to be recognized as the most powerful person in the school.

*"The first time, they might not realize it is wrong. But if they do it for the second time, they know it is wrong. They want to be the 'big person'."* P -

9

Another participant claims that bullies are aware of their actions and repercussions since they are sophisticated enough to bully behind the teacher's back. They would not attempt to bully others in the presence of the teacher because of the implications.

*"They know it is wrong because if the teacher comes to the class, they will not do it. So, they do it behind the teachers' backs on the ground or somewhere else."* P - 16

### **Unaware of the Harm Caused**

The other half of the participants feel that the bullies are unaware of their actions since they are primarily concerned with their satisfaction at the time. As a result, they would do everything to be pleased at the moment, even if it meant harming others. According to one participant, they are not only unaware of the effects of bullying, but they are also unaware of what the victim would face as a result of their acts.

*"They do it for fun. They are not aware of what would happen next. They do not even know what would happen to the other person who gets hurt."*

P - 13



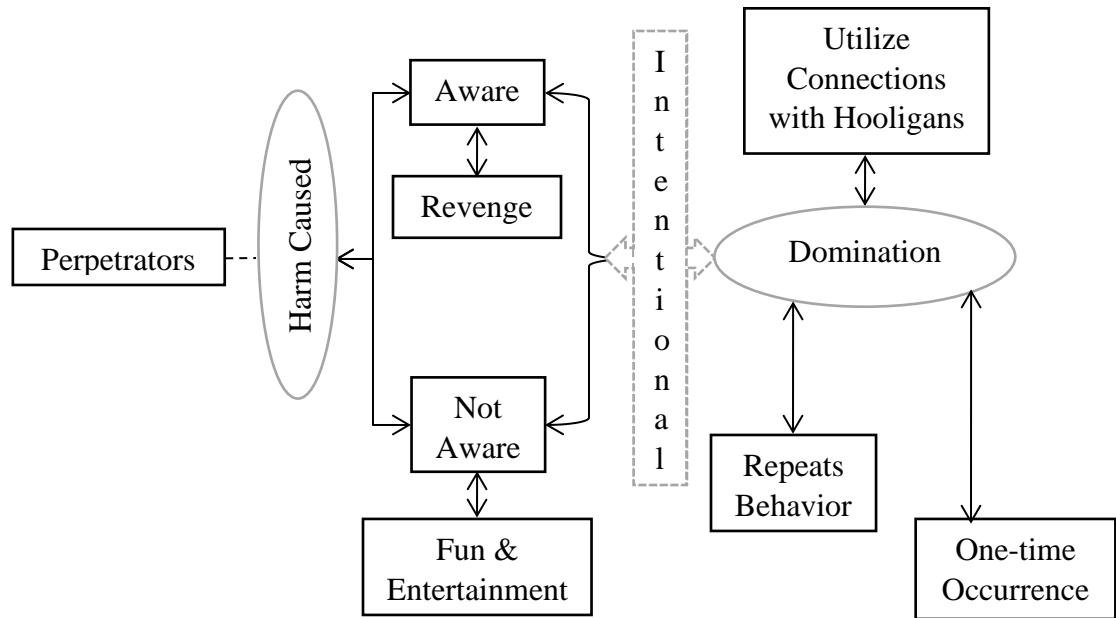
According to another participant, they may be unaware of the harm done or the consequences because they are consumed by the ambition to be the most powerful student in school. Furthermore, even if the bully is aware of the situation, they may be afraid to report their leader because of the accompanying dread. This demonstrates the authority structure among the bullies, with the majority of them obeying the 'ring leader's' demands.

*"They would not be aware because they just want to show off. Maybe the person with them might be aware of it. But they might not be able to communicate because they are scared of the main person/leader who bullies others." P - 25*

Another viewpoint is that the bullies are unaware because when someone is furious, all they worry about is acting on the anger, whether it is physical or verbal. Because bullying is motivated by rage, they will not consider the ramifications of their acts.

*"When we are high on anger, all we would think of is hitting the other person. So, they would go ahead and hit the person." P - 27*

Figure 3. Theme - 2: Conceptualization of Bullying



**Summary of Theme - 2: Conceptualization of Bullying**

Thus, the above theme has explored how participants conceptualize school bullying. The majority of the participants believe that when any behavior is perceived to be intentional, then it can be classified as bullying. The important part to note is the perception as identifying and labeling any behavior as bullying, majorly relies on the victim’s perception of the intensity and the overall characteristics of the behavior. This helps them to differentiate the behavior from others which is enjoyed by the victim too. However, few participants believe that another expression of intentionality is when the individuals pursue revenge by bullying the other person. Additionally, this criterion builds for the other criteria to identify and conceptualize bullying.

The participants next considered the recurrence of the behavior as a criterion. For this particular criterion, the participants chose a variety of positions. Few participants feel that the behavior must be repeated in order to be labeled as bullying. However, some argue that bullying can occur even if the action occurs just once and the victim is purposely hurt. The opposing viewpoint, which builds on the one-time occurrence, is that if the victim believes there is a strong likelihood that the action will be repeated in the future, it can be defined as bullying.

The perceived power imbalance was the third factor examined. According to the participants, there is an active power imbalance in the perpetrator-victim interaction. To assert dominance over the victim, the offender employs a variety of power play techniques. This helps them maintain their position as the most 'powerful person' at school. One of the strategies is to use hooligans to frighten anybody who dares to oppose them. Few participants claim that the bullies use it as their technique even if they have no connection with the hooligans. However, no one can confirm their suspicions as they are afraid of being accosted by hooligans on their way out of school. Few participants think that when they are fueled by anger, they would pursue the anger in order to exert authority over the crowd.

This also aids in the development of the following criteria, which analyzes their awareness of wrongdoing and the repercussions that follow. Few participants feel that when pursuing anger, they may not consider whether their acts are appropriate or bad, or the repercussions they may face. However, the other participants feel that the bullies are aware since they are taught not to engage in bullying in schools, and they

are intelligent enough to engage in the behaviors behind their teachers' backs in fear of the repercussions.

### **3. Roles in Bullying**

The people involved in bullying often take on a variety of roles and contribute differently to the bullying process. Understanding the many roles that are involved aids in dealing with bullying in the Indian culture. Thus, the current theme investigates the two roles - bully and victim - as proposed by the participants.

#### ***3.1. Motivators to Become a Bully***

This subtheme investigates the many reasons presented by participants that operate as motivators for bullies to engage in bullying. The explanations range from personal to social/contextual.

##### **Innately Bad**

Participants believe that people bully because of their personality and cognitive ability. Bullies, they believe, have the demeanor of a perpetrator. This causes them to regard themselves as having authority over others and hence would proceed to exert domination over others, as well as seeing themselves as a "big person."

*"It depends on an individual's behavior which would be based on their personality, bad thinking, how they see others - they would see them as someone lower to them, and they would have a self-thinking that they are a 'big person'."* P - 20

The other participants feel that their personality composition is a reflection of how they were and are treated by their families. Being abused as a youngster might instill an unending rage within them, which they would subsequently act on by aiming

toward their classmates. The other possibility is that they observed bullying at past schools and found it interesting, and therefore acted out the situation in the current school, establishing the dynamic. It is also worth noting that they would not have acted on their desire to engage in bullying at the prior school since there is already a conflict of power and domination in place. As a result, rather than fighting against the existing 'perceived authority,' it is easier to develop the dynamics in a new institution.

*"Because they want to make others sad and have been involved in activities like that since childhood. They might have also witnessed similar scenes, maybe in other schools." P - 23*

*"They would be someone who always has anger inside them or they would have that personality. Maybe they would also be like that because of their family as they would have grown up seeing and listening to these types of behaviors." P - 25*

### **Inferiority Complex**

Few participants believe that individuals become bullies because they feel inferior to their classmates. Everyone has the right to their own views, and being unable to form their own may result in inferior thoughts among bullies. They would, thus, engage in acts that would injure others in order to act on those inferior feelings and demonstrate to others that they are not inferior but rather their own self. This is believed to increase their self-esteem indirectly.

*"People have their own opinions of others. So, bullies have inferior thoughts when they see them." P - 10*

*"Because they're insecure about themselves, they do it to show themselves as a joker in front of everyone and get credit." P - 11*

### **Jealousy Towards Others**

Their inferiority complex manifests itself as jealousy. When bullies learn that their peers are ahead of them, especially in school, they resort to bullying in order to harm them. They may even seek assistance from others to fulfill their purpose of causing harm to others. Thus, a gang of offenders would bully an individual by banding together against them and barring them from future groups.

*"No matter what, if they think we are one step ahead of them, then they will bully or tease by seeking help from others. Yes, because of jealousy."*

P - 10

Aside from academics, if a person displays any attributes that the bully does not or would like to possess, they become an easy target for bullying.

*"They would bully others out of jealousy because the other possesses certain characteristics the bully doesn't." P - 18*

### **Influence of Drugs**

Drugs are another motivator for the bully to harm others. They may be unaware of the harm they are causing to others when under the influence of illicit substances.

The second point of view is that if a student is a habitual drug user, they may require money to purchase and consume the drugs regularly. They may threaten and extort other students if they run out of money. Thus, as a result of their drug addiction, they would be compelled to intimidate others.

*"Some might be addicted to drugs and hence they would have an intention to engage in activities like that." P - 23*

This, however, raises serious concerns since it raises issues about how youngsters obtain drugs. The researcher attempted to verify the aforementioned allegation by speaking with additional students but was unsuccessful since the students did not actively reply or refused to remark on the matter.

### **Secured Future**

According to one participant, if a person comes from a well-to-do family, there is no tension or pressure to seek education. As a result, they would naturally lose interest in pursuing a career through education, saying that they can live a very comfortable life due to their fortunate situation.

*"They are not interested in studying. They claim to have a fortune of lands and hence they say, "Even if I don't study, I can have a pretty good life because of the lands"." P - 3*

However, students engaging in bullying by disturbing and injuring others simply because they have enough money to live their lives is concerning and necessitates raising awareness in the school about the importance of education and the consequences of school bullying on both the perpetrator and victim.

### **Obsession with the Status**

According to the participants, the title 'most powerful person' is appealing, and the desire to become that person is a major incentive to engage in bullying. They consider it as their privilege to indulge in behaviors that harm others. However, they feel that these acts are enjoyable and should be regarded as such. They purposefully

disregard the advice from the other end - the victim, who expresses that they are not having as much fun as the perpetrators feel they should be. However, the screams are only heard by a deaf ear. This also assists them in maintaining their position so that they do not have competition for the same position that they are now enjoying.

*"They do it for fun to prove and hold their status. "I am the big person, and you should obey me" sort of thing. They overrule others so they don't have anyone as a competitor for their position." P - 9*

Furthermore, bullying in front of others not only increases their self-esteem but also aids in asserting power over others. This indirectly assists them in maintaining their position so that there are no competitors.

*"Because they want to portray themselves as a big person, they would engage in these behaviors in front of others." P - 22*

## **Happiness**

Participants believe that, while the offender may have an underlying motivation to harm others, their enjoyment is the primary motivator for them to participate in the action. They feel that the bully loves engaging in the conduct because it eventually leads to their enjoyment, and they find it amusing to see the other person face the repercussions of their actions. A participant who shared personal experience reported that they were frequently questioned about what they were doing and that no matter what activity they were working on at the time, they were treated to name-calling and foul language. And the victim's reaction to being subjected to the situation is a major reason why bullies continue to bully. Even if the emotions aren't as strong as they



expect, they find harming others endearing and continue to believe that they will get a major reaction eventually.

*"He does it for fun. He'll modify the names to call nicknames. Sometimes, he would suddenly come and ask what I was doing, only to spoil whatever I was engaging in. He also uses bad words. Sometimes the entire class reacts and there are times when it is only him." P - 8*

The researcher confirmed the aforementioned participant's assertions with another classmate. The participant described the experience in a similar manner. They also indicated that the bully would not be patient in all circumstances. If any of the bully's friends were exposed to such ordeals, the bully would fight back. However, if the victim is someone the victim has ill will against, they would love it.

*"He'll do it for his own fun. He would not feel happy if the person is close to him. But if the other person is someone he hates, then he would feel happy." P - 13*

Another participant affirmed that bullies use harming others to alleviate their tension. They may, however, discover satisfaction as a result of the procedure. Thus, by engaging in an activity, they would obtain two goals: peace of mind and happiness.

*"They would hurt others for the peace of their own mind. Even though they are hurting the other person, they would feel happy in the process." P - 26*

### **A Vicious Cycle of Hurt**

According to one participant, the perpetrator might resort to bullying because they had been harmed by someone else - this may be the individual's parents or friends, or they could be a victim somewhere else. However, because they would not have the

opportunity or know how to fight the other person, they would have to carry their tension and project it onto the person with whom they know they would not have any problems because their standing over them is already established.

*"Because someone would have scolded that person. Instead of keeping that at heart, that person would come and scold this person instead. They talk very badly. They talk to the individual's friends and make sure that they do not talk to this person again. They separate the friends from the person and make sure no one talks to him/her." P - 2*

### **Addiction**

A participant feels that if they had engaged in bullying for the first time for whatever reason, they would have found it appealing and repeated it over time. As a result, they would have been hooked to the bullying. As a consequence, even if they had no intention to cause to injure the other person, they would still proceed to engage in the behavior.

*"It's like an addiction. If they start bullying, some people will just get addicted to bullying, and that will become their behavior." P - 1*

### **Mindset**

Their mindset is another manifestation of addiction. According to one participant, bullies harm others because they do not know how to participate in other ways. They would have a fixed attitude to injure and annoy their peers since it is the only way they know to survive, even though they would neither enjoy the process nor receive anything in return.

*"I think, it's their mindset. If it is fixed in their mind that they want to irritate others, then they will irritate." P - 15*

### **Friendship Effect**

Peer pressure may be a primary motivator for bullying. Thus, the sort of friends a person makes at school may have a significant effect in predicting their engagement and role in bullying. Even if there is no peer pressure, if the individual is a member of a gang that actively engages in bullying, they will undoubtedly get involved in bullying in the long term.

*"Anyone can become a bully. It all depends on the type of people they make friends with. If they are friends with someone for so long, they'll absorb some of their characters." P - 4*

### **3.2. Reasons for Victimhood**

This subtheme investigates the many causes for an individual to be victimized by bullying as identified by the participants. These causes vary from personal to social/contextual.

#### **Nature - Timid**

One of the main causes of victimization, according to the participants, is being timid. These people are frequently alone and do not interact with others. They are normally quiet and do not receive much attention. Even if someone attempts to engage them in conversation, they do not respond well and retreat from the scene. Because of these features, they become an obvious target for bullying.

*"If they are very scared, then they are prone to be bullied. They are silent and would focus only on their work. If someone tries to strike a*

*conversation, this person would not respond or mingle with them, and be alone." P - 4*

Furthermore, due to their current medical ailments or restricted capacity to fight back and address the problems, they would simply sit back and let the other person have their way with them. This additionally encourages the bully to target them as the victim since they would not question them.

*"Because of their mindset, health issues, inability to defeat them, or not wanting to create a problem - they will just allow the other person to do whatever they want. There are also people who would let the other person do anything but would not pay any attention to them." P - 6*

Being naive and receptive to everyone makes them an ideal target for bullying. Dependence on others indicates that they have difficulties making their own decisions. As a result, they are an easy target for the offender since they will listen to them as well.

*"They are innocent and would listen to everyone. They can't do anything on their own. And thus, they get bullied because they listen to everyone." P*

- 16

### **Incomplete Family**

Individuals who have no or an incomplete family are particularly easy targets for bullying. The attacker regards the victim's incomplete family as having little support. They would target them because they believed no one would come to their defense or protect them. They also proceed to taunt them based on their family problems, even if the victims themselves are experiencing numerous hardships as a result of their

familial situations. This is particularly difficult for someone who has lost both parents.

*"Also, some people who have divorced parents or one parent is not there, like one of them is dead - they already have this sadness inside them that one of their parents is not with them or both of their parents are split. Some people who are orphaned are also bullied because they don't have parents. They keep bullying those people like, "You don't have parents, who are you going to tell it to?". So, they keep getting bullied." P - 1*

### **Novice Students**

When a student is new to a school, they are unaware of the institution's dynamics. As a result, these kids become an easy target, especially while they are attempting to adjust to their new educational environment. Furthermore, because they are new to the school, they may not have made any new friends and may be unaware of the regulations because they are still getting acclimated to them. Because the offenders are aware that they have no one to advocate for them and no authority figures to complain to, they take advantage of the circumstances and target them.

*"And they would bully the newcomers who do not have much idea about the school. So, when they are new, they would not know anything about the place and, of course, can't say anything too. This would make them an easy target for bullying." P - 21*

*"If the person is a new student and is walking by the seniors, then they would call and bully them. If there is a junior who is walking by, they would show off by calling them and doing things to them." P - 25*

### **Academic Achiever**

Individuals who perform well in school and achieve high exam scores are more likely to be bullied. Jealousy may drive the perpetrators to target them. Furthermore, people might believe that academic achievers are just adept at studying and hence have fewer companions. As a result, they would be unable to advocate for themselves, nor would have anybody else advocate for them.

*"She was always in the first three ranks. Most probably the first in the two ranks. She would mostly be in the first and if not, then the second. So, she was victimized." P - 1*

A participant recounted their own experience of being bullied because they were consistent in their work and kept the teacher informed on a daily basis. Because bullies do not generally do their homework on time, they target them and scare them into not alerting the teachers about the assignment tasked with. If the bullies believe that there is a chance that the individual might recall their teacher even after threatening them, they would hide their notebooks within their class or another class. In extreme circumstances, they may even shred the notebooks, leaving the individual with no work to show even though they have finished the task allocated to them.

*"They bullied me because I complete my work and tell the teachers. They would tear pages from my notebook or hide them when I go outside. They would hide my notebooks because I was regular. They would either tear pages from my notebook, or hide them, or steal and give them to some other class." P - 5*

The researcher confirmed the aforementioned allegation with other pupils in the participant's class. They agreed with the accusation and stated that the bullies are inconsistent with their work and so routinely warn the other pupils not to remind the teachers.

### **Poor Academic Record**

The perpetrators do not necessarily target academic achievers. According to one participant, whether or not the individual does well is irrelevant when the bully wishes to attack an individual. However, if a person has a low academic performance, the odds of being victimized increase. They would be bullied because the bully believes they are incapable of accomplishing anything, even acquiring knowledge.

*"Whether he studies well or doesn't - really doesn't matter as he would be victimized either way. But the chances of the individual who does not study well being victimized is more than the one who studies well. They would not tease those who study well." P - 8*

### **Complexity of Love**

Another factor that puts a person in the spotlight for the perpetrator to bully is having the same love interest as the perpetrator. The offenders are uninterested in learning the choices of their love interest. However, if they discover that someone else has romantic feelings for their love interest, they will threaten and harass them by urging them not to fall in love with them. A different perspective on the scenario is that the perpetrator not only has control over the school and the circumstance but also over their love interest and who they may see or speak with. As a result, finding out if

their romantic crush likes them back is out of the question because they are cut off from any prospective love interests.

*"Other reasons might include that stems from the romantic relationship. If you are in love with someone, they will taunt you by asking you not to fall in love because they are in love with the other person." P - 25*

### **Lack of Support**

Even if being unable to defend themselves makes them a target for victimization, not having somebody to help them fight back just highlights the problem. As previously said, naive and shy people are not typically good at establishing friends, therefore they do not have anyone to share their problems with. Even if the individual is afraid to speak up for themselves, the support of friends can aid in the fight against the offenders. However, not having friends when they are afraid to stand up for themselves makes these people an excellent target for bullying since the bullies know that no one, not even their parents, would question and hold them accountable.

*"If they become victims, then that means they can't stand up for themselves and no one is supporting them in fighting the bullies. They would also have no support from their parents and friends. Usually, shy kids are not good at making friends and they would very rarely make one. So, they struggle to stand up for themselves because no one has their back." P - 11*

### **Revenge**

According to some participants, another reason why specific persons are targeted by offenders might be a mishap. If the bullies think that the victim has done any wrongdoings against them in the past, they will have stored those bad sentiments



until the right time comes to exact their retribution. And one method of exacting vengeance is to bully the target, which is used by the majority of perpetrators. According to one participant, the offenders do not bully everyone, but mainly those who have already wronged them.

*"The bully might be angry at the victim for some reason. So maybe that's why he bullies the other person. They would bully others out of revenge."*

P - 23

*"Maybe they would have done something to anger them. So, to take revenge and embarrass them in front of others, they would victimize them. They would not victimize everyone." P – 25*

Figure 4. Theme - 3: Roles in Bullying – Bullies

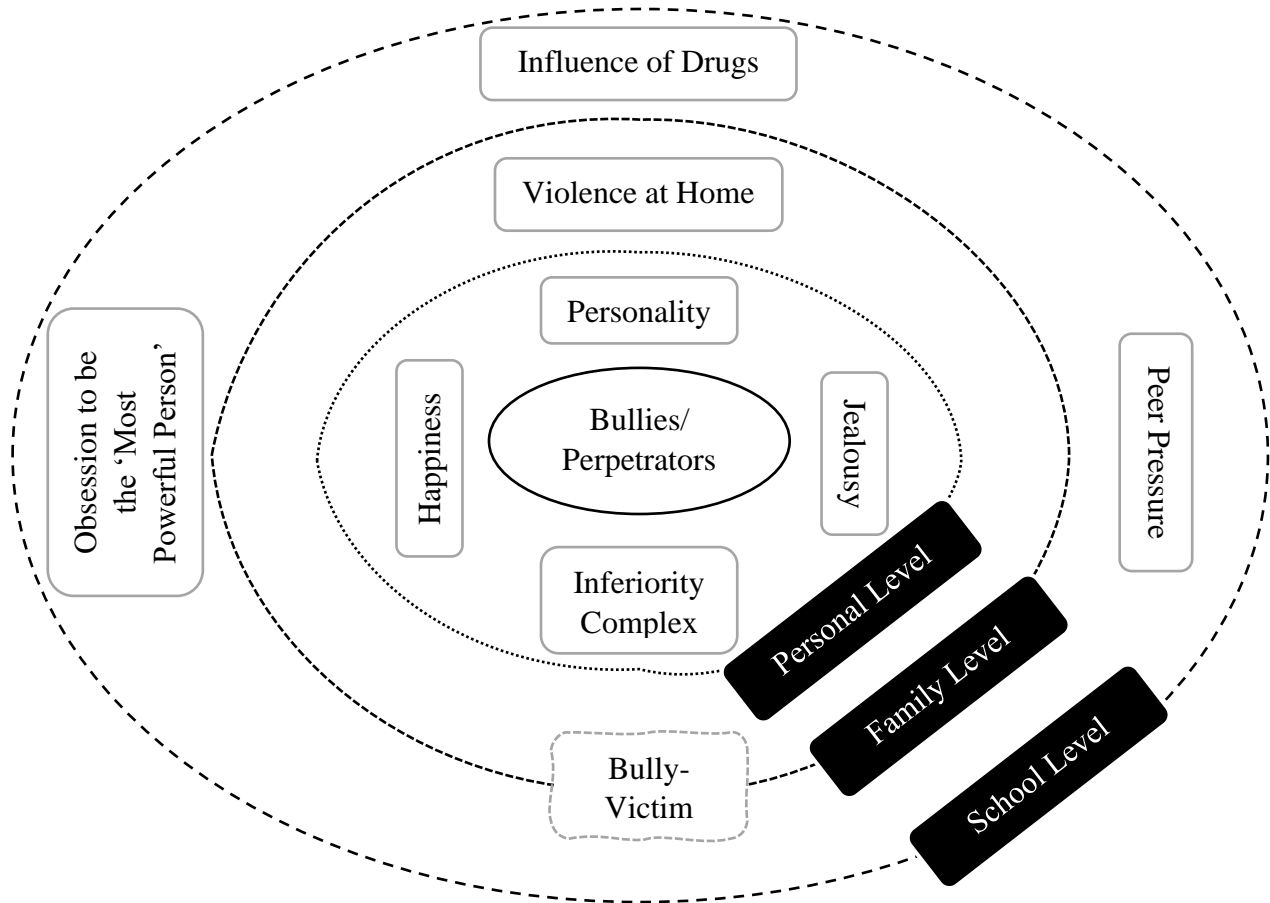
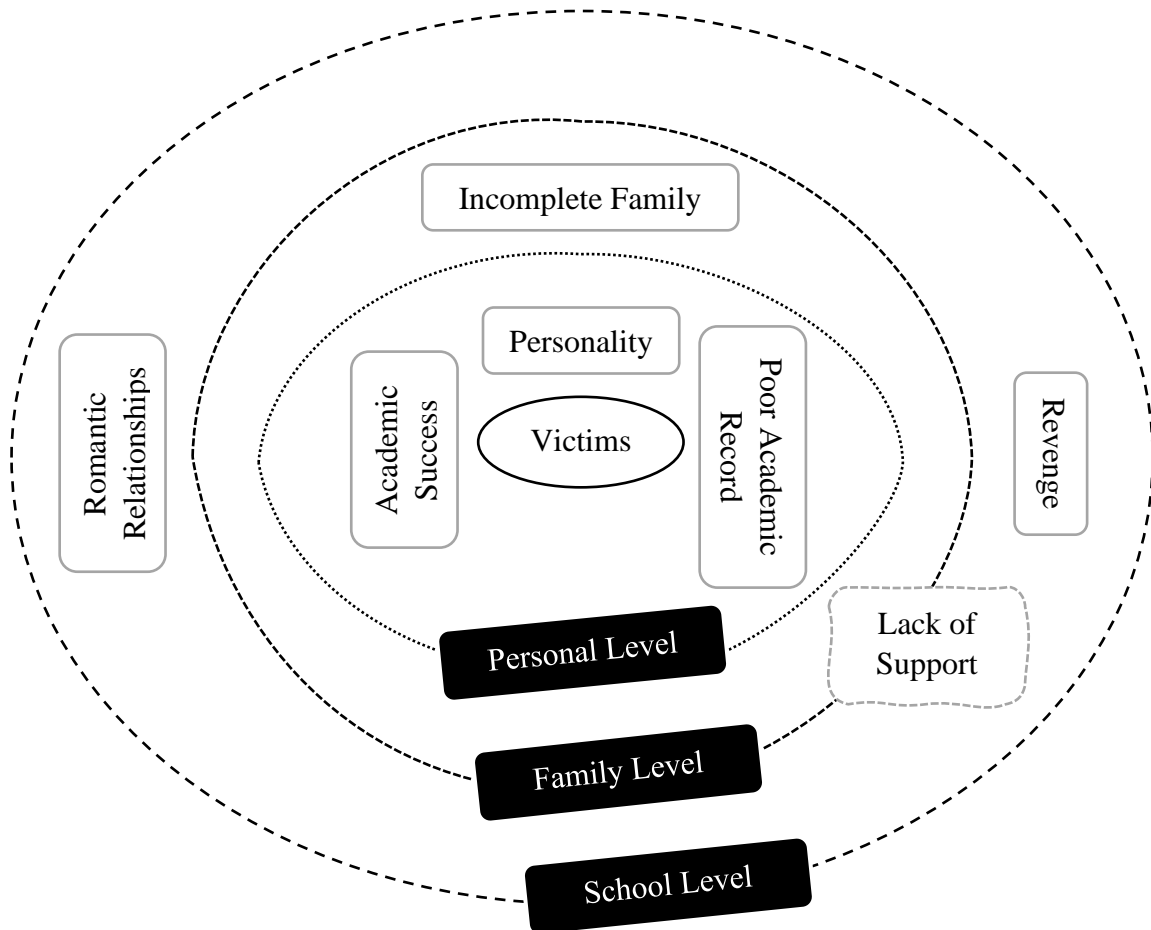


Figure 5. Theme - 3: Roles in Bullying – Victims



**Summary of Theme - 3: Roles in Bullying**

Thus, the preceding theme investigated the many roles that individuals play during the bullying process. The participants, on the other hand, vividly characterized the two most significant roles in bullying: bully and victim. Furthermore, the participants examined the numerous motivations for persons to participate in bullying as well as the reasons for them to be victimized.

Because of their personalities, the participants feel that the perpetrators engage in acts that harm others. They acquire an inferiority complex when they view their peer as being a better person or achieving better in numerous areas. Jealousy is a result of their inferiority mentality, which they utilize to victimize others they believe are better than them. The effect of drugs is a big factor for people to indulge in bullying. While those with ample money and a lack of interest in academics may indulge in bullying as a kind of amusement, others seek it only for the pleasure it provides. They may get addicted to the activity as a result of continually participating in the action as a source of enjoyment. Furthermore, the sort of friends one acquires might influence the position an individual adopts during the bullying process. If a person has acquaintances who are actively participating in perpetration, they may find themselves taking on a role in the process in the long term.

One of the main reasons an individual may become a victim of bullying is because of their timid and naive demeanor. Furthermore, having an incomplete or broken family makes them a more vulnerable target for bullying. Because of their mentality, these people would not actively seek out friendships or connect with those who offered companionship. As a result, when they are targeted, they will have no support system. Because kids are already afraid of confronting bullies, the lack of a support structure is frosting on the cake. This leads the offender to believe that they are free, with no one to question or hold them accountable for their actions. Newcomers who are unfamiliar with school norms and have few to no friends are also targeted since they are uninformed of the power dimension. However, few participants believe that the attacker would simply target those who have irritated them in the past. According

to them, the offender would store those bad emotions until the right time came and express them through bullying.

#### **4. Forms of Bullying**

Bullying takes numerous forms depending on the persons involved, the situation, and the culture in which it occurs. Exploring the many forms aids in understanding how the behavior occurs and aids in effective prevention.

##### ***4.1. Inflicting Harm***

This subtheme investigates the various ways bullies use to cause harm. The subtheme delves deeper into the forms depending on the proximity of the people involved proximity - close proximity (the individuals involved are in the same area at all times) and off proximity (the individuals involved may or may not be in the same place at all times).

##### **Physical Bullying**

Bullies, according to the participants, frequently use physical violence against their victims. For various reasons, they frequently engage in fighting, beating, and kicking them.

*"They would fight, hit, and kick us. They would also grab us by our shirt and say, "What are you being over-smart? Can't you come when we call you?" and then beat them." P - 25*

Aside from overtly participating in physical activity, bullies are believed to purposely damage the victim's most significant and treasured possession. The object spans from notebooks to the individual's automobile. It is vital to note that these are carried out when the victim is not present.

*"Like, the favorite thing of the other person, they tear it apart, even if it is their favorite book. Some... (pause). If the other person has got a bike and this person doesn't have one, they would try to destroy it when it has been parked outside and when the other person is gone." P - 2*

Another tactic used by bullies is to purposely lock someone inside the restroom and then flee. According to a participant's personal experience, the bullies would lock them inside the restroom and walk away to attend their courses. The victims stuck inside the restroom would have to wait for someone to open the door since they had to attend classes as well. However, no one would bother looking for the victim since the bullies would not have informed anybody, even the teachers. The student trapped inside would scream, weep, and pound on the doors, pleading for someone to open them, but there would be no one to save them since the room would be empty. They would be freed from the closed door if anybody in the neighboring classes heard their cries for assistance, or if someone came to use the restroom, or if the janitors showed up to clean the premises. However, it is important to note that it is not the perpetrator who would come back to free the individual who was locked. The participant further stated that the time they would be trapped inside the restroom stall may range between 30 and 45 minutes.

*"There, these people who hurt them would go to the extreme of beating others and locking them in the room. They'll lock in the bathroom. We would be banging on the door continuously. On hearing that any female workers, staff, or students from the neighboring class would come and open the door for us. It has happened 5 times to me alone." P - 6*

The researcher confirmed the aforesaid assertion with the participant's other peers. They validated the participant's allegation and said that it is something that happens on a daily basis, so it was nothing out of the ordinary. When the teachers were queried, they originally denied that anything like the circumstance at hand could happen within the vicinity. However, upon additional inquiry, they admitted that they were unaware of the incident and that they would monitor the area to avoid it from happening again in the future. Other participants have similarly confined victims to an empty and underused classroom or library.

### **Verbal Bullying**

According to the participants, the most prevalent type of bullying is verbal bullying. The participants said that they were frequently addressed with a nickname based on their physical attributes - thin or overweight - or anything that resonated with their character and demeanor. Even after several talks with the perpetrator about how they do not like being called nicknames, they find complete satisfaction in doing the exact opposite of what was instructed. If the person does not pay attention to what they are being called and remains silent, the offenders will proceed to the next stage of calling them foul phrases.

*"Calling using nicknames and keeping nicknames based on their character. How do I tell this? If a person is silent, we would call him with a name that includes bad words." P - 9*

Another form of verbal bullying is when they tell others to perform their responsibilities for them, even schoolwork. As a result, the bullies transfer academic accountability to the victim.

*"Ignoring, making fun of them, and ordering them into doing duties for us. They would also ask us to do their homework." P - 21*

### **Relational Bullying**

The participants feel that spreading a rumor about them is one of the worst techniques to be excluded from the class. One participant shared a personal experience from their previous school in which one of her classmates propagated a story about her kissing a male. She was not invited or allowed to participate in any of the teams or groups created once the story spread, and she was continually ignored by her peers. However, when the scenario reached management, they chastised the victim without investigating the case. However, the case was adequately probed only after the victim's parents became involved. It was only then that it was discovered that the boy who was 'supposedly' kissed by the girl had spread the word about her himself, and it was only when his parents were summoned to the school that he admitted the truth. However, the harm had already been done, and the victim was forced to continue her studies at a new institution.

*"I knew this girl who got this rumor spread about her. The rumor was that she went and kissed a boy. She was a really good girl. But this rumor spread, and everybody hated the girl because of that. And when it reached the principal, the principal, and the vice principal scolded that girl." P - 1*

Another participant considers that these rumors are essentially lies tailored based on the situation the victim was in. However, as the word spreads from person to person, each person will have put their own twist to the narrative. As a result, the rumor would not be even 1% of what actually occurred.



*"They would spread information about any of the situations we were in. They would modify the scenario with their lies. They would tell everyone, and they would all come back to ask if I really did that. They would tell instances that the individual had never done as something that the individual has done." P - 8*

Participants also feel that no unknown individual is engaged in the process of spreading a rumor, but rather someone known to them - friends. Because of any mistake, the companions would begin spreading tales about a member of their group, leaving the victim to face the repercussions alone. According to one participant, it is mostly the girls who are active in rumor spreading and will wait for the right opportunity to act.

*"Spreading rumors about them for no reason, being friends with them but talking trash about them with others, and not appreciating who the person truly is." P - 11*

*"In our class, it's not just the boys who spread rumors. Even the girls do it. There are some girls who are more interested in others' business than their own. If I talk with some boys, they would immediately start spreading rumors. I don't like that. They would always be rude." P - 14*

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying, according to the participants, is the most damaging kind of bullying. This is because they are blinded from knowing the person who is replying and behaving like their companion when they exchange conversations on an internet

platform. In the worst-case scenario, the participants fear that these people will use the confidential and sensitive data they have provided them, against them.

*"Cyberbullying is really, really, what can I say?...a dangerous kind of bullying. Because some people who pretend to be your friend, you talk to them and share all your information with them, they turn out to be bullies, and they use that information against you." P - 1*

A participant shared their own experience, explaining that on online platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Instagram, their peers would collect photographs of the participant and collage and edit them with some animals they believed best represented the participant and distribute them online. Despite many requests to remove the post, the offenders just ignored them and continued to mock the victim. Thus, this experience demonstrates that cyberbullying is not always perpetrated by people unknown to the victim, but rather by those acquainted with them. The participant further noted that, in addition to the cyberbullying, they would have to face the consequences in real life, where the offenders and other peers would continue to mock them. Cyberbullying by peers began during the COVID-19 epidemic when they had online classrooms but continues to this day.

*"Some people would hurt through messages. They would also compare us with some animals. I have been compared to a rat because I am small by my own friends and brother. Some people have even posted it on their social media accounts. From the moment they posted, they would keep on laughing while looking at me. I would tell them that I am hurt and ask*

*them why they are doing it. They would not answer me and just laugh at me." P - 6*

Another participant related a personal incident in which the individual with whom they were on a video call purposely called another peer who was not on good terms with the participant. When they notice the participant on the call, they will request that the individual be removed from the call and, in some cases, from the group.

*"Suppose a person is video calling another and if there's already another person on the call, he would be like, "Why did you call him? Remove him from the call and group". They would say things like that." P - 16*

#### **4.2. Culture-specific Forms**

This sub-theme delves into the cultural forms as depicted by the participants. Some of these forms may be unique to Indian culture. Thus, knowing culture-specific forms aids in the development of a culture-specific solution.

##### **Stigmatization Because of Family Conditions**

Individuals would be bullied because of their family circumstances, according to one participant. For example, if a person has a family member, particularly siblings, who has a medical problem, they are more likely to be bullied. Instead of demonstrating sympathy for the individual, perpetrators would make the condition something to mock and harm the victim.

*"And also, if they have siblings, who are mentally disturbed or something like that...who are mentally...what can I say deficient? There's a disorder that makes grown-ups act like children. If the people with this disorder have siblings without the disorder, then that sibling will be targeted like,*

*"Your sister or your brother is like this". So, they also target those people." P - 1*

### **Community Differences**

Differential treatment based on caste and other distinctions, according to the participants, is pervasive in the school, even if it is not clearly obvious. According to one participant's personal experience, peers from the upper caste would mistreat people from lower castes or subcastes. They not only discriminate against and mistreat the victim but also invite their peers to do the same. Furthermore, if the victim's upper caste peers banded together, they would physically abuse her. The participant goes on to say that those from lower castes typically don't have any support, therefore they can't fight back against the perpetrators.

*"This person belongs to the upper caste whereas the other person belongs to the lower one. The person from the upper caste talks badly about the person from the lower caste and would also tell everyone and make them talk. Sometimes, when this lower caste person is alone, the higher caste people join together as a group and beat them. The lower caste people do not have anyone to support them. If they had any sort of support, this would not happen, but unfortunately, they do not have any." P - 2*

Another participant related their own experience, saying that after knowing about their caste, their friends intentionally began to shun them.

*"I know 2 or 3 students. After learning my caste, they stopped talking with me slowly and started avoiding me." P - 3*

Another participant mentioned their personal experience of knowing peers who are very selective about the acquaintances they make and would thus only be friends with people who belong to the same caste as them. Furthermore, they would aggressively look down on and hurt persons who belong to a different caste than themselves.

*"Some people make friends only based on caste. If we take a particular caste, these people would only make friends with those who belong to the same caste. They would hurt others who belong to other castes." P - 6*

### **Socioeconomic Differences**

Even while schools are attempting to overcome socioeconomic gaps at least inside the school setting by providing all kids with a standard uniform, participants acknowledge that such differences still exist and appear as bullying. Students from affluent backgrounds would brag about the amenities available to them, their residence, and the connections they have to those from ordinary or low-income households, and use this as a tactic to harm them.

*"Like, they are rich but we are poor; they have a lot of support, but there's no one to support us; they have a lot of servants, but we don't have any and their house is big whereas our others are small, etc. But the rich are the ones who would tease the poor a lot." P - 2*

Furthermore, they would concentrate on the necessities, namely a phone and the clothing that their classmates use to tease and hurt them. They'd make matters worse by asking if they didn't have any money at all.

*"If they buy an iPhone or tablet and if we buy a small phone, they would be like, "I have a big phone, and you only have a small one. Don't you have money?" and hurt us." P - 6*

*"They would also make fun of those who do not wear expensive outfits by saying, "You're not wearing a nice shirt. Just look at you!", etc." P - 11*

A participant recounted their own experience, saying that while they were in third or fourth grade, their friends observed them being picked up by their grandfather in an Excel. Instead of just moving on, their peers began circulating stories about the participant and conducting guessing games over their home. This has left the participant with a trauma from which they are now striving to recover.

*"When I was in my 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, my grandfather would come to pick me up, and he had an Excel bike. Seeing that, they spread rumors that I come from a certain household. That's what I remember." P - 10*

### **Religious Differences**

A participant related their own experience of witnessing persons from various faith groups being treated differently than them. Even if the peers do not openly focus on religious differences, it eventually leads to an apparent disparity in treatment among the peers.

*"I have seen bullying which stemmed because of the religion. Because Muslims are treated differently. Even Christians are referred to differently – they would be scolded only in English. They do not focus on religion intentionally, but since they engage in such behaviors, it just happens." P -*

10

*"In schools itself, there are students who ask about others' religions and bully them." P - 23*

### **Language Differences**

Participants also stated that language differences exist within the school community and that classmates intentionally dissuade others from making friends with them purely because of language difficulties. Instead, they urge kids to make friends with others who speak the same language as them.

*"They would be like, "You speak a different language than me. So go and talk with people who speak your language"."* P - 16

Furthermore, they said that it is not limited to linguistic differences, but also to dialect differences. According to one participant who related their own experience, perpetrators routinely frighten those who speak a different language or dialect into learning the language of the location.

*"When the student is from another state, they would be like, "What are you even talking about? Learn our language. This is our state, and hence you should properly learn our language"."* P - 25

### **Academics-related**

One kind that the participants find unusual in Indian culture is when they are mistreated because of academic issues. Participants noted that teachers frequently forget the homework that was assigned to kids the day before. As a result, if any of them tries to remind the teachers about the homework, they will become easy targets for bullying. The offenders would then physically and verbally abuse the victim.

*"They would beat even if we remind teachers about tests. Just because they wouldn't have prepared for the test, they would beat if we reminded the teachers. They would beat and also swear us." P - 5*

#### ***Summary of Theme - 4: Forms of Bullying***

The preceding theme attempts to identify the many forms of bullying. Boys, according to participants, typically participate in physical bullying and respond by beating, punching, and kicking the victim. They would also damage the victim's precious possessions. In the worst-case situation, they would lock the victim inside the restroom for 30 to 45 minutes until someone other than the perpetrator arrived and opened the door for them.

Participants also stated that their friends frequently refer to them by nicknames that they believe best describe their physical appearance, temperament, and personality. Despite repeated appeals not to call them such, the perpetrators would ignore them. Participants also feel that girls are more likely to engage in relational bullying, in which they spread rumors about the victim or exclude them from the group. The rumors, according to the participants, generally include the victims in a romantic situation. When a circumstance similar to the one anticipated by the perpetrators arises, they would fabricate and circulate stories in order to ruin the victim's reputation. When the rumor spreads from person to person, each person adds their own perspective, resulting in the rumor blowing out of proportion and being nothing like the true event.

The type of bullying that participants are most afraid of is cyberbullying, in which they may not know who the person on the other end is. As a result, if the individual



trusts them enough to reveal personal and sensitive information to them, they will try to use that information against them. The participants felt that cyberbullying by peers became more serious when their own classmates began sharing photographs comparing the victim to animals, they believe the individual is most akin to. And no number of requests would persuade the perpetrator to remove the posting as they would turn a deaf ear to their pleas.

Participants noted how, despite the schools' efforts to establish a community free of caste, social, religious, and linguistic disparities, they nonetheless occur within the school premises. They revealed personal stories of being mocked, physically abused, and outcast by their peers because of their caste, religion, and social status. When the perpetrators encounter peers who do not speak the same language or speak a different dialect, they compel them to learn the language properly.

Furthermore, one aspect that the participants felt distinctive to Indian culture was when they were persecuted as a result of academic-related issues, particularly schoolwork. When a student reminds teachers of homework that was assigned to them the day before, they become an accessible target for bullying.

## **5. Occurrence of Bullying**

School bullying can occur in a variety of settings inside the school. However, it can also occur outside of the school, either near the school or in other locations perpetrated by persons recognized in the school community.

### ***5.1. Inside School***

This subtheme investigates the numerous locations inside the school where bullying occurs, as identified by the participants.

## **Restroom**

A participant feels that most bullying occurs in the toilet. One of the reasons is that the place is private, with little to no monitoring from the teachers. As a result, it provides a safe sanctuary for offenders to indulge in bullying. As previously said, restrooms allow attackers to lock the victim inside a restroom stall and easily avoid being held accountable for their acts.

*"Basically, I think some people bully in the restroom because it's private. Not that many people come to the restroom. There are some cases of people bullying in the restroom because they just shove the people against the wall and start blackmailing. That's one kind of bullying." P - 1*

A participant who shared their own experience stated that even if they were absent from class, the teachers would not notice. Even if their classmates notice that they are not in class, they will naturally think that they are using the restroom for personal reasons rather than being confined within the stalls.

*"Teachers usually monitor the restroom, but if they are not there, they will fight there. Sometimes, they would lock inside the restroom. When trying to wash their hands, they would either take the handkerchief and run away or try to push inside. It is more inside the restroom compared to the class. Someone who would come to use the restroom would open the door. Or the aunties who would come to clean would open. It has not happened to me, but I have seen them pushing someone down. In case of waiting, they would not stay inside long - but a max. of 30 minutes. It would take time for the teachers to notice that someone is missing. Even if the friends*

*know, if the person did not return soon, they might think he has personal business to attend." P - 10*

### **Classroom**

A participant recounted their own experience, stating that the offender generally participates in bullying inside the classroom only while the teacher is not there. They would not harass when the teacher is in the classroom because they would report them to the school and have them penalized.

*"Actually, in the classroom, they start a fight for no reason and make fun of the shy kids. They would bully in the absence of the teacher. If the teacher finds out, she'll take them to the principal and have them punished." P - 11*

The researcher attempted to validate the statements by speaking with the teachers and principal. They did not, however, provide a sufficient response.

Another participant stated that even if the offender bullies their friends in the classroom when the teacher is not there, they will forget about it after they leave.

Interestingly, the perpetrator anticipates that the victims will leave the situation behind once they leave the classroom and feels that the problem develops only when the victims carry the events with them.

*"My friend would do it in the class only. He will only start when the teacher is not there. He will leave it in the classroom and not take it outside." P - 13*

## **Playground**

According to one participant, the offenders would engage in bullying on the playground due to the large audience available. They chose the place because there would be many peers to encourage them and laugh at the victim's mistreatment. The reaction of peers improves the perpetrator's self-esteem, and the larger audience also aids in effortlessly establishing power over the crowd.

*"In the playground - because there would be a lot of students to laugh and make fun of the victim, they get bullied. Everyone would make fun of them." P - 16*

## **Verandah**

According to one participant, the verandah is a readily accessible site for bullying, and individuals would be violated at any time of day in the absence of the teachers - morning sessions, intervals, or lunch breaks.

*"In the verandah, during the morning session when there are no teachers, brief intervals, or lunch breaks." P - 13*

## **5.2. Around School**

This subtheme investigates the many places surrounding the school where bullying typically occurs, based on participant testimonies.

### **Bus Stand**

According to one participant's personal experience, the bus stop is the most prevalent location when attackers bully an individual outside of school. It is important to emphasize, however, that it is not just the bully who would harass an individual outside of school, but also the hooligans with whom the bully maintains a

connection. The bully and the hooligans would use weapons - generally knives - to threaten the individual.

*"Except for the road, outside the school, it takes place a lot at the bus stand. I come to the school on the bus daily and have witnessed it twice. A 12th guy called a rowdy. Even my friend's brother got my friend involved in bullying and rowdies a lot." P - 3*

### **Roads**

Outside of school, the most prevalent location for bullying to occur is on the roads. If the perpetrators meet the individual on the way, they will verbally violate them by calling them by the nicknames that they had requested not to be called. The perpetrator, on the other hand, would use those identities to address the individual in front of a bigger audience.

*"People would bully online, in class, or on the road - some people would give nicknames to the others in the class, and when they are walking on the road, they would call them using those names in front of everyone." P -*

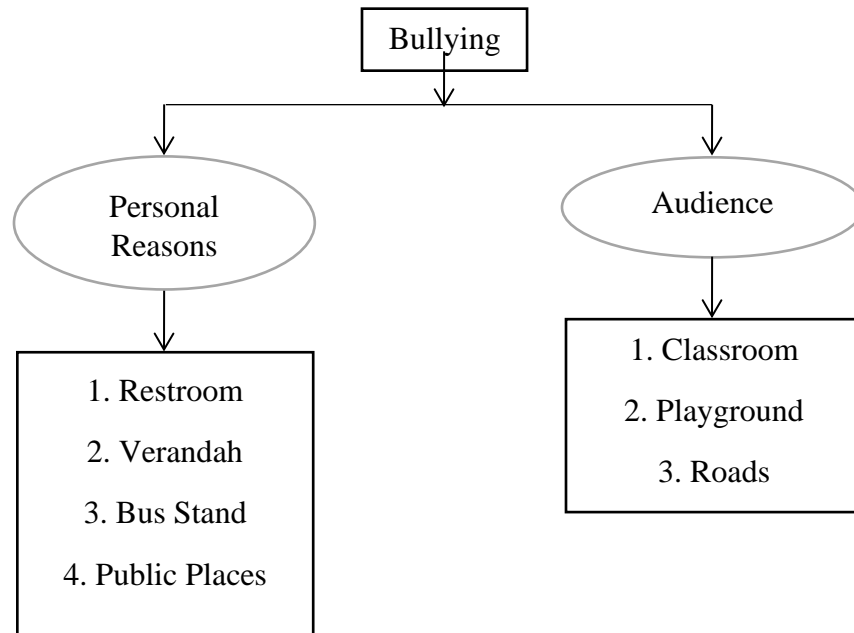
*6*

### **Public Places**

If the students decide to congregate in a public place for various reasons, the offender will begin bullying them regardless of the venue or audience.

*"If we are meeting them in a place, they would start speaking badly about the person, like in the park, beach, etc." P - 2*

Figure 6. Theme - 5: Occurrence of Bullying



**Summary of Theme - 5: Occurrence of Bullying**

The preceding theme attempted to comprehend the different settings - both within and outside of schools - where bullying occurs. According to the participants, the most prevalent venue within the school is the restrooms, since perpetrators are certain that they will not be held accountable regardless of their actions. Even if the victim is trapped inside a restroom stall, the participants agreed that teachers would have a difficult time identifying a missing pupil. Furthermore, if their friends become aware that the individual is missing from class and has not returned from the restroom, they will believe that the individual is using the restroom for personal reasons rather than worrying about the individual being locked inside the stall.

The second most prevalent location within the school is the classroom, where the perpetrators would torment the victims and expect that once they stepped out, the

victims would forget everything that had happened in the classroom. Other locations include the playground, where they will have a larger audience to amuse and dominate and the verandah.

The most popular areas around the school are bus stands and roadways. At bus stops, the perpetrators would approach the individual with the hooligans with whom they share a connection and threaten the victim with a weapon. On the road, the perpetrators frequently refer to them by the nicknames they have asked not to be called. Nonetheless, they continue to violate the individual because of the greater audience.

## **6. Prevention of Bullying**

The most crucial step in avoiding school bullying is to prevent it from escalating further. Not all anti-bullying strategies, however, have been demonstrated to be beneficial. As a result, it is critical to learn from the key beneficiaries, students, how they reckon one may effectively reduce school bullying.

### ***6.1. Preventive Measures***

This subtheme investigates the many preventative approaches proposed by participants to successfully deal with school bullying.

#### **Starts from Home**

According to one participant, parents of children should become involved in order to successfully reduce school bullying. They should educate their children at a young age that it is bad to violate others and that it is necessary to be accommodating to everyone. The participant recommends an exercise that might assist an individual in comprehending the severity of bullying. During the practice, the parents should

pretend to be a bully in order for the individual to grasp what it is like to be on the receiving end. Individuals should thus be taught not to perpetrate by their parents because it would have serious implications for both the individual and the victim. Instead, they should educate them to be prosocial and serve others, which would benefit both of them. The participant is convinced that this is one method for reducing and preventing school bullying.

*"If parents tell their children not to bully- Some parents will sometimes behave like bullies, just to tell their children not to bully... Like, this is how they will feel, so don't bully. Just for, like, a few minutes, they will pretend to be a bully. If the parents teach their children not to be bullies, not to hurt other people's feelings, that it will be bad for them, it will be bad for you; it will be a negative result for both of you. But if you help them, it'll be good for both of you. So, help them instead of bullying them. If the parents teach that, if all the parents teach that, and most importantly, the children accept it, then bullying can be prevented. It can be reduced." P - 1*

### **Moral Sciences Classes**

Aside from being taught at home, the participant advises that schools incorporate Moral Science classes in their curriculum. These classes would teach excellent values through stories, and all pupils would learn how to be good people and citizens as a result. The participant also underlines that it is past time to act on the situation as if nothing is done now, it will spiral out of control.



*"Moral security- moral safety classes. Like probably once a week, we could have- Many schools did this, who does this- Why am I saying who, which does this, and my old school also had this subject called VBSC. This VBSC class will tell you how to be good citizens, how to be good people, and not follow these. Once a week, if you have these kinds of classes, you don't- it doesn't even need to be named VBSC; name it something like bully classes or something like that. No matter its name, it should just teach the students how to be good citizens and not hurt others. My personal feeling is that if people's- bullying increases, the world will become a bully to itself. So, we have to do all the measures to decrease it now." P - 1*

### **Create Awareness**

According to one participant, raising awareness is one of the most effective strategies to combat school bullying. However, the participant also notes that, while there is sufficient knowledge of the issue in other nations, understanding of the issue in India is relatively restricted. As a result, raising awareness would assist the student body in understanding the situation at hand.

*"We should create awareness. We do not have much awareness in India. I have not seen much news about bullying in India online. But I am aware of it in other countries." P - 10*

### **Standup for Others**

According to one participant, it is preferable to ignore the scenario entirely in order to avoid being engaged. In unforeseen situations, however, victims must advocate for themselves. If they are unable to protect themselves or fight the bully, their peers should assist the victim in fighting the aggressor.

*"By standing up for those who can't stand up for themselves and avoiding them as much as possible. I think it's better to avoid them. And also, by standing up for oneself." P - 11*

Another person suggested that the students come out and bring the situation to the attention of the teachers and parents. If they do this, even threatening the perpetrator and urging them not to bully will help prevent the issue from going further, as they would learn that they would be held responsible for their behavior.

*"Others should help the person who is being bullied. They should threaten the bully and say, "Don't do it. If you do it, I'll complain to the teachers or parents"." P - 16*

### **Counseling**

Few participants feel that assisting the perpetrator in receiving counseling will aid in the prevention of school bullying. A participant believes that the perpetrator should be counseled. They feel that therapy should be provided continuously for a month in order to observe a difference in them. If the desired change is not achieved, the perpetrator should be counseled until they change.

*"We should give them counseling. They would change if the counseling is given continuously for a month or so. We should give them counseling till they change." P - 7*

According to another participant, if bullying concerns are presented, the school should select a teacher, preferably a sir, to watch the specific spot where the bullying allegedly occurred. And, once recognized, the perpetrator should be counseled.

*"We have to be friends with everyone. If we know where bullying usually occurs, we should appoint a teacher, especially a sir, to stand by. We could also send them to counseling." P - 28*

### **Inform Parents or Teachers**

According to one participant, one effective technique to cope with bullying is to bring it up with parents or teachers and encourage them to take appropriate action. If the offender continues to engage in the same behavior despite being informed by parents and teachers, the problem should be forwarded to higher authority in the hopes of prompt action to prevent the situation from evolving further.

*"To prevent this, we can inform the parents and ask them to take some actions. Or we can inform the teachers and ask them to take action. If they keep doing the same thing and cause more trouble, we can inform the Principal or Head Master and get them to give their TCs." P - 5*

Another participant asserts that peers should stand up to perpetrators and, if they do not see any change in their conduct, they should discuss the problem with teachers first, and subsequently with parents.

*"If they do not change after we tell them, we should inform the teachers first. And then the parents." P - 9*

### **File a Complaint**

The participants feel that if the participation of both teachers and parents does not result in a change in the offender and they continue to engage in the conduct, the victim should file a complaint against them with the police and let the police take its course. The participant believes that after the complaint is filed, the police will contact the school administration to warn the perpetrators not to engage in this behavior again. If the severity of the issue is high, they would approach the school administration about suspending the bully.

*"They could also file a complaint to the police. The police can talk with the principal and suspend the bully. Or they could warn the bully to not engage in those behaviors further, one last time." P - 18*

Another participant feels that if the perpetrator continues to harm their peers, they should be turned over to the police, where they will be tried by the law and punished with prison time. They also feel that the culprit will only change once they have served their prison sentence and realize the gravity of the situation.

*"If they keep doing it, we should hand over them to the police. When they return from jail, they would realize they were wrong." P - 28*

### **Transfer Certificates (TC)**

According to one participant, improvements should be made to school policy, and decisions should be made by teachers who have the authority to issue a Transfer Certificate (TC) to perpetrators who have not changed even after numerous

warnings. Many participants feel that issuing a TC is the final and only option for preventing school bullying from worsening at a school when no other steps taken by peers, teachers, or parents are effective.

*"The teachers should be strong enough to decide the bullies. They should change the school policy to the extent that if someone gets caught bullying, they should be given the Transfer Certificate (TC)." P - 19*

### **Be Friends**

Few participants agree that making friends with your peers is one of the simplest strategies to prevent bullying in school. This can be accomplished by requiring classmates to spend the majority of their time within the classroom. As a result, when the classmates leave the class, they will automatically rely on one another and become friends by being accommodating to one another.

*"We should try to be friends with everyone, and the school should provide us with all the resources to accomplish that. We should also spend most of our time in the classroom. When we do this instead of going out, we would naturally become friends with the people we share the space with." P - 27*

### **Be Silent**

Another method suggested by the participant for keeping the issue from growing further is to remain silent. They believe that even if the perpetrator breaches, one should ignore them and focus on the work at hand. As there is no provocation involved, the participant feels that not paying attention to the perpetrator will assist in reducing the severity of the harm caused.

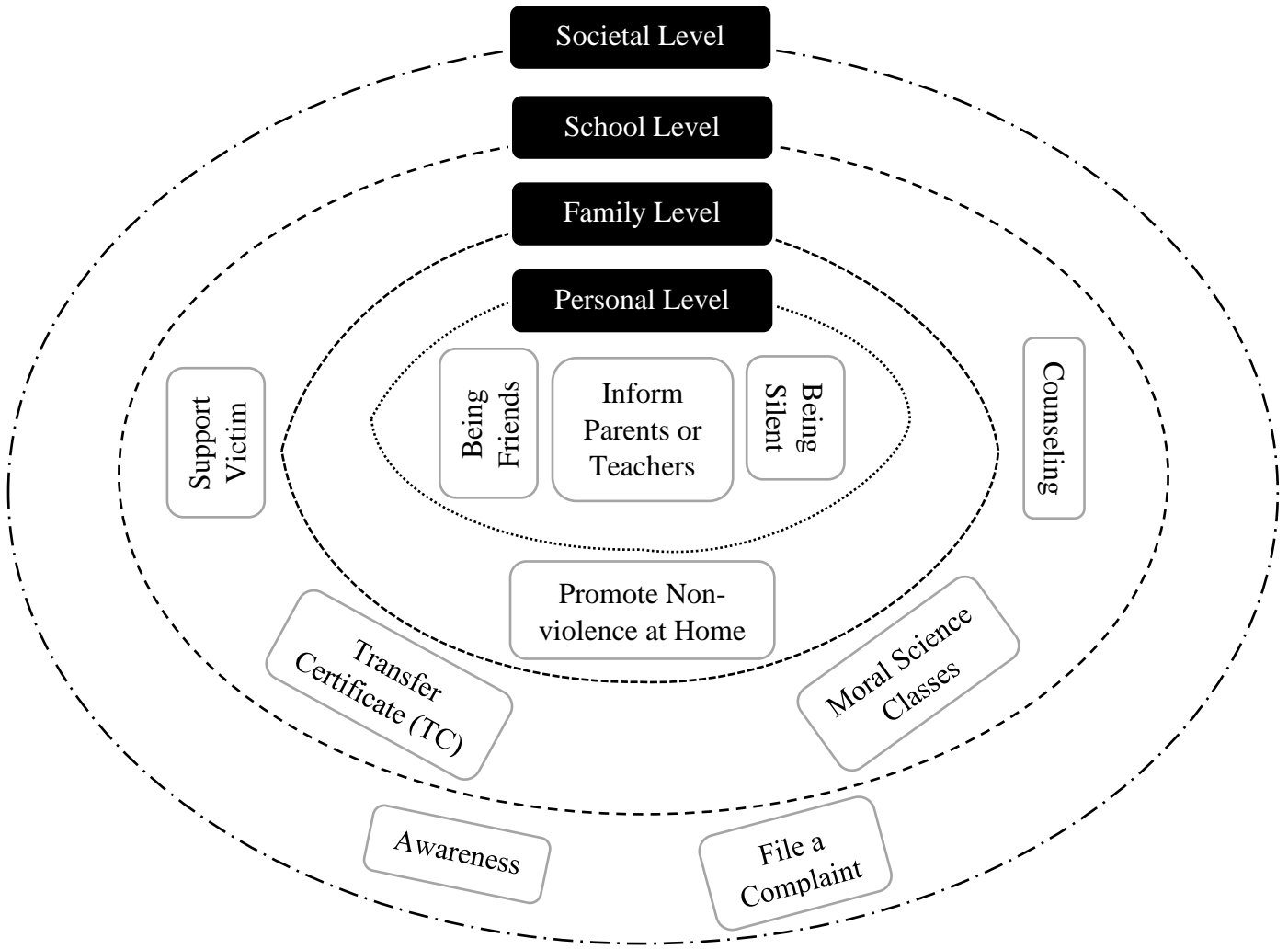
*"When we are playing and if someone makes fun of us, we should not mind it and be silent. We could actually prevent the situation from escalating further by being silent." P - 27*

### **Taste of Their Own Medicine**

The taste of their own medication is one of the odd methods suggested by the participant. The participant believes that the offenders will not fully comprehend the seriousness of the issue or the pain inflicted on the victim until their sibling is bullied. Only then would they realize the hurt they had caused and attempt to amend their conduct.

*"I hope he has a sister who undergoes the same thing and goes back to tell him, so he understands how much he hurts others." P - 12*

Figure 7. Theme - 6: Prevention of Bullying



**Summary of Theme - 6: Prevention of Bullying**

Thus, the preceding theme investigates the many strategies proposed by the participants to avoid bullying in school. According to the participants, parents should teach their children not to injure others in order to successfully combat school bullying. Parents should also explain the repercussions of their child's actions, for both the offender and the victim. Furthermore, schools should implement moral

science programs in which kids are taught excellent morals and values through narratives.

Participants also agreed that when the offender does not stop but continues to engage in the conduct, peers should speak up for the victim and raise the problem with parents or teachers. Furthermore, if teachers and parents are unable to properly address the matter, it should be notified to the school administration or filed with the police. As a result, the bully would be cautioned, suspended, or given TC for their actions.

The participants also feel that becoming friends with their peers is the simplest approach to combat bullying. When students spend a lot of time together, they naturally learn to depend on each other and be accommodating. Another option for dealing with school bullying is to remain silent. One of the atypical methods proposed by a participant to guarantee the offender learns their lesson is to hope that their sibling is harmed in the same way, so that the perpetrator understands the gravity of the issue and the ramifications.

To conclude, individuals are reported to be subjected to school bullying on a regular basis. Bullies are reported to have poor self-esteem and are motivated by a need for approval from their peers. As a result, they victimize people who are afraid or with whom they have a history and carry unpleasant sentiments. When they are driven by vengeance, they seek locations where they will not be held accountable for their acts. When they are driven by the need for entertainment, they tend to move to areas where there is a large enough crowd. This would assist them in gaining dominance



over the crowd and regaining their self-esteem. Bullying can, thus, only be prevented if all the shareholders involved both directly and indirectly, participate equally.

## **CHAPTER - V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The current study investigated adolescents' perceptions of school bullying in the southern states of India, especially their comprehension and conceptualization of the phenomenon. The analysis yielded several themes, including comprehension and conceptualization of bullying; roles involved in bullying, forms, places with incidence, and prevention of bullying.

#### **Comprehension of Bullying**

Several characteristics/behaviors can assist in identifying and differentiating school bullying from other behaviors. Participants indicated that bullies are frequently identifiable when they display the following characteristics/behaviors: body shaming, disturbing others, and rebelling against teachers. According to the findings of the current study, perpetrators engage in body shaming, which at first appeared to be a harmless jest by shadow friends. The findings were supported by Ayu et al. (2022) who defined body shaming as an act of physical humiliation intended at words is a significant phenomenon to be aware of since it is a kind of bullying. This practice is found to be fatal to the victim's psychological growth. The findings also indicated that the perpetrators of body shaming were their shadow friends or remained in the same school, whether the aim was humorous or not, which was not warranted. Additionally, according to Kapoor (2022), 70 percent of adolescents aged 15 to 19 years in India have experienced body shaming in school, an environment designed to combat such stereotypes and concerns rather than nurture them. It is also discovered that, even though the majority of adolescents are affected by this issue, most schools lack groups or help desks to address the gravity of the situation.

Furthermore, body shaming has been demonstrated to predict body dysmorphic disorder if not dealt with at the appropriate time (Lestari, 2019).

According to Reisdorph (2015), disturbing others is a hallmark of school bullying, as found in the present study, since it is perceived as an unprovoked, aggressive, forceful, occasionally violent, and sometimes threatening action. Bullies also intend to injure, harm, threaten, harass, intimidate, and/or frighten their target(s). However, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2021), bullied children are those who do not get along with others, are perceived as bothersome or aggravating, or provoke others for attention, also known as provocative victims. The disparity in the findings should be investigated further in the Indian context. Being disrespectful to teachers is another hallmark of school bullying. This is because bullies frequently believe that teachers always view them as targets or undesirable teaching materials, so they ignore the teacher's commands and attract the teacher's attention and recognition by doing the contrary (Zhao, 2022).

The participants also provided various explanations for why school bullying occurs, including the need to be liked by others, self-esteem concerns, a strong hatred for the victim, a scenario that escalates from fun to trouble, and betrayal by friends. According to Menesini and Salmivalli, (2017), individuals who are bullies are perceived as having poor social skills, low self-esteem, impairments in social information processing, low social standing in the peer group, and other adjustment issues. Despite the widespread perception that poor self-esteem leads to aggressiveness, including bullying. Although negative self-related cognitions are (weakly) associated with bullying, they do not predict becoming a pure, non-victimized bully (Cook et al., 2010). In general, there is minimal support for the aggression-low self-esteem theory

(Baumeister et al., 2000). Instead, new research indicates that narcissism, or a sense of grandiosity and entitlement, as well as callous-emotional qualities (characterized by a lack of empathy and shame) are linked to bullying (Fanti & Kimonis, 2012; Reijntjes et al., 2016). Furthermore, study findings show that bullies are confident in their use of violence, expect favorable outcomes for aggression (e.g., peer acknowledgment), see aggression as a normal way of behaving, and have an overall positive attitude toward the use of aggression (Toblin et al., 2005).

Negative interactions, such as dislike and bullying, have been shown to have a significant impact on children's social, psychological, and intellectual development (Arseneault, 2018; Kretschmer et al., 2018; Newcomb et al., 1993). Externalization and internalization of problems (Hodges & Perry, 1999; van Lier et al., 2012), issues with both mental and physical health (Arseneault, 2018), low self-esteem (Egan & Perry, 1998), and academic maladjustment (Buhs et al., 2006; Ladd et al., 1997) have all been linked to being disliked or bullied by peers. Kisfalusi et al. (2022) discovered mutual reinforcement between hate and bullying/victimization in their study. Disliked youngsters were shown to be more prone to bully or be victimized by people who hated them earlier. Children who had previously been despised by more schoolmates were more likely to bully or be mistreated by other schoolmates. Importantly, victims were more likely to be despised over time by those who bullied them but not by other students, but bullies were more likely to be disliked over time by both those they tormented and other students.

According to research, students bully for a variety of reasons, including defining social status, acquiring material rewards, experiencing fun, releasing emotions, achieving a sense of security in school, adhering to group norms or group pressure, over revenge, and punishing rebels (Frisén

et al., 2008; Lam & Liu, 2007; Sijtsema et al., 2009; Thornberg, 2010). Furthermore, Varjas et al. (2010) state that adolescents may bully just "for fun." It is vital to emphasize that this motive varies from deriving pleasure by hurting others since teenagers who bully for fun may not care if their targets suffer harm or not. When friendships are strained, individuals are frequently purposefully excluded from get-togethers, parties, excursions, or organizations by their ex-friends. They would also have others ignore them, not want to be their friend anymore, or not want them in their group, and have ugly lies, rumors, or stories spread about them (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). False friendships are relationships in which someone appears to be a friend or is a 'friend' on occasion but exploits their authority to abuse another. It is critical to recognize that bullying is not always as obvious as someone openly being unkind to another person. It can be far more complex than that. False friendships can be difficult to detect even among adults (Anti-Bullying Alliance, n.d.-1).

In three phases, the participants comprehended the process of school bullying. Baiting, generating stress on the victim, and being selfish and overbearing towards the victim are the precedents. To 'bait' someone, according to the Anti-Bullying Alliance (n.d.-2), is to purposefully upset someone by saying or doing things that irritate them. Baiting is therefore a provocative act designed to elicit an angry, violent, or emotional response from another person. It may be used both offline and online to bully someone to elicit a 'rise' out of them, as well as to antagonize people who may be bullying others to induce them to bully. Baiting is often done covertly to try to persuade someone to burst into a fury or respond negatively/loudly, causing them to get into trouble. According to Arzt (2023), when a person is a victim of bullying or harassment, they will feel a range of feelings, from moderate humiliation to intense dread as a result of being in a situation where their safety is jeopardized. Thus, school bullying is a different social stressor

because it is characterized by a systematic type of interpersonal aggression accompanied by acute emotions of powerlessness and defenselessness. And bullies utilize this effectively on victims to display dominance over them. Furthermore, stress is associated with actions and attitudes in both the victim and the one engaged in bullying behavior (Kampoli et al., 2017). Victims, in particular, have either an enhanced or muted stress response, which has been linked to mental health conditions (Arseneault et al., 2010). Cohen and Wills (1985) indicated that children who are isolated from their peers experience great stress (i.e., social isolation), which is also indicated by higher levels of cortisol in those children (Peters et al., 2011) in support of the buffering effect of social support on bullying-related psychopathology.

Furthermore, an adolescent is prone to bullying others in school and getting in trouble simply because they act on impulse, wish to be selfish, and make poor judgments. As a result, bullies emphasize their physical strength and feed on other people's shortcomings. They are better at regulating than leading, and they are more prone to rage, impatience, and a lack of patience. They have little regard for authority or anybody who is weaker than them and see violence - physical, verbal, or emotional - as a way to advance in life (Times of India, 2022). School bullying, according to Rivara et al. (2016), has both short- and long-term consequences for the person who is tormented, the person who bullies, the person who is bullied and bullies others, and the bystander present during the bullying incident. Bullying's physical health implications might be immediate, such as physical harm, or long-term, such as headaches, sleep difficulties, or somatization. Internalizing disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and, especially for females, self-harming behavior, are prevalent after being bullied (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kidger et al., 2015; Klomek et al., 2009, 2015). Externalizing issues can arise as a consequence, particularly in boys (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Rueger and colleagues (2011) discovered a consistent

contemporaneous connection between peer victimization and maladjustment time. Students who had sustained victimization throughout the school year had exceptionally positive psychological and academic outcomes.

### **Conceptualization of Bullying**

Apart from the three fundamental characteristics of school bullying, which are negative acts, repetition, and power imbalance (Cheng et al., 2011), the participants agreed on another - morals. Participants think that most bullies engage in actions despite understanding the harm they bring to the victim and the repercussions they would face if held accountable. This demonstrates that if a person engages in school bullying without being aware of the negative implications, they may be trained not to engage in similar activities in the future. However, if the person is already aware, it demonstrates that they intentionally choose to injure others even when they are aware that it is wrong and socially undesirable.

Moral disengagement is a psychological process that increases the likelihood of unpleasant and cruel behavior by relieving the individual of self-censure and possible guilt (Bandura et al., 2001; Bandura, 1999). In both adults and children, research has demonstrated a positive association between violent conduct and moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 2001; Bandura, 1995; Caprara et al., 1995; Paciello et al., 2008). As a result, higher moral disengagement is associated with more aggressive and violent conduct. Children who bully others are also more likely to be ethically disengaged (Barchia & Bussey, 2007; Gini, 2006; Hymel et al., 2005). Thus, bullies are more likely to experience pride or indifference (emotions linked with moral disengagement) than guilt or shame, and they prefer to highlight personal repercussions or advantages for the bully in explaining these sentiments (Menesini et al., 2003). Even after adjusting for initial aggression,

significant levels of moral disengagement are found to be connected with higher aggressiveness 8 months later (Hymel & Bonanno, 2014).

The failure to distinguish between peer victimization and bullying, according to Malecki et al. (2015), is the most obvious issue. Bullying entails hostile behaviors that are repeated over time with purpose and a power difference between the victim and the perpetrator. Peer victimization entails repeated hostile behaviors but does not need intentionality or a power imbalance. While these two concepts appear to be identical, Hunter et al. (2007) study reveals that they are not. Within their own experiences, they discovered that youngsters discriminate between bullying and peer victimization. Furthermore, bullied and peer-victimized kids have distinct degrees of depressive symptoms, employ different coping methods, and have varied assessments of danger.

However, previous studies that have analyzed the students' perceptions of the phenomenon found that a large proportion of adolescents do not concurrently apply the criteria of motive to hurt, repetition, and disparity in power, which differs greatly from the findings of the current study (Frisén et al., 2008; Guerin & Hennessy, 2002; Madsen, 1996; Naylor et al., 2006; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Furthermore, Cuadrado-Gordillo (2012) discovered in their study that none of the three groups - bully, victim, and bystander - thought the criterion of repetition was relevant in defining bullying. Another finding was that both aggressors and witnesses used the criteria of 'power imbalance' and 'intent to hurt' to identify a bullying situation, with the aggressors emphasizing their superiority of power over the victim and the witnesses emphasizing their intent to hurt the victim. One interesting conclusion was that victims do not consider the 'power imbalance' element. The 'intent to cause harm to' was the aspect that



affected their perceptions. Furthermore, certain forms of bullying were perceived as ordinary teenage social interactions, with perception varying widely depending on the adolescent's status as aggressor, victim, or bystander.

### **Roles in Bullying**

The current study investigated the motivational elements for becoming a bully as well as the causes for being bullied at three levels: personal, family, and school. Personal motivators for being a bully include their personality, inferiority complex, envy, and the satisfaction they get from harming others, while familial motivators include being exposed to violence at home. At the school level, the variables include a fixation with becoming the most famous person in school, peer pressure, and the effect of drugs with the factor – of being a bully-victim lying at both the home and school levels. This is because regardless of where the child is harmed - at home or school - they will carry their rage and hatred with them and take them out on their target at school.

Personal reasons for being bullied include their personality and both academic achievement and poor academic record, while familial causes include having an incomplete or shattered family. At the school level, the issues include problems with romantic relationships and being victimized for vengeance. However, the factor – lack of support lies at both the family and school levels because a kid becomes an easy target if they do not have support from their home and have no one to support and speak up for them at school.

According to Baumeister (1999), there are four causes of violence: predation (or instrumental violence), retribution, ideology, and sadism. Pinker (2011) expands on McClelland's (1987) taxonomy of reasons (TOR) by adding a fifth category: power, saying that the desire for power is

a type of instrumental violence that is ubiquitous in humans. According to Fluck (2017), instrumental violence occurs when the offender assaults the victim in order to achieve a goal that he or she cannot achieve by nonviolent methods. This is one typical motivation for bullying is that bullies frequently blackmail their victims into giving them money or precious stuff. Violence driven by a desire for power occurs when the offender wishes to secure or improve his or her status within a social organization, and girls have been found to utilize different types of violence than boys. Furthermore, when it comes to bullying, the traits that increase the likelihood of becoming a victim appear to be psychological rather than ethnicity, social status, outer appearance, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and other obvious traits that distinguish the individual from the majority (e.g., low self-esteem, shyness, introversion). Bullies may also engage in violence to gain pleasure from seeing another person suffer. As a result, fellow students are tormented in the classroom out of boredom, which is one of the primary reasons females, bully. Furthermore, while bullies claim that their motivation is largely vengeance, victims generally indicate sadism and power.

When it comes to the reasons for bullying, a variety of individual-environment juvenile violence theoretical frameworks indicate that numerous characteristics of both people and environments contribute to the likelihood of being targeted (e.g., Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Most theories, on the other hand, believe that the reasons an individual is chosen for victimization can be fully explained at the individual level (e.g., Gumpel, 2014; Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Targeting, on the other hand, appears to be an acute manifestation of larger relational, cultural, structural, and socioeconomic linking systems of oppression for individuals (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Thornberg, 2010; Wendell, 1990), possibly to maintain a dominant and hegemonic moral order (Davies, 2011). Individual-level characteristics (e.g., ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, gender, and ability) interact with contextual oppressive forces (e.g., classism, racial discrimination, sexism, ableism) to produce unique reasons for victimization, according to these perspectives (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Gumpel, 2014). That is, victimization happens in a relational context in which a range of distinct interchanging oppressive systems might manifest. As a result, students' perspectives on the causes of victimization are expected to represent both individual and relationship phenomena.

Gardella et al. (2020) identified 35 widely stated explanations in their study, several of which are underrepresented in earlier studies. Students cited explanations mostly connected to relational dynamics, physical traits, non-physical personal factors, and external aspects. Sexual/dating past, peer group, shadow peers, family they belong to, being new to the school, and age/grade they belong to are all aspects classified as relationship dynamics. These findings depict being targeted as a social phenomenon with both individual and environmental components. Body/physical dynamics elements include the victim's general look, how they dress, body weight, height, beauty, hair, cases of illness or impairment, and being strong and athletic. Race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, temperament, cognitive aptitude, religious and political affiliation, and socioeconomic background are examples of non-physical characteristics. External-to-self explanations include concerns related to the aggressor's issues, unhelpful instructors and other staff, the assumption that they are universally victimized (that everyone picks on them), gossip, and context-specific reasons.

Bullying in schools is impacted by socioeconomic and cultural issues in India. With bullying being rampant in Indian schools, both in person and online, kids in India are found to be bullied

for a variety of reasons, including low academic performance, skin color, poverty, and caste (Skrzypiec et al., 2015).

### **Forms of Bullying**

The current investigation discovered evidence for previously explored types of school bullying. Fighting, beating, kicking, damaging the victim's most significant and treasured property, and locking the victim inside the restroom or vacant and abandoned classrooms were all observed as types of physical bullying. Verbal bullying manifests itself in the form of using nicknames based on the victim's physical traits - skinny or overweight or anything that connects with them based on their character and personality - and ordering them to complete academic activities, including homework. The manifestation of relational bullying includes being excluded from class due to a rumor created about the victim by a shadow friend(s). Cyberbullying manifests as having private and personal information exposed, uploading collages of the victim with animals, passing on abusive remarks, and abruptly pulling the victim from a video conversation. However, based on the participant's responses, the types of school bullying specific to the Indian culture include being stigmatized because of the physical and mental health conditions of family members, particularly siblings, caste, socioeconomic, religious, and religious differences, and those that arise as a result of academic-related situations.

Although the participants identified religious affiliation and socioeconomic background as being unique to Indian culture, other researchers have discovered these in their research as well (e.g., Gardella et al., 2020). However, in India, the caste system generates boundaries and exclusivity among various ethnic groups, which might contribute to bullying behaviors (Campbell et al., 2018). Furthermore, research has discovered that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes tend to

cluster in lower-performing schools, implying a possible relationship between caste-based discrimination and school admissions (Sharma et al., 2017). In India, language disparities have also been highlighted as a cause of school bullying (Skrzypiec et al., 2015). With its numerous languages, faiths, and customs, India's complex cultural and linguistic environment can lead to disparities and conflicts among pupils (Mehta & Pilia, 2014). Bullying can occur at school because of language differences, beliefs, ethnicity, and other aspects of variety (Castro, 2021). Furthermore, it was shown that bullying among children was frequently associated with religious or cultural differences, such as the language spoken or clothing worn (Sagar & Sen, 2021). These findings point to the need for a greater knowledge of linguistic variability as well as the development of inclusive educational environments (Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000). Although academic-related scenarios include those that arise from reminding teachers about homework assigned, further study is required to determine whether it is Indian context-specific.

### **Occurrence of Bullying**

Bullying was classified into two types based on the responses of participants: bullying that occurred within the school and bullying that occurred outside of the school by persons recognized within the school community. The bathroom, classroom, playground, and verandah are the locations where bullying occurred inside the school, and outside the school, the locations include bus stations, roads, and public spaces.

In-person bullying, violence, and victimization occur both within and outside of school, according to Sharma et al. (2017). Furthermore, Rana et al. (2022) found that school bullying was more widespread in vacant classrooms, restrooms, corridors, buses, and playgrounds, lending credence to the current research conclusion. Although participants in the current research

referred to bullies using weapons, the majority of the previous evidence supports otherwise. According to Silva et al. (2023), victims of bullying were more likely to bring weapons to school, including firearms and knives, among high school students. Another meta-analytic assessment (Valdebenito et al., 2017) corroborated the link between weapon carrying and bullying perpetration and victimization, both inside and outside of the school environment. A large, nationally representative study also found that victims of bullying who had experienced additional signs of peer aggressiveness were more likely to bring weapons to school (Oliphant, 2023). Furthermore, research has indicated that bullying victims are more likely to engage in aggressive and antisocial activities, such as carrying weapons to school (Pham et al., 2017). Although there is little information on the precise context of weapon use during school bullying in India, these studies imply that there is a substantial link between bullying victimization and weapon carrying in school settings.

### **Prevention of Bullying**

According to the participants, school bullying may be prevented on four levels: personal, familial, school, and society. Individuals can prevent school bullying on a personal level by telling parents and/or instructors as promptly as possible, making friends with all of their peers to avoid difficulties, and remaining silent when victimized to prevent the issue from progressing. At the family level, parents should educate their children to approach and settle disputes nonviolently and without hurting anybody, so that they do not victimize others at school. Schools can prevent bullying by raising awareness so that students and teachers stand up for the victim, using Moral Science classes to instill good morals and behaviors in students, organizing counseling sessions for bullies, and, if none of the above works, taking harsher action by issuing

Transfer Certificates (TC) to bullies. Raising awareness and encouraging victims to come forward to register a complaint against the aggressor are two ways society can assist in preventing school bullying from evolving.

In their study, Rana et al. (2022) reached the following conclusions: increasing awareness and hosting video sessions about bullying, training sessions for parents and teachers on how to deal with bullying effectively, and monitoring high-risk locations. Furthermore, with the help of the participants, Srisiva et al. (2013) identified the following preventive measures: assessing the scope of the problem and implementing a comprehensive school-wide program, intervening early, integrating anti-bullying themes into the curriculum, creating a safe physical environment, having the principal take on the role of a leader, conducting staff training, establishing clear anti-bullying rules and policies, and working individually with students. According to the participants in Malik and Ahmed's (2019) study, drafting rules and regulations to stop bullying will be an effective measure to counter it, whereas some believe that adults should carry out their responsibility properly by educating kids about bullying and giving them proper advice and safeguards to handle such a situation. Even though the preventive strategies provided by participants vary widely among research, young people's intention to reduce school bullying stays consistent.

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**APPENDIX - 1**  
**SCREENING TEST**

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Standard & Section:

School:

Caste: General/ OBC/ SC/ ST

Sub caste:

Religion: Hindu/ Christian/ Muslim/ Buddhist/ Sikh/ Jain

Perceived socioeconomic status: (Please tick in the appropriate level)

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Very high	High	Above average	Average	Below average	Low	Very Low

Type of family: Joint/ Nuclear/ Separated

Family members living with you:

Residence: Urban / Semi-urban/ Rural

Place:

Have you heard about the term bullying? Yes/ No

Do you know what bullying is? Yes/ No

Does bullying involve...

...saying mean and hurtful things or making fun or calling an individual using names? Yes/ No

...completely ignoring or excluding an individual from a group of friends or leave out of things on purpose? Yes/ No

...hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving around, or locking an individual inside a room? Yes/ No

...telling lies or spreading false rumors or sending mean notes and trying to make other students dislike an individual? Yes/ No

## APPENDIX - 2

### PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, Ms. Sindhu D M, a Ph.D. scholar at the Department of Psychology, Central University of Karnataka, am conducting my study under the guidance of Dr. Rajkumar E, Assistant Professor. The focus of this research is to explore an individual's understanding of bullying and how it exists in the Indian context.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in the study, he/she would be required to answer some questions where he/she can express their opinions, thoughts, and ideas about the topic in discussion. There are no right or wrong answers for anything he/she'd tell in the interview. It is an attempt to understand his/her views on bullying and their related aspects. To aid the process of data analysis of this study, the session will be audio-recorded with your consent and would remain in possession of the researcher.

Since this study is not funded by any agency, no monetary benefits would be given for the participation. However, the findings will add further understanding to the field of psychology in understanding school violence. The interview may not take more than an hour and any experience that your child shares or any information that he/she provides will remain confidential. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific meetings or in publications; however, your child's identity would not be disclosed at any place. During the course of involvement, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. You are free to contact the researcher at Phone: 79041 40945 or Mail ID: [20dppsy06@cuk.ac.in](mailto:20dppsy06@cuk.ac.in) to clear any of your doubts.

Name of the Student:

Name of the Parent:

Signature of the Parent

## **APPENDIX - 3**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. What is your understanding of bullying?
2. When do you think a behavior can be called bullying? (Probe - Intentionality, Repetition, Power imbalance)
3. Do you know anyone who is a bully?
4. Do you know anyone who is being bullied?
5. What are the different ways they are victimized? (Probe - Different forms, Culture-specific)
6. Where do you think bullying usually takes place? (Probe)
7. Do you think bullies are aware of the negative outcome of bullying? (Probe - Morality)



# INTERVENTIONS TO ENHANCE HEALTHY BEHAVIORS AMONG HYPERTENSION PATIENTS: A META-ANALYSIS

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\* Lakshmi, Jesline Joshy, Surekha N

## Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** Hypertension, according to the National Health Mission (2016), it is found to prevail at the rate of 29.8% with 33% in the urban part and 25% in the rural part of India, thus leading among the health-related risk factors. It is also a major modifiable risk factor of CVD and renal disease, which would prevent about 304,000 deaths (caused by coronary heart disease and stroke) if appropriately controlled.

**OBJECTIVES:** To make an evidence-based report on interventions that promote healthy behaviors among those diagnosed with hypertension in India.

**METHOD:** In the present review, search engines such as: PubMed, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, Taylor & Francis, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. Gray literature was also included by performing a manual search on Google Scholar. The search keywords include: "Symptoms", "Intervention", "Hypertension", and "India".

**RESULTS:** The psychological interventions were found to be effective in bringing down the Systolic Blood Pressure (SBP). Yoga and breathing techniques are often used along with antihypertensive medications in controlling hypertension and are found to be effective.

**CONCLUSION:** The non-medication interventions can help in avoiding blood pressure complications and thus can be used as an effective complementary therapy for heart-related diseases.

**Keywords:** Loneliness, Resilience, Old age

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## Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (n.d.-a), cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the term used for the group of heart and blood vessels disorders which include: (i) hypertension (high blood pressure), (ii) coronary heart disease (heart attack), (iii) cerebrovascular disease (stroke), (iv) peripheral vascular disease, (v) heart failure, (vi) rheumatic heart disease, (vii) congenital heart disease, and (viii) cardiomyopathies. Based on the fact sheets published by WHO (2017), more people are found to die annually from CVDs (37%) than any other cause and thus being the leading cause of death globally. It is projected that by 2030, CVDs would be the single leading cause of the deaths resulting in almost 23.6 million deaths. India which constitutes of 28 states and 8 union territories and more than one billion people has reported 27% deaths which are attributed to CVDs in 2016 (WHO, n.d.-b). According to Prabhakaran, Jeemon

& Roy (2016), it is found to be the leading cause of death in India, causing an average of 272 deaths per 100,000 population which is higher than the global estimate of 235 deaths per 100,000, affecting more men than females. The CVD epidemic has also seen a drastic rise by 59% in terms of premature mortality in the past two decades (1990-2010). The severity of the disease is projected to further rise causing around 23 million (2.3 crore) deaths in India by 2030 ("By 2030, deaths due," 2018).

Hypertension which is also known as raised or high blood pressure is a condition where the blood vessels persistently have a raised pressure leading to heart attacks, heart failure, kidney diseases or stroke (WebMD, 2021). It is common in 1 among 4 men and 1 among 5 women worldwide, thus being a major cause of premature death (WHO, n.d.-c). According to the National Health Mission (2016), it is found to prevail at the rate of 29.8% with 33% in the urban part and 25% in the rural part of India,

thus leading among the health-related risk factors. It is also a major modifiable risk factor of CVD and renal disease, which would prevent about 304,000 deaths (caused by coronary heart disease and stroke) if appropriately controlled.

But the prevention can be difficult because of the lack of awareness, screening, appropriate treatment, and control of the disease. As patients with hypertension need continuous care, therapeutic recommendations can be made to manage and prevent the disease. According to WebMD (2021), the goal of any treatment for hypertension is to lower the increased blood pressure and to protect vital organs – heart, kidney, and brain from damage. Thus, such treatments were found to significantly reduce heart failure by more than 50%, stroke by 35-40%, and heart attack by 20-25%. Drug therapy can be introduced the diagnosed along with recommended lifestyle modifications to bring it under control.

Psychological interventions also play an important role in controlling hypertension. Relaxation techniques are among the most frequently used, as an aid in controlling the disease. Some psychological techniques include: cognitive behavioral methods, motivational interviewing, biofeedback, transcendental meditation, yoga, relaxation techniques (Jacobson's progressive muscle relaxation, Schultz' autogenic training) (Abgrall-Barbry & Consoli, 2006; Witten, Jansen van Vuuren & Learmonth, 2013).

Behavioral (lifestyle modification) techniques which utilizes behavioral principles to promote the necessary change in an individual, is considered to be a key strategy to prevent and treat hypertension

## Method

### *Research criteria*

Data from different databases (PubMed, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, Taylor & Francis, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library) were included in the present review with the help of PRISMA declaration. Gray literature was also accessed with the help of Google Scholar. The search was not limited by the publication type.

The keywords used are: ((intervention [Title/Abstract]) AND (hypertension [Title/Abstract])) AND (India [Title/Abstract]).

### *Study criteria*

(Dubbert, 1995; Hasandokht et al., 2015). The main aim of this technique is to promote and achieve a balanced mind-body state by adopting healthy behaviors in a disciplined way (Ghati et al., 2021). Some of the lifestyle measures include reduction in salt intake, stopping tobacco intake, and losing weight in case obese can also be used to prevent the disease. Yoga is also an important behavioral technique which is being widely studied about, on the effectiveness of its different postures (asanas), concentration (meditation), and regulated breathing techniques (pranayamas) in reducing the high blood pressure (Ghati et al., 2021). Even though progressive muscle relaxation techniques are not considered effective, yoga is recommended as an effective intervention for reducing hypertension (Goldstein, Josephson, Xie & Hughes, 2012; Hagins, Selfe & Innes, 2013).

To control the global burden of morbidity and mortality of CVDs, preventing and controlling hypertension can be one of the cost-effective strategies (Weintraub et al., 2011; Hasandokht et al., 2015). This can be achieved with the help of psychological interventions along with or without drug therapy. With recent hypertension guidelines reporting the effectiveness of guided breathing exercise as an effective non-expensive stress reduction behavior therapy (Ghati et al., 2021) and also by considering the increase and the importance of control in preventing ill effects of the disease, the present review aims at making an evidence-based report on the effectiveness of psychological interventions among those diagnosed with hypertension in India.

The present review was carried out based on the following criteria: (1) study on hypertension carried out in the Indian context; (2) study should involve intervention; (3) study should mention the mean and standard deviation of Systolic Blood Pressure (SBP) for both experimental and control groups; (4) study should be published in English.

The studies which were carried out on pre-hypertensive patients, pregnant women, and school children were not included in the review.

### *Data selection and extraction*

Zotero was used to import the search results from different databases. The duplicates were merged, followed by primary screening which was based on

the titles. The studies were then screened based on the abstract, followed by screening based on the method used. Based on the full-text reading and inclusion criteria, the studies were finalized. Information about author(s), year published, sample size, Indian state, type of intervention used, and mean and standard deviation for both experimental and control group were extracted for the present study.

**Analysis**

The meta-analysis was carried out using Review Manager (RevMan) 5.4. The mean and standard deviation of SPB along with the sample size were used to calculate the summary measure of the interventions. Forest plot is also used to show the summary measure – whether the intervention favors the experimental group or control group.

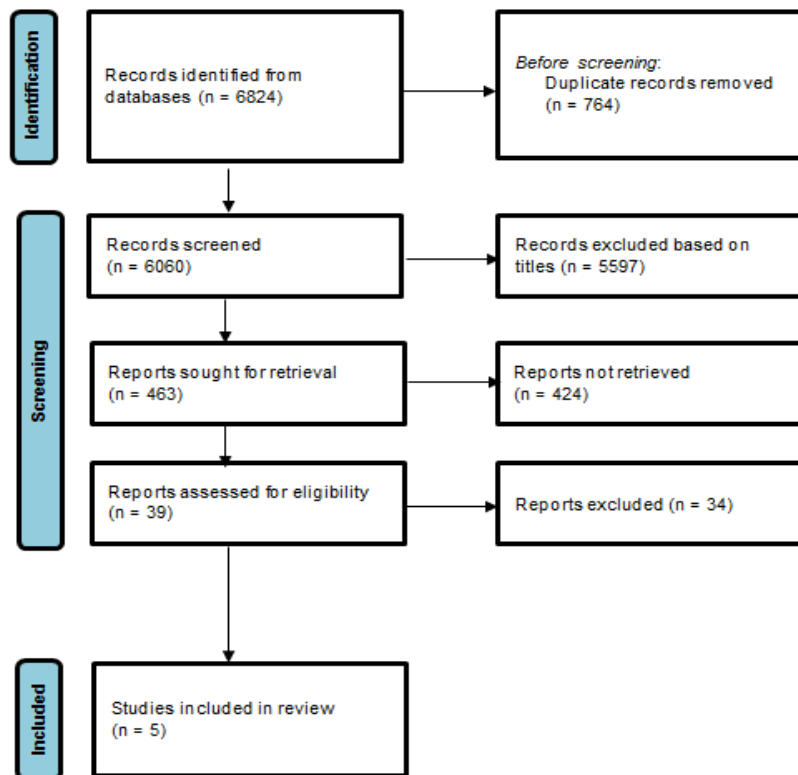
**RESULTS**

*Systematic Review*

For the present study, 6824 study records were identified through database search. After removing duplicates, 6060 studies were screened based on their titles. 463 studies were identified based on their titles which were then screened based on the method. The identified 39 studies were then screened based on the full-text reading and inclusion criteria. Thus, the present review sampled 5 papers which include a combined total of 568 samples, with a mean of 113.6 and standard deviation of 64.2. The maximum samples size is 238 with the minimum being 60.

The sampled studies include: Ghati, 2020; Kunikullaya, 2016; Thanalakshmi, 2020; Sujatha, 2014; and Shetty, 2017.

Figure 1. PRISMA chart describing the selection of articles for the present review



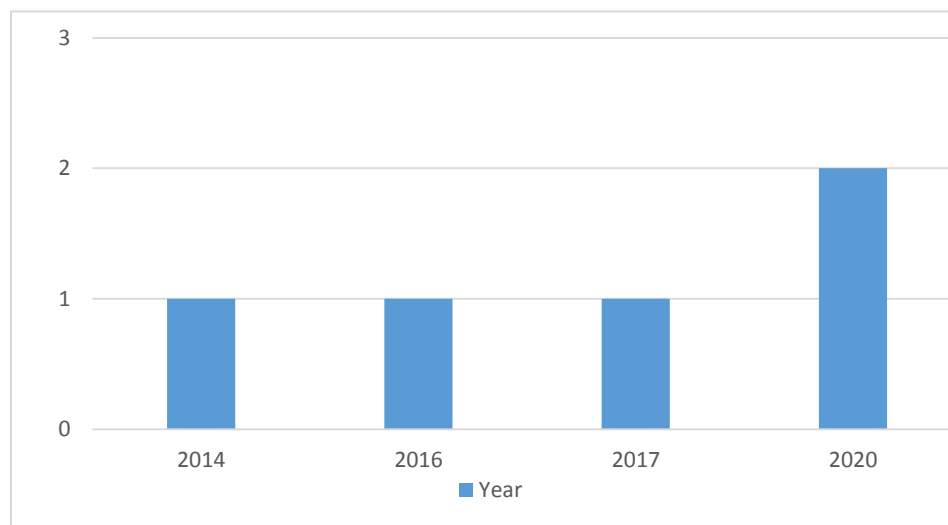
The search was carried out in April, 2021. As shown in figure 1, 5 studies were included from 6824 studies in the review, while the others which did not match the inclusion criteria were removed.

Table 1 Characteristics of the studies

		<i>N</i>	%
Published	Yes	5	100
Type of publication	Original Article	5	100
State	Karnataka	2	40
	Tamil Nadu	2	40
	New Delhi	1	20

As shown in table 1, all the studies (100%) included in the review were published as original article in different journals and were from Karnataka (40%) and Tamil Nadu (40%).

Figure 2: Year of publication of the studies



As shown in figure 2, the earliest publication included in the review is 2014 with the latest being 2020.

Table 3 Different types of interventions used

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>N</i>	%
Bee-Humming Breathing (BHB) exercise	1	20
Music and Lifestyle intervention	1	20
Sheethali Pranayama	1	20
Sheethali and Sheethkari Pranayama	1	20
Yoga	1	20

As shown in table 3, various interventions are used to enhance healthy behaviors among hypertension patients.

Table 4 Details of the studies included

Author, year	State	Sample	Intervention	Measured constructs	Follow-up time	Findings
Ghati, 2021	New Delhi	70 patients with essential HTN	Bee-Humming Breathing (BHB)	BP, HRV	5 minutes	No sig. decrease
Kunikullaya, 2016	Karnataka	100 patients with stage I HTN	Musicwith lifestyle modification	BP, stress, and biomarkers of HTN	3 months	No sig. decrease
Thanalakshmi, 2020	Tamil Nadu	100 patients with HTN	Sheetali pranayama	BP, HRV	3 months	Sig. decrease
Sujatha, 2014	Tamil Nadu	238 patients with stage I and II HTN	Yoga	BP, HR, BMI, anxiety, and perceived stress	12 weeks	Sig. decrease
Shetty, 2017	Karnataka	60 patients with HTN	Sheetali and Sheetkari pranayamas	BP, HR, HRV, and RR	30 days	Sig. decrease

\*HTN – Hypertension, BP – Blood Pressure, HRV – Heart Rate Variability, HR – Heart Rate, BMI – Body Mass Index, RR – Respiration Rate

Table 4 Summary measure of the intervention

Study or Subgroup	Experimental			Control			Weight	Std. Mean Difference IV, Random, 95% CI
	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD	Total		
Ghati, 2020	131.7	10.9	32	125.8	12.6	35	20.0%	0.49 [0.01, 0.98]
Kunikullaya, 2016	130.02	12.2	45	129.91	11.5	43	20.3%	0.01 [-0.41, 0.43]
Shetty, 2017	124.12	14.72	40	139.72	12.9	42	20.1%	-1.12 [-1.59, -0.65]
Sujatha, 2014	138.51	9.39	118	152.38	10.25	120	20.8%	-1.41 [-1.69, -1.12]
Thanalakshmi, 2020	132	3.8	30	152.9	9.8	30	18.8%	-2.78 [-3.50, -2.05]
<b>Total (95% CI)</b>			<b>265</b>			<b>270</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>-0.94 [-1.86, -0.01]</b>

Heterogeneity: Tau<sup>2</sup> = 1.05; Chi<sup>2</sup> = 88.61, df = 4 (P < 0.00001); I<sup>2</sup> = 95%  
 Test for overall effect: Z = 1.98 (P = 0.05)

A meta-analysis of the five studies that assessed hypertension at postintervention showed a small statistically significant effect favoring the experimental group (SMD = -0.94, 95% CI [-1.86, -0.01], Z = 1.98, p = 0.05), with statistically substantial to moderately significant heterogeneity (I<sup>2</sup> = 95%, p < .00001) among 535 participants.

**DISCUSSION**

According to Sorrentino&Bakris (2018), accurate diagnosis of hypertension is important for the implementation of any treatment strategy. The diagnosis involves recording the BP of the patient at least in three different occasions using proper techniques to establish the persistent evaluation in the BP. While looking at the anti-drug therapy to treat hypertension, lifestyle modification comes as the keystone. Lifestyle modification is thus found to add in to the lowering effect achieved through the drug treatment. Thus, it is found to be reasonable to try lifestyle modification therapy for a minimum of 3 months to a maximum of 6 months before committing to any drug therapy, only if the individual has a borderline to mild elevation in the BP and with no compelling evidence of organ damage which might indicate the need for medications. If an individual is found to properly adhere to the lifestyle modification therapy, it might even be possible to stop the intake of certain medications. But further research is to be done to verify the extend of the role that lifestyle modification therapy can play among hypertensive patients. However, it is also found that the efficacy of the lifestyle modification therapy hugely relies on the effort that is been put to adhere to the therapy i.e., a small lifestyle modification can only bring in a minimal BP change whereas a significant lifestyle modification

can bring forth a significant change in the BP. Thus, considering the above importance of psychological intervention in the prevention, cure and control of hypertension (Ihwanudin, Amatayakul&Karuncharempanit, 2015), the present review has analysed different studies to understand the effectiveness of the different interventions used.

Thus, the present review aims to make an evidence-based report on interventions that promote healthy behaviors among those diagnosed with hypertension in India. The results based on the five papers included in the review show that the interventions were effective in reducing the SBP, despite the effect size.

According to Ghati, et al., (2020) Bee-Humming Breathing (BHB) exercise also known as ‘Bhramari pranayama’ is a form of pranayama which involves breathing in through both the nostrils and producing a humming bee (‘mmmm’) sound while breathing out for as long as possible. Even though being a very simple technique, this form was found to improve Heart Rate Variability (HRV), BP, pulmonary function, anxiety and depression. This effect can be contributed to its action on the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) and relaxing effect. Even though the overall effect favors the experimental group, an immediate effect of 5-minutes BHB exercise, found no

significant decrease in the systolic blood pressure. The result can be attributed to the fact that the control group was also performing pranayama without the bee-humming sound. Also, the participants of the study already had their hypertension in check by taking adequate anti-hypertensive drugs. This shows that a single short session does not have an effect on the blood pressure and thus emphasizing on the length of the intervention, which is also found to play an important role in controlling hypertension. A 12-month yoga intervention was found to be an effective complementary therapy, with a significant impact on hypertension and also on other cardiovascular parameters (Verma, Oza & Patel, 2019). However, research indicates that as low as 5 mmHg reduction in the SPB would result in a reduction of all-cause mortality, coronary heart disease related mortality, and stroke-related mortality at 7%, 9%, and 14% respectively (Kühlmann et al., 2016; Chobanian et al., 2003). This shows that even if the decrease in the blood pressure is not significant, it can still prevent a person from mortality. Considering the importance of as low as 5 mmHg reduction in the SPB and the studied effect of BHB exercise, further research can be done to study the effect of BHB exercise on those who are not under anti-hypertensive drug treatment which if found effective, can be used as a non-expensive therapy along with drug treatment.

According to Kunikullaya, et al., (2016) music as a non-pharmacological mode of therapy offers advantages of easy administration, safety, better compliance, and low cost. In Indian music, the set of musical notes which are presented in an order to generate a melody, denotes the musical scale which is also known as 'raga'. Different ragas are said to have the property to evoke different emotions. Ancient Indian music literatures – Sama Veda and Raga Chikitsa, 'Ahar bhairav', 'Bhupali', 'Puriya', 'Todi', 'Kausi Kanada', 'Hindol', and 'Bhimpalas' are said to have the properties to normalize BP. Based on the findings that classical music can be an effective stress buster and can effectively reduce BP owing to the stress reduction (Chafin, et al., 2004; García-Vera, Sanz & Labrador, 2004), the effect of 'Raga bhimpalas' along with lifestyle modification (predominantly change in the diet and awareness

about the ill effects of stress) was evaluated. Music intervention along with lifestyle modification was found to bring in a minimal reduction in the SBP level, which was statistically insignificant. However, the control group which only used lifestyle modification as an intervention was found to bring a statistically significant reduction in the SPB level. Thus, the acute effect of the music intervention was not studied, attributing the result to the type of monitoring – Ambulatory Blood Pressure (ABP – which was used in the study to take multiple measurements i.e., >18/day, which was averaged) or sphygmomanometer (which was used in the other studies to take a measurement each day). Kühlmann, et al., (2016) in their systematic review and meta-analysis found a decrease in blood pressure in hypertensive patients, who received music interventions. But the relationship between blood pressure reduction and music intervention was failed to be established as cause-effect relationship. However, direct comparison of the reviews is not possible because of the different analytical methods used. Thus, further studies using the same monitoring tool can give a better insight on the acute effect of music intervention among hypertensive individuals.

According to Thanalakshmi et al., (2020), sheetali pranayama is a breathing manipulation where inhalation is done through the tongue which is folded to form a tube with eyes close. This is followed by a slow exhalation through both the nostrils. The effect of this breathing technique was found to significantly reduce the SBP among hypertensive patients when compared to the control group. Thus, these pranayamas as described in the ancient yoga texts including 'Hatha Yoga Pradipika' were found to have various benefits including – increasing breathing capacity, concentration, relaxation, etc., (Muktibodhananda, 2012). This pranayama is also found safer to use among hypertensive patients with co-morbid conditions such as cerebrovascular (CVA) risk, coronary artery disease (CAD), obesity etc. The effectiveness of this particular pranayama maybe because of the stimulation of the vagal nerve and increase in the cardiac parasympathetic activity which in turn regulates the BP (via baroreceptor reflex). Thus, this mechanism is believed to be a short-term controller of BP.

Similarly, another study studied the effect of Sheethali along with Sheethkari pranayama. Sheethkari pranayama is also a breathing modification where lower and upper teeth are pressed together with as much as separation in the lips is comfortable. Inhalation is done slowly through the gaps in the teeth. At the end of inhalation, the mouth would be closed for to exhale through nose. These two pranayama techniques have suggested improved psychophysical relaxation as there was a significant decrease in the SBP level compared to the control group. Practicing yoga with pranayamas have found to be beneficial, especially in achieving a balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and also creates an increased awareness as there would be an increased brain activity – both alpha and beta (Shetty et al., 2017; Vasanthan, 2017). Thus, Sheethali and Sheethkari Pranayama are found to cause a significant decrease in hypertension and also other cardiovascular parameters (Shetty, et al., 2017; Naveen Kumar, et al., 2018). They are also found to have an immediate effect in controlling blood pressure.

Yoga helps in focusing the attention on the present moment instead of being arrested in one's own thoughts (Grossman et al., 2004). According to Sujatha & Judie (2014), this mental stability which is achieved after freeing oneself from mental attribution can be related to the improvement in the parasympathetic activity and reduction in the sympathetic activity. In their study, which set out to understand the effects of yoga on hypertensive patients found a significant reduction in SBP before and after intervention and also between the groups (i.e., experimental and control group). Further, yoga was also found to decrease the anxiety and stress symptoms among hypertensive patients, indicating that the intervention can possibly be a new therapeutic approach which can be either aerobic or anaerobic exercises. Thus, it can be used as a non-pharmacological intervention to prevent complications among hypertensive patients.

Thus, the result is consistent with another study which has reported effectiveness of lifestyle interventions to prevent and treat hypertension (Valenzuela et al., 2021), but is not consistent with

the other studies (Glynn et al., 2010; Kühlmann, et al., 2016). Valenzuela et al., (2021) in their review found that compared to the commonly used antihypertensive drugs, lifestyle interventions especially exercise were found to be effective in reducing blood pressure. However, Glynn et al., (2010) in their review found that other interventions than a vigorous antihypertensive drug therapy showed varied results. They found that self-monitoring was associated with a moderate net reduction, educational interventions directed at either the health professionals or patients were not associated with large net reduction in the blood pressure and nurse or pharmacist led care showing a promising way forward but would require further evaluation.

Thus, if the psychological interventions are further proved to be effective, it would open a new gateway in providing interventions that are low cost and effective in bringing down the blood pressure (Kühlmann et al., 2016).

The present review has a number of limitations. The review has only considered those studies which were conducted in India and has also considered only SBP for calculating the meta-analysis. Thus, considering the other aspects which were missed in the present review, further studies might bring a better insight into the effectiveness of psychological interventions in bringing down the blood pressure.

## Conclusion

The psychological interventions were found to be effective in bringing down the SPB. Yoga and breathing techniques are found to have modest but significant effect in controlling hypertension when used consistently. They can also help in avoiding blood pressure complications and thus can be used as an effective complementary therapy for heart related diseases.

## Data availability:

Data is available on request from the corresponding author.

## Conflict of interest:

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.



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# **Perceptions of Adolescents on School Bullying: A Qualitative Inquiry**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the  
Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Psychology**

By

**SINDHU D M**

(20DPPSY06)

Under the Supervision of

**Dr. ESLAVATH RAJKUMAR**



CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF KARNATAKA

Department of Psychology  
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## CHAPTER - VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Schools are the most important institutions in the lives of children. It is only second to home and family as the basis on which youngsters build their future. The denial of education to millions of children and young people violates their fundamental rights. Every year, 246 million children and adolescents are victimized by violence in and around schools, according to a Plan International survey done in 144 countries (UNESCO, 2019-a). According to a recent UNESCO research (2023), more than 30% of pupils globally have been recognized as victims of bullying. Thus, according to these statistics, school bullying can be regarded as an ongoing epidemic on a global scale (UNESCO, 2019-a). The survey also indicates that 32% of pupils (one in every three) are bullied at least once a month. Boys are frequently subjected to physical assault, whilst girls are subjected to psychological bullying. It has also been noted that girls are bullied disproportionately, particularly those who are viewed as not adhering to the dominant social, gender, and sexual standards (UNESCO, n.d.). Though kids are bullied for a variety of reasons, the most prevalent is the victim's physical appearance, followed by ethnicity, country, and color (UNESCO, 2019-a). Children with impairments, as well as those who are transgender, homosexual, or lesbian, have been proven to be at a higher risk of bullying (Dawkins, 1996; Hunter, 1990; Rigby, 2002).

The idea and characteristics of school bullying have evolved over the previous few decades, according to Sagar and Sen (2021), and exploration is still in its early phases. The segregation of social, regional, or cultural bullying is especially relevant in the context of the Indian community, which has a diverse social, religious, and cultural background. This is especially

important in understanding victimization and the advancement of mental health conditions associated with bullying (Atwal & Wang, 2019; Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). This would allow us to understand bullying better and develop specific anti-bullying measures. As a result, designing and implementing unique and culturally relevant anti-bullying strategies in schools becomes even more critical. Even though there are regulations in place to oversee school bullying, the issue is rarely taken seriously and is commonly disregarded in India due to a lack of understanding about its negative impact on an individual's emotional and psychological health. As a result, bullies continue to discriminate or hurt people based on their caste, gender, religion, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, medical issues and handicap, or physical appearance, among other factors. As a result, analyzing school bullying in India becomes even more important (Youth Ki Awaaz, 2017).

Furthermore, while qualitative research on school bullying has been undertaken in India, their approaches to the phenomenon have varied significantly (Kodapally et al., 2021; Malik & Mehta, 2016; Nazir, 2019; Shiba et al., 2018). Previous research examined bullying from the perspectives of parents and teachers, and while just a few of them focused on children, understanding of school bullying has been restricted. Given the importance of gathering students' perspectives on school bullying (Horton et al., 2015), the current study provides a first step toward understanding school bullying in India.

Purposive sampling was used in this study to identify 28 students who effectively passed the screening test. These adolescents, aged 13 to 16, were chosen from government and private schools in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. The researcher gained permission from both government and private schools to conduct the study at their facilities.

Once formal consent was gained, the researcher had a debriefing session with each class's pupils to establish a favorable connection and complete the screening assessment. Data was collected only from those adolescents who completed the screening exam and obtained parental permission to participate in the research. A semi-structured interview schedule was employed to collect information from participants. Thematic analysis has been performed to identify data themes. In qualitative research, theme analysis is commonly used to find data trends. After they were evaluated, the factors were divided into several themes which were further divided into subthemes. The current study included adolescents who displayed competency in English, could talk fluently without any inherent limits, passed the screening exam, and got a parental agreement. Individuals who did not comprehend school bullying adequately, showed significant misunderstanding between school bullying and ragging, were currently taking prescription medicines, had psychiatric or other neurological issues, and indicated difficulties speaking English were excluded. The study sought to elicit students' perceptions of school bullying. The study looked at six data-driven themes: comprehension of bullying, conceptualization of bullying, roles in bullying, forms of bullying, occurrence of bullying, and prevention of bullying. As a result, the study was able to give detailed insights into students' awareness of the phenomenon and definition of bullying, as well as their recommendations for preventing the issue.

### **Limitation of the Study**

There is no such thing as a faultless study. There is always skepticism in the study, implying that some disadvantages cannot be ruled out.

One of the study's weaknesses is that the data were not evaluated for gender, socioeconomic, and cultural disparities. Furthermore, the study did not concentrate primarily on the experiences of the bully or victim populations.

### **Implications of the Study**

The present study is a first step toward comprehending school bullying in India. This qualitative study has contributed to the existing body of knowledge on adolescents' perceptions of school bullying in India. With explicit accounts of the participants' own experiences, it has helped to gain greater knowledge and views about the phenomenon at hand. The study provided an in-depth understanding of school bullying, its manifestations, and the preventive strategies suggested by participants. Learning about teenagers' perceptions and experiences would assist in the construction of a more effective intervention plan and action to reduce school bullying in India. This study has important policy, intervention, tool development, and therapeutic implications. Thus, the present study findings can assist administrators and policymakers in a range of areas, such as the service and public sectors, schools, NGOs, and so on, in better preventing school bullying from escalating further.

### **Future Directions**

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations might be made:

- Because the data was confined to only three South Indian states, there is a need for future research by collecting data from other states and studying varied demographic variables.
- The same study might be repeated throughout India with a bigger sample size, allowing the findings to be disseminated to a larger community.

- A similar study might be extended to different age groups to obtain more relevant data and insights.
- Multicultural studies can be conducted to investigate similarities and contrasts across communities and cultures.
- Based on present data, longitudinal research can be conducted in the future to determine new patterns and changes over time.
- To determine whether there are class variations in views of school bullying, studies based on socioeconomic inequalities (lower, medium, and upper classes) might be conducted.
- The current research might be used to construct an Indian context-based instrument for measuring school bullying.
- Furthermore, the current study may lead to the creation of appropriate interventions to effectively address the phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

The study sought to discover how adolescents perceive and comprehend school bullying. The study looked at a variety of themes, including comprehension of bullying, conceptualization of bullying, roles in bullying, forms of bullying, occurrence of bullying, and prevention of bullying, and it was able to provide an in-depth look at adolescents' understanding of school bullying, its manifestations, and the preventive strategies suggested by participants. Learning about the children's experiences aids in the development of a more effective intervention approach and action plan to prevent school bullying from accelerating further in the Indian community.

Thus, the current study indicated the cultural predispositions affecting bullying, implying that society must detect, address, and eliminate bullying in educational institutions as soon as

possible. Fortunately, schools can avoid bullying when there is more understanding of the rules and openness in their implementation. Additionally, institutes must reduce the gaps that allow for bullying to occur. More bullying research, particularly qualitative studies, should be done across cultures to highlight developing tendencies and provide context for quantitative findings.