

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Prevalence of bullying among pupils in Baghdad

Waleed Arif Tawfeeq Al-Ani¹, Ahmed Khalaf Al-Delaimy², Yossra Hanoon Al-Robaiaay³, Reem Falah Kadhim⁴

Abstract

Objective: To find out the prevalence of bullying among primary school students in an urban centre, and to categorise its types.

Method: The descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted from October 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019, in Baghdad, Iraq, and comprised primary school children of either gender aged 9-15 years studying in schools in all the 3 directorates of the Al-Karkh side of the city. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the subjects, from school data, and through interaction with social-guide teachers of the respective classes. Data was analysed using SPSS 28.

Results: Of the 1,000 subjects from 50 schools, 537(53.7) were girls, 322(32.2%) were aged 11 years and 409(40.9%) were in the fifth grade. Overall, 146(14.6%) students reported having been bullied, 29(2.9%) were bullies themselves, while 59(5.9%) were both bullies and the bullied. It was found that almost quarter of pupils take part in bullying other pupils and almost 20% of pupils were kicked, pushed or hit by other Pupils during the last month.

Conclusion: Bullying was found to be prevalent in the study's sample. No clear legislation is present to prevent or control the social problem that has a significant effect on the mental and behavioural burden on students.

Key Words: Bullying, Students, Schools, Social Problems.

(JPMA 74: S119 (Supple-8); 2024) DOI:<https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA-BAGH-16-26>

Introduction

Bullying victimisation is defined as intentional harm-doing by peers and aggressive behaviour that is carried out repeatedly and involves an imbalance of power between the victim and the bully^{1,2}. It is about mental health functioning, social self-perceptions, assimilation difficulties and aggressive behavioural characteristics³.

It is a worldwide problem affecting mainly school-age children⁴. Scientists have been identified two types or forms of bullying; the direct form of bullying where the victim faces words and physical attack by the bullying person, and indirect bullying where social exclusion and spreading rumours are common.^{5,6} A study on both types of bullying among Algerian schoolchildren aged 8-12 years indicated more prevalence of direct bullying among those aged 8 years and higher indirect bullying among those aged 12 years. Furthermore, bullying happens more among children who have less secure family environment, changing houses and places, and absenteeism⁷.

In the United States. Nanseletal. Identified bullying

.....
^{1,3} Department of Family and Community Medicine, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq² Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Anbar, Ramadi, Iraq.⁴ MBCHB Karkah Health Directorate, Baghdad, Iraq.

Correspondence: Waleed Arif Tawfeeq Al-Ani

Email: drwaleedarifalani@yahoo.com

prevalence to be 30% among students in a large survey study focussing on bullying, which also reported the association of bullying with lower academic achievement⁸. Studies have shown that bullying can cause mental distress and physical harm to the victim⁹⁻¹¹. A study in 2012 showed that children being bullied at school is one of the predisposing factors to different types of stress reactions¹². Also, ethnicity, especially being an ethnic minority, was an important factor in bullying in schools¹³. In Oman, verbal, misuse, physical and social isolation were the most prevalent bullying types, and bullying was generally initiated by a peer of the same age or older than the victim¹⁴. In Iraq, a study found that 39.1% of the students had been bullied, and bullying was significantly associated with smoking, drug abuse and academic failure in school¹⁵.

The current study was planned to find out the prevalence of bullying among primary school students in an urban centre and to categorise its types.

Subjects and Methods

The descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted from October 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019, in Baghdad, Iraq, and comprised primary school children of either gender aged 9-15 years studying in schools in all the 3 directorates of the Al-Karkh side of the city. Data was collected using a standardised questionnaire obtained from the United Nations International Society for

Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)¹⁶. The questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic language at the Department of English, College of Literature, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad.

After approval from the ethics review committee of the College of Medicine, Mustansiriyah University, the sample size was calculated using a population size of 116 882 students in grades 4-6th, a 95% confidence interval, 5% allowed error, a prevalence rate of bullying of 39.1% as other authors reported^{17,18}, and a design effect of 3. The calculated sample size was 859 and increased to 1000 to account for nonresponse, recording errors, parenteral refusal of consent, and to ensure a better representation of the target population. A pilot assessment was carried out among 50 pupils in 2 schools, one each for girls and boys, to check the quality and suitability of the questionnaire, and necessary modifications were made accordingly. Permission and approval were obtained from the headquarters of the educational directorate administration, which was distributed to sectors and schools involved in the study. Informed consent from the parents was obtained by sending the consent form to the children.

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with pupils, from the school data, and through interaction with social-guide teachers of the respective classes. Bullying frequency, location and type were explored along with any interference by teachers or peers.

Educational administration in Baghdad is divided into Al-Karkh and Al-Resafa directorates. The Al-Karkh directorate, which was the focus of the current study, is further subdivided into First, Second and Third sub-directorates that are further divided into sectors, with each sector having a number of schools in line with population density. Multistage probability sampling technique was used by including all three directorates of Al-Karkh. In the first stage, the lottery method was used to select of 5-7% of the total number of schools. In the second stage, 3 classes were randomly selected from 4th, 5th and 6th grades within each school using a simple random sampling technique, and in the last stage, a systematic probability sampling technique was used by including every other pupil for inclusion from each selected class. Finally, the study included 1000 primary school students.

Data was analysed using SPSS 28. Data was presented as frequencies and percentages. Pearson's chi-square test with the application of Yate's correction or Fisher exact test was used, as applicable.

Results

Of the total 50 schools, 12(24%) were exclusively for girls, 13(26%) for boys, and 25(50%) had co-education. Of the 1,000 school children, 537(53.7) were girls, 322(32.2%) were aged 11 years, 409(40.9%) were in the 5th grade, 876(87.6%) had never failed a class, 704(70.4%) liked the school 'very much' and 365(36.5%) had >5 friends (Table 1).

Table-1: Characteristics of the study subjects (n = 1000).

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
Class		
Fourth	313	31.3
Fifth	409	40.9
Sixth	278	27.8
Age (years)		
9	93	9.3
10	284	28.4
11	322	32.2
12	249	24.9
13	44	4.4
14	8	0.8
Gender		
Male	463	46.3
Female	537	53.7
Years of failure		
No	876	87.6
One year	104	10.4
More than one year	20	2.0
How he/she likes school		
Very much	704	70.4
Little	223	22.3
Don not like it	73	7.3
Number of friends he/she has		
No one	61	6.1
Only one	278	27.8
Two-five friends	296	29.6
More than five	365	36.5

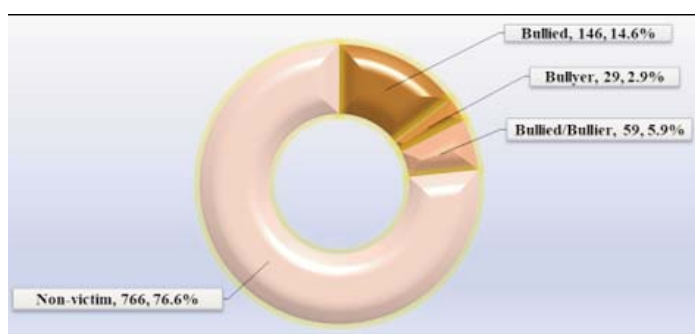
Data about the preceding 1 month showed that 122(12.2%) students faced bullying once a week, while 39(3.9%) and 28(2.8%) students took part in bullying once a month and once a week, respectively. Bullying patterns involved abusive language, kicking and pushing, as well as backbiting (Table 2).

Overall, 146(14.6%) students reported having been bullied, 29(2.9%) were bullies themselves, while 59(5.9%) were both bullies and had been bullied as well (Figure).

It was found that almost quarter of pupils participated in bullying other pupils and almost 20% of them were kicked, pushed or hit by other Pupils during the previous month. 161(16.1%) were bullied on the way to and from

Table-2: Bullying frequency and patterns in the preceding month.

Types of bullied action	In the past month; How often been:			
	Never	Once	Once/ week	Many times, /week
Bullied at school	52.8	26.7	8.3	12.2
Called by mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way	64.5	16.0	7.7	11.8
Left out of things on purpose, completely ignored, or not letting him/her participate in playing	64.0	21.6	6.7	7.7
Kicked, pushed or hit by other Pupils	52.3	29.5	7.0	11.2
Other Pupils told lies or spread remorse about him/her and tried to make others dislike him/her	66.3	20.1	5.7	7.9
Found that money or other things have been taken away or damaged	61.1	26.6	4.8	7.5
Threatened to do something against his/her will	75.3	14.8	6.1	3.8
Types of bullier action				
Take part in bullying other Pupils	68.4	24.9	3.9	2.8
Called other Pupils by mean names, made fun of them, or tease them in a hurtful way	78.4	16.5	2.3	2.8
Left other Pupils out of things on purpose, completely ignore them, or not letting them participate in playing	71.6	22.1	4.0	2.3
Kicked, pushed or hit other Pupils	72.0	19.8	5.3	2.9
Told lies on other Pupils or spread rumours about them and tried to make others dislike a student	87.1	8.7	2.3	1.9
Took money or other things from a student or damage their belongings	91.8	5.7	1.3	1.2
Threatened another Pupils to do something against their will	92.2	6.5	0.3	1.0

**Figure:** The bully and the bullied among the students.

school. In 518(51.8%) bullying cases, teachers reacted to stop bullying, while 352(35.2%) peers reacted. Overall, 51(5.1%) parents of bullies had been contacted by schools many times.

Discussion

The current study indicated that 14.6% of students were bullying victims, while 2.9% of students admitted to being bullies themselves. In a study in China among children in grades 6, 8 and 10, a lower prevalence (6.3%) of bullying was noted, while the students who admitted to bullying others were not too different (2.5%)¹⁹. On the contrary, in Egypt, the prevalence of bullying behaviour identified was way higher (77.8%)²⁰. A study in Saudi Arabia included 300 secondary school students of both genders

and revealed that the prevalence of bullying was 64.7%²¹. In Nigeria, 50.8% of girls and 51.4% of boys were victims of bullying in primary schools²². In the US, the prevalence of bullying was 30% among children in grades 6 and 10⁸. This difference in the prevalence of bullying may be related to differences in family bonding and home-based violence, effective school roles and preventive programmes to lessen bullying at school. In addition, living in impoverished neighbourhoods, mental personality, experiencing racism, drug abuse, antisocial beliefs and attitudes, attention deficits, hyperactivity, or learning disorders, and other risk factors could also have a direct impact on students turning into either a bully or a victim^{23,24}.

The present study revealed that the highest prevalence of types of bullying were calling others by demeaning names and words, making fun of others, pushing or kicking, and depriving others of their pocket money. In a study done in Beirut, spreading rumours had the highest prevalence, followed by rejecting peers from social groups²⁴.

Children who classify themselves as either victims or bullies are later in life often found to have mental disorders^{25,26}. Jadamba a et al.in a systemic review examined the association between the initiation of depressive and anxiety disorders in people exposed to

bullying during childhood²⁷.

Conclusion

Due to a weak reaction from peers and teachers, bullying was found to be common in the sample studied. In Iraq, bullying takes different forms, and it was generally perpetrated by peers in the same grade and class. Urgent preventive programmes in schools as well as legislation by the Ministry of Education and its directorates are needed.

Disclaimer: None.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Source of Funding: None.

References

1. Olweus D. *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. New Jersey, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993; pp 1-160.
2. Olweus D. School bullying: development and some important challenges. *Annu Rev Clin Psychol* 2013;9:751-80. doi: 10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-050212-185516.
3. Vaillancourt T, Hymel S, McDougall P. Bullying is power: Implications for school-based intervention strategies. *J Appl Psychol* 2003;19:157-76. doi: 10.1300/J008v19n02_10.
4. Juvonen J, Graham S. Bullying in schools: the power of bullies and the plight of victims. *Annu Rev Psychol* 2014;65:159-85. doi: 10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115030.
5. van der Wal MF, de Wit CA, Hirasing RA. Psychosocial health among young victims and offenders of direct and indirect bullying. *Pediatrics* 2003;111:1312-7. doi: 10.1542/peds.111.6.1312.
6. Savahl S, Montserrat C, Casas F, Adams S, Tiliouine H, Benninger E, et al. Children's Experiences of Bullying Victimization and the Influence on Their Subjective Well-Being: A Multinational Comparison. *Child Dev* 2019;90:414-31. doi: 10.1111/cdev.13135.
7. Tiliouine H. School bullying victimisation and subjective well-being in Algeria. *Child Indic Res* 2015;8:133-50.
8. Nansel TR, Overpeck M, Pilla RS, Ruan WJ, Simons-Morton B, Scheidt P. Bullying behaviors among US youth: prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *JAMA* 2001;285:2094-100. doi: 10.1001/jama.285.16.2094.
9. Awiria O. Bullying at school-What we know and what we can do. *Br J Educat Stud* 1994;42:403-6.
10. Rivers I, Smith PK. Types of bullying behaviour and their correlates. *Aggress Behav* 1994;20:359-68. doi: 10.1002/1098-2337(1994)20:5<359::AID-AB2480200503>3.0.CO;2-J.
11. Cheraghi A, Piskin M. A comparison of peer bullying among high school students in Iran and Turkey. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci* 2011;15:2510-20. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.04.137.
12. Vanaelst B, De Vriendt T, Huybrechts I, Rinaldi S, De Henauw S. Epidemiological approaches to measure childhood stress. *Paediatr Perinat Epidemiol* 2012;26:280-97. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-3016.2012.01258.x.
13. Vervoort MH, Scholte RH, Overbeek G. Bullying and victimization among adolescents: the role of ethnicity and ethnic composition of school class. *J Youth Adolesc* 2010;39:1-11. doi: 10.1007/s10964-008-9355-y.
14. Al-Saadoon M, Al-Farsi YM, Rizvi S, Al-Sharbati M, Al-Jabri A, Almamari S, et al. The magnitude and impact of bullying among school pupils in Muscat, Oman: a cross-sectional study. *ScientificWorldJournal* 2014;2014:e169737. doi: 10.1155/2014/169737.
15. Yahya HM, Hashim MT, Al-Kaseer EA, Al-Diwan JK. Bullying victimization among school-going adolescents in Iraq. *J Fac Med Baghdad* 2015;57:221-4.
16. United Nations (UN). UN Study on Violence Against Children. [Online] [Cited 2018 September 17]. Available from URL: <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/un-study-violence-against-children>.
17. Yahya HM, Hashim MT, Al-Kaseer EA, Al-Diwan JK. Bullying victimization among school- going adolescents in Iraq. *J Fac Med Baghdad* 2015;57:221-4. DOI: 10.32007/jfacmedbagdad.573367
18. Shawki B, Al-Hadithi T, Shabila N. Association of bullying behaviour with smoking, alcohol use and drug use among school students in Erbil City, Iraq. *East Mediterr Health J* 2021;27:483-90. doi: 10.26719/2021.27.5.483.
19. Zhang H, Zhou H, Tao T. Bullying Behaviors and Psychosocial Adjustment Among School-Aged Children in China. *J Interpers Violence* 2019;34:2363-75. doi: 10.1177/0886260518780777.
20. Galal YS, Emadeldin M, Mwafy MA. Prevalence and correlates of bullying and victimization among school students in rural Egypt. *J Egypt Public Health Assoc* 2019;94:18. doi: 10.1186/s42506-019-0019-4.
21. Alsaleem MA, Alhashem HA, Alsaleem SA, Mahfouz AA. Bullying Prevalence among Secondary School Children in Khamis Mushait City, Southwestern Saudi Arabia. *Behav Sci (Basel)* 2021;11:134. doi: 10.3390/bs11100134.
22. Umoke PCI, Umoke M, Ugwuanyi CS, Okeke CIO, Eseadi C, Onuorah AR, et al. Bullying experience of pupils in Nigerian primary schools. *Medicine (Baltimore)* 2020;99:e22409. doi: 10.1097/MD.00000000000022409.
23. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Youth Violence Prevention: Risk factors for perpetration. [Online] [Cited 2020 March 02]. Available from URL: https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/risk-factors/index.html#cdc_risk_factors_perpet-risk-factors-for-perpetration
24. Gabrielli S, Rizzi S, Carbone S, Piras EM. School Interventions for Bullying-Cyberbullying Prevention in Adolescents: Insights from the UPRIGHT and CREEP Projects. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2021;18:11697. doi: 10.3390/ijerph182111697.
25. Khamis V. Bullying among school-age children in the greater Beirut area: risk and protective factors. *Child Abuse Negl* 2015;39:137-46. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.08.005.
26. Wang H, Tang J, Dill SE, Xiao J, Boswell M, Cousineau C, et al. Bullying Victims in Rural Primary Schools: Prevalence, Correlates, and Consequences. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2022;19:765. doi: 10.3390/ijerph19020765.
27. Jadambaa A, Thomas HJ, Scott JG, Graves N, Brain D, Pacella R. The contribution of bullying victimisation to the burden of anxiety and depressive disorders in Australia. *Epidemiol Psychiatr Sci* 2019;29:e54. doi: 10.1017/S2045796019000489.
28. Jenkins LN, Troop-Gordon W. Bystanders in bullying: Introduction to the special issue. *J Sch Psychol* 2020;81:47-50. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2020.07.002.