



Exploring The Relationship Between Bullying, Academic Achievement And Social Behavior Among University Students

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Abstract

The current study aims to explore the relationship between Bullying, Academic Achievement and Social Behavior among University Students. These variables are essential in the modern era due to their impact on students' well-being and academic success. The sample size for the study was calculated by G power formula and 250 university students (121 men and 129 women) aged 18-25 from various universities in Faisalabad was selected using a convenient sampling technique. The variables were measured using the Bullying Questionnaire (Gall Dore, 2015), Academic Performance Scale (McGregory et al., 2015) and Social Behavior Questionnaire (Ledley et al., 1997). A correlational research design was employed, and data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and t-tests were used to evaluate the hypotheses. The results indicated that bullying is positively and significantly related to academic achievement, while bullying positively associate with social behavior. These findings suggest that positive significant relationship between bullying is associated with academic achievement and social behavior among university students. No significant gender differences were found in terms of bullying, academic achievement or social behavior. The study highlights the importance of addressing bullying to improve academic performance and social behavior among university students. In conclusion, the present research study creates awareness among researchers, educational psychologists, and parents that excessive about bullying may effect on academic achievement and social behavior among university students.

Keywords: University Students, Bullying, Academic Achievement, Social Behavior, Student Well-Being

1. Introduction

According to Olweus (1999), "bullying" is typically defined as an intentional violent act or behavior that occur over a period of time and consistently by an individual or group against a victim who is not able to defend one. According to Rigby (2002), one form of abuse that result from an imbalance of power is bullying and is best described as a deliberate assault of power. A brand new type of violence and bullying known as "cyber bullying" has surfaced in recent years. In this type of bullying, the aggression is directed against contemporary technology, particularly mobile phones and the internet. According to research on this subject, the issue just recently emerged as a result of a rise in the use of electronic devices by youth like laptop and mobile phones (Monks & Smith, 2006).

Bullying is increasingly recognized as a significant threat to teenagers' social, emotional, and physical development (Smith, 1997). Craig & Pepler (2003) describe it as occurring in relationships with unequal power dynamics, where a stronger individual repeatedly harms a weaker one. Most studies highlight bullying's power disparity and repeated harm (Farrington, 1993). The effects are severe for both bullies and victims, regardless of measurement or motivation. Bullying has severe short and long-term repercussions for all involved, including witnesses. Bullies are often impulsive, violent, antisocial, lack empathy, and show low levels of worry and insecurity (Olweus, 1996).

Academic performance is influenced by factors such as motivation, personality, interests, abilities, study habits, self-worth, and the teacher-student relationship. Diverging performance occurs when a student's classroom performance differs from expectations, with inadequate performance falling short of these expectations. Occasionally, teaching methods may contribute to this. Learning studies identify two orientations: quantitative (behavioral and cognitive) and qualitative. The qualitative orientation includes research on learning approaches and styles, which take a phenomenological approach within the information processing paradigm (Gini & Pozzoli, 2015).

Academic achievement significantly declines due to victimization, which diminishes pupils' enthusiasm and interest in learning. In higher education, particularly in university settings, bullying severely impacts student academic motivation. Young-Jones et al. (2015) found that bullying causes considerable psychological stress and distress, discouraging students' learning and creativity for an extended period. It often results in poor classroom performance, especially in public speaking tasks. Even with a strong understanding of the subject, the lasting psychological impact undermines victims' confidence, making them feel inferior, rejected, and unable to perform effectively in the classroom.

According to Maturana and Varela (1987), behavior describes the changes a system undergoes in relation to its environment. This broad definition applies to any system, such as an animal, robot, or agent, reacting to its surroundings. Our focus, however, is on social behavior. A system is social if its actions consider society, not

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limited to human civilizations but including any organisms or agents engaging in social interactions. Without social interactions, their group is merely a population (Castelfranchi, 1998).

Research indicates that adults who were bullied as children are more likely to experience depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties in adult relationships (Olweus, 1993). Rigby (1998) found that younger adolescents may uniquely show a correlation between poor physical and mental health and peer victimization. However, there is limited information on the link between behavioral issues, psychological health, and relational bullying. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that verbal and indirect aggression, as well as victimization, significantly predicted anxiety in children. Sharp (1995) also noted that indirect bullying caused higher stress levels than direct bullying.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Guided by social identity theory, the investigation examines how group affiliations and the need for positive social identity drive bullying behaviors. The social information processing hypothesis outlines six steps where deficiencies can lead to bullying, with bullies often showing poor empathy and social competence. Social cognitive theory highlights reciprocal determinism and the impact of self-efficacy on behavior. Atkinson's motivation theory suggests an inverse relationship between task attractiveness and feasibility, while modern perspectives indicate that anticipation and value beliefs predict performance. The framework explores bullying as an independent variable affecting academic achievement and social behavior, negatively impacting social interactions, relationships, peer acceptance, grades, test scores, and attendance. Factors like individual traits, family dynamics, school climate, and societal norms shape this relationship, with gender moderating the impact and psychological distress mediating effects on social behavior and academic performance.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Study Design

The present quantitative research used a correlational research strategy. A correlational study is a type of study design that looks at the relationships across two or more variables (Health, 2018).

3.2. Sampling Technique

Convenient sampling was used in the current research investigation to obtain data. A sort of non-probability or non-random sampling, convenience sampling, study participants based on pragmatic factors like ease of access, close proximity, availability at a specific time, or willingness to participate (Dornyei, 2007).

3.3. Procedure

Students from Government College Women University, Riphah International University, University of Faisalabad, and Agricultural University of Faisalabad provided physical data for this study. Separate consent and demographic forms were distributed to university students, and these forms were collected after 30 minutes. Prior to the questionnaire being distributed, university students were fully informed and provided an explanation of the reason for the research. University students were offered assurances regarding the privacy of the information they gave and that it would only be used for instructional purposes.

The university students were initially provided an Urdu translation of all the surveys, along with additional clarification to allay any doubt. The university students received comprehensive instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. University students' behavior was noted and monitored during the investigation. Only consenting participants who were enrolled in university courses signed the consent form and completed the provided study questionnaire. The full process of administering data gathering took place over the course of twenty days, from March 8 to March 28.

4. Results

Statistical Procedure for the Social Sciences (SPSS- 26) version was used for data analysis. Descriptive analysis, reliability analysis and correlations statistics tool were used.

Table 1: Frequencies & Percentages of Demographic Variables (N = 250).

| Characteristics | | <i>F</i> | % |
|-------------------|--------------|----------|------|
| Gender | Male | 121 | 48.4 |
| | Female | 129 | 51.6 |
| Age | 18 – 22 | 162 | 64.8 |
| | 23 – 30 | 88 | 35.2 |
| Qualification | BS/MA/MSc | 207 | 82.8 |
| | MS/MPhil | 43 | 17.2 |
| Family System | Joint | 107 | 42.8 |
| | Nuclear | 143 | 57.2 |
| Occupation | Student | 222 | 88.8 |
| | Employed | 28 | 11.2 |
| Father Occupation | Businessman | 81 | 32.4 |
| | Labor | 8 | 3.2 |
| | Govt. Employ | 19 | 7.6 |

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------|-----|------|
| Mother Occupation | Other | 142 | 56.8 |
| | House wife | 217 | 86.8 |
| | Employed | 33 | 13.2 |

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the respondents. Females comprised 51.6% and males 48.4% of the sample. The total of 250 respondents represents a 100% frequency distribution. Ages ranged with 64.8% (162 respondents) between 18 and 22, and 35.2% (88 respondents) between 23 and 30. Educational data shows 82.8% were in the BS/MA/MSc category (207 respondents), and 17.2% were in the MS/MPhil category (43 respondents). Family systems included 42.8% in joint families (107 respondents) and 57.2% in nuclear families (143 respondents). Of 222 student respondents, 88.8% were employed. For fathers' occupations, 32.4% were businessmen, 3.2% laborers, 7.6% government employees, and 56.8% in other jobs. For mothers, 86.8% were housewives, and 13.2% were employed.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha for the Research Measures (N = 250).

| Research Measures | α | Items |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Bullying Questionnaire | .77 | 12 |
| Academic Performance Scale | .81 | 8 |
| Social Behavior Questionnaire | .62 | 27 |

According to the findings in table 2 above, variables were utilized to define the dependability using the data. The reliability of the bullying questionnaire is satisfactory. Its Cronbach's alpha value is .77, which is deemed high and acceptable when the value of Alpha Cronbach is greater than 0.5. Additionally, the Social Behavior scale has a very satisfactory reliability of .62, but the Academic Performance scale has a reliability of .81. The confidence level is calculated using alpha as the significance level. A satisfactory level of confidence in the current research is provided by bullying, academic performance, and social behavior.

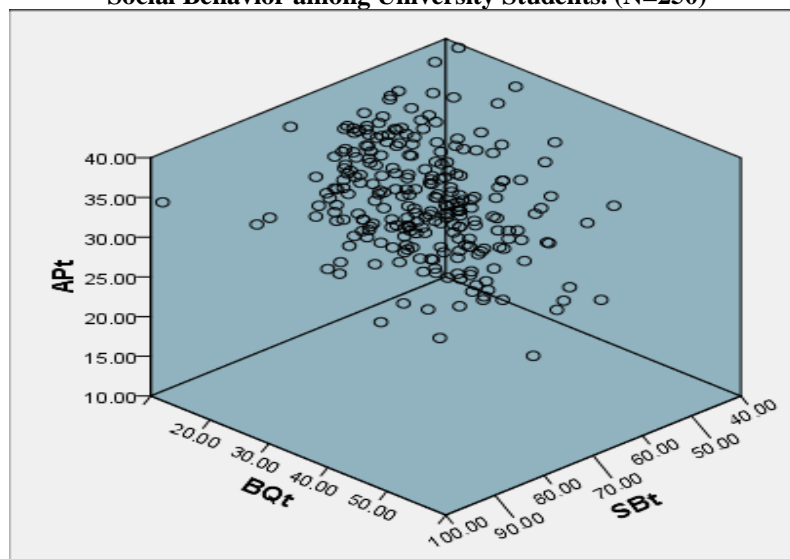
Table 3: Inter correlation between Bullying, Social Behavior and Academic Achievement among University students (N = 250)

| Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------------------|---|--------|--------|
| 1. Bullying | - | .445** | .123** |
| 2. Academic Achievement | - | - | .140** |
| 3. Social Behavior | - | - | - |

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 - tailed).

The inter-correlation table presents the relationships between bullying, social behavior, and academic achievement among university students (N = 250). The correlation between bullying and social behavior is .445**, indicating a moderate positive relationship. This suggests that as bullying increases, social behavior tends to increase, with a statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level. The correlation between bullying and academic achievement is .123**, indicating a weak positive relationship. Higher levels of bullying are associated with slightly higher academic achievement, also significant at the 0.01 level. Lastly, the correlation between academic achievement and social behavior is .140**, suggesting a weak positive relationship, where better social behavior is linked to slightly higher academic achievement. This correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. These findings highlight significant, though varied, relationships between the variables.

Figure 1: Three-D Scatter Plot Showing the Relationship between Bullying, Academic Achievement and Social Behavior among University Students. (N=250)



The 3D scatter plot illustrates the relationship between bullying, academic achievement, and social behavior among 250 university students, the data indicates a moderate positive correlation between bullying and academic performance. This suggests that as instances of bullying increase, academic achievement also tends to increase. In contrast, the plot reveals a weaker yet significant positive correlation between bullying and social behavior, indicating that higher levels of bullying are slightly associated with better social behavior. Overall, the scatter plot highlights that bullying has a differential impact on academic and social outcomes, with a stronger relationship observed for academic performance compared to social behavior.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Bullying, Academic Achievement and Social Behavior among University Students (N = 250)

| Variables | Male (N = 101) | | Female (N = 149) | | t | 95% of CI | | |
|-----------|-------------------|------|---------------------|------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | LL | UL | Cohen's d |
| BQ | 28.79 | 9.45 | 26.64 | 8.90 | 1.85 | -.14 | -4.44 | .23 |
| APS | 30.83 | 5.64 | 31.71 | 4.93 | -1.31 | -2.19 | .44 | .17 |
| SBQ | 65.96 | 7.45 | 65.48 | 8.77 | .463 | -1.56 | 2.51 | .06 |

Note: P < .05=, P < .01=, P < .001=**, CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, t= Degree of Freedom (N-2), BQ= Bullying Questionnaire, APS= Academic Performance Scale, SBQ= Social Behavior Questionnaire.

According to the result there is significant difference in the mean scores of Bullying, Academic Achievement and Social Behavior among University Students. In bullying the male score (M = 28.79, SD = 9.45) and female score (M = 26.64, SD = 8.90), which shows that male students are suffering more from bullying in contrast to female students. According to results there was little difference found in academic achievement between male (M = 30.83, SD = 5.64) and female (M = 31.71, SD = 4.93), result showed that the academic achievement was observed to be little more in female students as compared to male students. In social behavior there is also a little difference found in male (M = 65.96, SD = 7.45) and female (M = 65.48, SD = 8.77), the result showed almost same effect on male students as well as females' students. Cohen's d for bullying was .23, Cohen's d for academic achievement was .17 and Cohen's d for social behavior was .06. So, all of them fall in the large effect size category.

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis of this research is that there is a significant relationship between bullying and academic achievement among university students. The results indicate a notable correlation between bullying and academic success in this population. The findings revealed a strong connection between bullying and academic performance among university students, which is consistent with previous studies supporting this hypothesis. Bullying manifests in various forms at universities, with different types of bullies affecting students depending on the environment. Bullying often arises from individuals or groups who perceive themselves as superior to others, leading to behaviors that ridicule differences in appearance, ideas, or actions. Despite lecturers' assurances that measures have been taken to prevent bullying, students remain unconvinced that the issue has been adequately addressed in the classroom and university environment (Akhtar et al., 2023). This research indicates that while bullying impacts students' performance and behavior in the classroom, it does not affect their academic achievement as measured by GPA (Lee, 2004).

Physical bullying has become the most common form among students in Islamic higher education institutions, occurring in 25-26% of cases. Social bullying is the second most prevalent, accounting for 18-23%, followed by racial bullying, which affects 5-8% of students at the three Islamic higher education institutions mentioned. Interviews with professors, who confirmed that bullying occurs in various forms at universities, support the survey results. However, it seems that lecturers highlight verbal bullying as the most common type occurring in the classroom. Students, particularly those in higher education, often participate in verbal bullying. Teachers regularly witness instances of verbal bullying during the teaching and learning process (Lee, 2004).

The gender differences observed in four social cognition scales (self-efficacy for violence, expected reward, value of reward, and value of victim suffering) align with previous research indicating that males tend to endorse beliefs favoring aggression. Furthermore, the study revealed that boys were more actively involved in bullying than girls, whether as bullies, supporters, or reinforces. According to Salmivalli, (1996), boys exhibit greater sensitivity than girls to participate in physically aggressive forms of social interaction, which contributes to this finding. Boys are often expected to engage in bullying behaviors and rough and tumble play to integrate into their social groups. Multiple studies have shown that boys, more so than girls, endorse aggression (Sutton et al., 1999).

6. Limitations

- Other variables that could affect the correlation between bullying, academic performance, and social behavior were not accounted for in the study.
- The study's sample size was limited, potentially limiting its representativeness across the student population.

- The study utilized self-reported data, which may introduce biases and accuracy concerns.
- The study exclusively employed survey methodology, possibly overlooking the intricacies of the issue.
- Lack of longitudinal approach: The study was cross-sectional and did not explore the enduring impacts of bullying over time.

7. Implication And Recommendations

Bullying at universities negatively impacts academic achievement by lowering grades and increasing absenteeism, while also harming social behavior through increased social anxiety and isolation. These effects are compounded by psychological distress, such as anxiety and depression, leading to a harmful university environment. To address this, universities should implement strict anti-bullying policies, provide accessible counseling and support services, and conduct awareness and education campaigns. Additionally, establishing peer support programs, anonymous reporting mechanisms, promoting positive social interactions, and training faculty to recognize and address bullying are crucial steps to create a safer and more supportive campus environment.

- Universities should periodically conduct surveys to evaluate the prevalence of bullying and its impacts on students.
- Universities should develop explicit policies and protocols for reporting and addressing incidents of bullying.
- Universities should provide counseling and peer support services to students affected by bullying.
- Universities should establish transparent procedures and guidelines for addressing instances of bullying.
- Universities should offer counseling and peer support services to students who encounter bullying.

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