

## Bullying Symptoms and their Effects on Victims

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### Abstract

Bullying symptoms refer to aggressive acts or behaviors aimed at abusing/torturing the others who are weaker than the bully, which can cause physical or psychological harm to the victim. In addition, victims of bullying will feel depressed, terrified, apprehensive, and agitated the whole time, with some suffering serious and permanent injuries, and even worse – death. Hence, this study aims to discuss the definitions and concepts of bullying symptoms, the effects on the victims, and the reasons of suppression by the victims. There are (9) reasons of the suppression: (i) Shame and embarrassment, (ii) Fear of retaliation, (iii) Fears of making things worse, (iv) Desire for acceptance, (v) Fear of not being believed, (vi) Concerned about "snitching", (vii) Low self-esteem, (viii) Failure to recognize bullying, and (ix) Thinking that it would not help. Therefore, the bullying symptoms need to be given a serious attention by all parties including the victims themselves, to reduce the number of cases from time to time, and to avoid the risk of fatal injuries.

**Keywords:** Bullying Behavior, Symptoms, Effects, Victims

### Introduction

In "Teasing and Bullying" that was published more than a century ago in the Pedagogical Seminary, bullying behavior was first described in the scientific literature as a part of a childhood experience. The author described bullying behavior, and identified the causes and treatments for others' tormenting, and advocated for additional research (Koo, 2007). Dan Olweus, a Swedish research professor of psychology in Norway, conducted an extensive study on bullying nearly a century later (Olweus, 1978). Olweus' efforts raised awareness of the problem and inspired other professionals to conduct their own research, thereby expanding and contributing to our understanding of the bullying behavior. Bullying research has continuously grown since Olweus' previous work (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Over the past few decades, venues where bullying behaviors occur have expanded with the advent of the

Internet, chat rooms, instant messaging, social media, and other forms of digital electronic communication. These modes of communication have provided a new communal avenue for bullying. While media reports linking bullying to suicide suggest a causal relationship, the available research suggests that there are often multiple factors that contribute to a youth's suicide-related ideology and behavior. However, several studies have demonstrated an association between bullying involvement and suicide-related ideology and behavior (Holt et al., 2015).

There are numerous interpretations and definitions of bullying behavior. Bullying misconduct is interpreted from various perspectives. The more perspectives on bullying that are used, the broader and deeper the interpretation of bullying becomes. Bullying behavior has also been studied by researchers in the past. As a result of their research, the findings of these studies have provided ample space to define the term "bullying". Bullying is generally defined as a behavior that is committed by someone who abuses another person. People who have been abused are naturally weaker than those who have not been abused. The goal of bullying behavior is to demonstrate that the bully is more powerful than the victim by causing physical or psychological harm to the victim. In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Department of Education released the first federal definition of bullying. The definition includes three core elements: (i) unwanted aggressive behavior, (ii) observed or perceived power imbalance, and (iii) repetition or high likelihood of repetition of bullying behaviors. The definition of bullying based on the Kamus Dewan (Fourth Edition) states that bullying is the act of abusing or intimidating another party. According to Einarsen et al (2020), workplace bullying is defined as "harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone's work tasks." Bullying (or mobbing) must occur consistently and repeatedly (e.g., weekly) and over a period for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a specific activity, interaction, or process (e.g., about six months). According to the above definitions, bullying behaviors include harassing, offending, isolating from a group, and negative actions that can affect a person's work. Negative behavior also includes interactions or processes that occur on a regular basis and repeat for at least a week or over a six-month period. Often, the individual who is the target of bullying finds it difficult to defend themselves against the negative act.

Bullying is a form of an aggressive behavior that is designed to hurt another. There is no universal agreement on the definition of bullying, but there is some consensus that it is an aggressive behavior that satisfies two additional criteria of (i) repetition, and (ii) there is a power imbalance such that it is difficult for the victim to defend themselves (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Bullying is an aggressive behavior – that is an abuse of power by an individual or a group of individuals against others. Bullying is a repeated act of an unprovoked aggression that is psychologically or physically damaging for the victim, where the strength of the aggressor or aggressors and the victim is unequal (Jankauskiene et al., 2008). The Times Lingua Dictionary (1993) defines bullying as people who like to use violence to intimidate weak people. In ordinary Malay, a bully is known as "penyakit" i.e., those who are bigger/stronger or have friends, have a habit of harassing or oppressing smaller/weaker people. To understand bullying, there are researchers who equate bullying with cruelty. The National Research Council (in Allan, 2010) classifies bullying as interpersonal violence and defines it as "a behavior by persons against persons that intentionally threatens, attempts, or actually inflicts physical harm". The behaviors that are described in this definition are also found in definitions of aggression and most of what is understood about violence comes from research done on aggression. It has been shown that in many instances, childhood aggression can be linked to future violent behaviors. Children at around eight years old who show

aggressive behaviors are more likely to demonstrate delinquent, criminal, or violent behavior in adolescence and adulthood than their peers.

Hence, this study aims to discuss the definitions and concepts of bullying symptoms, the effects on victims, and the reasons of the bullying victims often refusing to inform the others.



Figure 1: Landscape of Bullying

(<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/23482/toolkit/introduction/index.html>)

### **Bullying Symptoms: Definitions, Concepts, and Effects on Victims**

Bullying behavior involves the participation of the bully and the victim of bullying. Bullies are those who commit bullying behaviors to the victims of bullying. Naturally, bullies are those who have the nature of people who are stronger, more powerful, and more able to commit bullying behaviors. This form of strength can usually be demonstrated whether individually or in groups. The nature of the victims of bullying are those who are weaker and unable to match the strength and power of the bully. These weaknesses include physical weakness and others (Smith & Monks, 2008). The example includes being physically weak, hence the victim of bullying is unable to fight the bully. Victims of bullying are also fearful and unable to complain to their friends, teachers, or parents. Usually, the victims of bullying are always alone. The purpose of bullying is for these bullies to show that they are stronger or more powerful than the victim. Bullies also feel satisfied when they bully others. The more the victim fears, the higher the degree of satisfaction felt by the bully. Other than that, the purpose of bullying behavior is to make the weak become compliant and respectful of the bully. To make the situation happens as expected by the bully, the bully will injure the victim

either physically or psychologically. The effects that the victim feels include injury, fear, and discomfort (Liu & Graves, 2011). According to a psychology professor Elizabeth Englander – the director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts, bullying, especially in childhood, is a way to gain social capital. Regarding the reason why kids bully, she quoted "Bullying among children today is about social status, and it is about feeling psychologically on top. So, it is a strong motivator in a lot of ways. If you can swallow being mean to somebody, you can level up your social status and become more popular and appear more confident or funny."

Bullying can affect everyone, those who are bullied, those who bully, and those who witness bullying. Bullying is linked to many negative outcomes including impacts on mental health, substance use, and suicide. The bully will feel stronger and more powerful and feel satisfied when he sees the victim of bullying fear and acquiesce to the strength and power that the bully has. The bully will also be satisfied to see the victim being in an uncomfortable and calm state. In some cases, the bully will be satisfied if the victim becomes seriously injured and it is likely that the victim will die. According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, kids who bully others can also engage in violent and other risky behaviors in adulthood. Kids who bully are more likely to become engaged in alcohol abuse and other drugs in adolescence. As adults, they would engage in brawls, vandalism of property, and become school dropouts. As grownups, they could have criminal records and traffic violations, being abusive on their love partners, wives, or children, and are more prone to engage in sexual intercourse at a young age (Kaliampos et al., 2022).

Victims of bullying will feel depressed, scared, anxious and restless all the time. There were also victims becoming injured and disabled. This effect will leave an impact in the life period of the victim. Some cases of bullying can result in death. Children who are bullied frequently face significant personal challenges, such as fear of abandonment and humiliation. Insecurity, fear, and low self-esteem are all common symptoms. Despite this, many children who are bullied do not report the incident to anyone. The purposes for remaining silent vary from individual to individual, but bullying is often frightening and perplexing. Most children are uncertain on how to handle the situation because of this fact. Many people will keep bullying incidents as a secret while they contemplate on how to handle them. Bullying occurs on a regular basis. The bully will bully the victim multiple times. The level of bullying is related to the frequency of the repeated bullying behavior. Naturally, every subsequent bullying behavior has an element of increasing from the standpoint of the seriousness of the behavior (Benbenishty & Astor, 2019). The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicated that nationwide, 19.5% of students in grades 9–12 reported of being bullied on school property within the period of 12 months, preceding the survey.



Figure 2: The Bullying Cycle (<https://stopthesilencestopbullying.weebly.com/what-is-bullying.html>)

### **The Reasons Behind Bullying Incident Suppression**

**Shame and Embarrassment:** Bullying is mostly about power and domination and being bullied can make children feel helpless or weak. This combination causes severe humiliation and embarrassment in many children. Bullying can occur when a child is already sensitive towards something, such as a physical characteristic. In other circumstances, the abuse may take the shape of a charge levelled against them for whatever they did. In any case, they will be too embarrassed to talk about it with anyone. Discussing about the bullying incident would require them to draw attention to their "fault" in front of others. For some children, the prospect of approaching an adult about bullying is worse than the bullying itself. According to one survey, 44 percent of the kids believe they have been bullied because of their appearance, while 16 percent believe they have been targeted because of their race. In the meantime, 14 percent of kids reported being bullied because of their sexual orientation. 12 percent said they were picked out because they were poor, and 7 percent said they were bullied because they had a disability. All these situations are ones that most children are sensitive to and would not want to discuss (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2019).

**Fear of Retaliation:** Often, kids feel like reporting a bully would not make a difference. Not only do they feel powerless, but they also worry that the bully will only make their life worse if they speak up. Among kids who were bullied, 40% reported that the people who targeted them were bigger and physically stronger, while 56% reported that those bullying them had the ability to influence other students' perceptions of them. Many kids prefer to weather the storm alone than risk escalating the problem. They may even believe that if they keep quiet, the bullying will eventually end. If they do talk to an adult, it is often with the promise that the adult will not report the incidents or take further action (Melgar et al., 2021).

**Fears of Making Things Worse:** It is normal to take rapid actions when one realizes that their child is being bullied. However, the proclivity for stepping in to solve problems could be the reason why the child is hesitant to involve another person. Parents may be concerned that their children may cause a ruckus. To reduce a child's anxiety, the first reaction should be tempered, and refrained from acting, especially when it comes to contacting their school or other involved parties (Strindberg et al., 2020).

**Desire for Acceptance:** Many children believe that to fit in, they must accept occasional bullying. As a result, they will give in to peer pressure and tolerate bullying as a means of preserving their social status. In cliques, this mix of peer pressure and bullying is common. Victimized children frequently desire for acceptance from the very people who bully them. They may endure fake friendships and nasty behavior to stay in the group, especially when that person bullying them has a greater social status than they do. In fact, half of kids in between the ages of 12 and 18 who had already been bullied said that the bully had more social power. Furthermore, 31% said they wished they had more money.

**Fear of Not Being Believed:** Bullies are frequently the students whose instructors and parents least expect to be bullies. They may be well-liked, academically successful, or well-respected in their community. As a result, when these bullies select out a victim who is frequently in trouble, has a proclivity for storytelling, or has disciplinary troubles, it is reasonable for the victim to assume no one will believe them. They may be concerned that others will conclude that they are lying or fabricating information.

**Concerned About "Snitching":** Most bullying incidents occur when adults are either absent or not close enough to witness the behavior. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, "bullied students reported that bullying occurred in the following places: the hallway or stairwell at school (43%), inside the classroom (42%), in the cafeteria (27%), outside school grounds (22%), online or by text (15%), in the bathroom or locker room (12%), and on the school bus (8%)." To receive support, the bullied individuals must either inform someone or hope that a bystander will report the occurrence. Bullying typically gets undetected because no one wants to be called a rat or a tattletale. Bullying frequently has an unspoken rule of secrecy within peer groups. Bullying will continue if this code is in existence. Bullying victims are typically more terrified of being labelled a tattletale, a baby, a rat, or a snitch than of continuing to be bullied, so they remain silent. To overcome the culture of secrecy surrounding bullying, educators must ensure that a climate exists where reporting abuse is not only acceptable but expected. This also implies that they should be cautious in their handling of bullying reports. One study in 2020 noted the following responses from adults when teens told them about being bullied: "the adult responded irrationally, conferred blame and criticism, did not take the time to understand the context or empathize, or was apathetic and dismissive." All of these can be barriers to kids reporting bullying to adults (O'Brien et al., 2018).

**Low Self-Esteem:** Youngsters are frequently acutely aware of their flaws. As a result, many children will naturally conclude that if someone picks on one of those flaws and uses it to ridicule and humiliate them, they deserve it. When a child is extremely critical of himself or lacks self-esteem, he or she may believe the bully's comments and, as a result, accept the bullying. This can have long term negative consequences for their self-esteem.

**Failure to Recognize Bullying:** Because physical bullying is obvious to spot, it is more likely to be reported. Bullying that is more subtle, such as relationship aggression, is more likely to go unnoticed and unreported. Spreading rumors, isolating others, and undermining relationships

are all examples of bullying that children may be unaware of. Bullying can develop from even minor activities like teasing.

Thinking It Would Not Help: Despite recent progress with bullying prevention, the underlying message that kids need to be tough during difficult situations still prevails. Many assume that adults would not help, or they fear that the adults in their lives will think poorly of them due to the abuse they are experiencing. They may also believe that adults expect them to handle the situation on their own. Consequently, as kids get older, fewer and fewer report the bullying incidents they experience, with only 39% of bullied high school students reporting harassment and bullying they are experiencing. Instead, school officials would rather not be distracted by bullying because they are focused on meeting academic goals, encouraging students to address all difficulties on their own. This is especially problematic if kids attempt to handle potentially violent situations on their own (Ferreira & Deslandes, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The symptoms of bullying are generally classified as acts or behaviors that are immoral and unacceptable in the eyes of the world community. It can affect the harmony of a community and welcome a sense of insecurity and threat in the local community. Even worse, extreme symptoms of bullying can cause serious injury to the victim – physical or psychological, or even death. The reluctance of the victims of bullying to speak out or report such cases to the authorities is also the cause of the hardships faced to contain this matter, that grows in time. This study contributes to the development of a conceptual framework for the prevention of bullying in the society, especially for the children and teenagers. It aims to create a stable, peaceful, and safe atmosphere in the local community and further increase the Global Peace Index (GPI) of a country because of the cooperation of all parties.

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