

Bullying - A Prevalent but Under-reported Problem in Society

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Bullying is best described as repeated and intentional use of threat or aggressive behaviour to abuse or dominate others in the context of a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying is commonly observed in our society, but proper statistics are lacking as it is mostly an under-reported and less-studied phenomenon. Nansel TR et al. reported almost 30% prevalence of bullying in the survey of American youths¹.

Bullying may involve verbal abuse, physical manhandling, victimisation in relationships and cyber bullying. Verbal abuse may include shouting and using insulting and obscene words against the victim while physical bullying is done by pushing, pulling, hitting, making obscene or insulting gestures. Relationships victimisation takes the form of intentionally excluding someone from groups and gatherings and creating gossips or spreading rumours. With the rising use of technology, cell phones and computers are being excessively used for cyber bullying through email, text messages and social media.

The person who is responsible for bullying is called a bully. Bullies themselves, are psychologically disturbed people and have got abnormal traits in personality. They enjoy dominating others with no regards for others. They crave attention and usually blame, accuse and criticise others to cover up for their own deficiencies. Many of these people are reportedly spoiled by their caregivers.

Similarly victims or targets of bullying are also considered psychologically unstable and are sus-

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ceptible for manipulation by others. They are mostly physically weaker than their peer group and are seen introverted, socially withdrawn and find difficulty in asserting themselves. They have a poor self-esteem, mostly dependent and gets easily upset with a feeling of insecurity in different social situations. Few of these people become victim due to some disability, their affiliation to a minority group or other features giving rise to stigmatization.

The common places of bullying are educational institutions like schools², colleges or universities where a reasonable number of students, especially the new comers, are badly exposed to verbal or physical bullying by the groups of bullies. Other places where bullying is frequently observed are workplaces and occasions of social interactions. Bullying is sometimes seen even at home or in family environment where parents, siblings or spouse are either the victim of or actively responsible for bullying.

The authorities at schools and colleges should carefully look for prevention, early recognition and effective remedial measures for behaviours related to bullying at their institutions. The students spend a critical period of their life in these institutions and their future professional career is highly dependent on smooth academic progress at these places. Bullying if present, is likely to affect their studies by reducing motivation and concentration which is necessary for their progress.

Being the victim of a bully can be a painful experience, and can affect every aspect of a person's life, long after the bully has moved on to another victim. People who are bullied are at higher risk of developing depression, anxiety and other stress-related disorders³. They lose interest in academics, professional and social activities and their persistent feelings of sadness and loneliness may result in suicidal thoughts or acts⁴.

There should be an effective bullying prevention program at schools with the aim to create awareness among students, teachers, administrators and parents for bullying behaviours and also to suggest effective measures to deal with such situations. Periodic surveys of students can help identifying how severe the bullying problem is in a school. Successful anti-bullying programs include classroom and playground supervision and giving advice to students (who are just spectators) how to stand up for victims so that bullying behaviour becomes a stigma rather than being socially acceptable.

If parents feels that their child is being bullied at school, it should be taken seriously by them, and the child should be encouraged to talk about it. The parent must try to get details about the circumstances related to bullying, especially about the bully, and should teach the child how to respond assertively, without getting upset. The kid may also find it helpful to stay with other students and a teacher so the bully has less opportunity to engage in the behaviour.

Bullying is not limited to young children but is also variably seen in adult population particularly at their workplaces⁵. This workplace bullying, if unchecked, can badly affect the professional competency of victims and can have a negative impact on overall reputation of the organisation^{6,7}.

Like educational institutions, services of counsellor should also be adequately available to employees who can provide necessary counselling to the victims of bullying and for other behavioural issues of workers.

Cyber bullying is getting increasingly common especially in teenagers due to their excessive involvement in social media. Cyber bullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass or target another person via social media. Changhol Lee et al. reported almost 34% of responders in a sample size of 4000 participants in Korean adolescents reported cyber bullying⁸. Another review of social media studies reported 23% bullying in adolescent studies in Canada⁹.

The effective ways of dealing with bullying are attempts to ignoring the bully and avoiding getting angry or upset and also trying to get removed from that situation. At the same time it may be necessary in certain situations to respond to bully evenly

and firmly. Professional help in the form of psychotherapy and/or treatment by psychiatrists may be required if the victim of bullying develop intense emotional symptoms that interfere with their ability to function and it suggest the presence of a diagnosable psychiatric disorder.

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