Addressing Bullying in Elementary Schools: Parents' Perspectives on Understanding the Role of Home and School

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Abstract

Bullying in school has been an issue for years that still needs to be addressed in Pakistani schools. The present study was an attempt to explore parents' perspectives on understanding the role of home and schools with an emphasis on parents' and schoolteachers' roles in addressing this problem in schools. Ten parents, including fathers and mothers, were finally accessed through purposive sampling with the help of their school-going children studying in a district's elementary public and private schools. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews while employing a qualitative approach to explore parents' understanding of the phenomenon. The interview transcripts were analyzed by coding the data while reading the text several times and identifying significant themes that can best describe the problem under investigation. The emergent themes described the role of home and school in addressing the issue through the lens of parents and teachers. It was explored that many factors, including home and school environment, children brought up, and social class system, cause bullying in schools and have many adverse effects, which can be addressed through the engagement of parents and teachers. The study has implications for elementary school students' well-being and academic success.

Keywords: *School Environment, Bullying, Parental Engagement, Peer Support, School Students, School Policy.*

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Introduction

Bullying has been an ongoing issue since schools first began and it has grown to be one of the most serious problems affecting school children, leading to school violence and having a lasting effect on the victims. Bullying is an example of aggressive behavior, an activity meant to hurt another person. Bullying is aggressive conduct that also satisfies the following two requirements. However, there is no universal agreement on what constitutes bullying: (1) Repetition- it happens repeatedly, and (2) An imbalance of power makes it difficult for the victim to defend oneself (Olweus, 1999). Bullying was first mentioned in 1530. Also, a book on bullying in schools, "Tom Brown School Days" was published by Thomas Hughes in 1857. The first scholarly journal article regarding bullying in schools was published in 1897. Regarding bullying research, Dan Olweus is regarded as a pioneer researcher. Bullying is described as a repeated act of hostility committed against the weak by an influential person or a group of persons (Olweus, 1993). A concise description of the term "systematic abuse of power" is provided by Smith and Sharp (1994).

Research and policy development is needed to eliminate bullying in schools and help the victims. Victimization has been shown to have negative impacts on children time and time again. The victims of bullying experience dread and anxiety because of the bullying atmosphere. They display considerably lower attendance rates, avoidance behaviours, and school skipping than typical children (Glew et al., 2005; Maximo, 2014). These things are detrimental to children's academic success, internalizing and externalizing issues (Buhs, 2006). Internalizing concerns include anxiety disorders, sadness, loneliness, withdrawal, and psychosomatic illnesses (Reijntjes et al., 2010; Sourander, 2007).

Victims who taunt and provoke others to gain a reaction are more prone to have externalizing issues, such as delinquency, due to their weak social and communication abilities (Wolke et al., 2000). Bullies are not young individuals with severely low self-esteem or nervous people, despite some widespread notions to the contrary (Harcourt, 2015). Most of the time, bullies are bigger and stronger than their victims. Contrary to popular belief, bullying is more than merely hazardous. As we can se   e, bullying   is the main factor contributing to the rising death rates in our world.

Bullying aims to seize control of the situation and run the school and the classroom has a seriously detrimental effect on teachers, especially on the students involved. Bullying has been an issue in schools since the dawn of civilization, frequently having disastrous effects on the victims. Numerous initiatives to curb bullying have been made, yet the cycle persists. This is because the bully, the root of the problem, requires

greater attention. The parents of bullied children can contribute to addressing the issues and challenges such students face. The study attempts to examine the parental role and their engagement in handling the situation school children face.

Research Questions

The study's central question **was,** what is the role of home and school environments in addressing the problems of bullying in elementary schools? The other subsidiary research questions which were addressed in the study were:

- What are the parents' responses in addressing the bullying as complained by their children, and what are its consequences?
- What is the role of teachers in addressing the situation of bullying in the elementary schools?

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative. The researchers interviewed the parents of students who had been bullied. As part of the qualitative research procedure known as induction, data are acquired from particular study participants, and the researchers generate various ideas and theories. The researcher employed interviews as a data collection tool to get information from parents. The researchers also developed a demographic questionnaire to seek key information from the participants, which was validated and confirmed. A well-designed interview guide was used based on the research questions to gather the data.

The interview guide consisted of a set of semi-structured questions related to the purpose of the study and the main research questions. Twenty-five elementary school students were identified through snowball sampling, and they were contacted, out of which ten participants studying in different public and private schools were approached purposively, and consent was taken from their parents to conduct interviews. The interviews were conducted for forty to sixty-five minutes and were transcribed and analyzed through line-by-line and selective approaches for identifying codes, categories, and themes described in detail.

Results of the Study

The following theme emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the parents of elementary school students.

Home and School Environment

The home and school environment plays an essential role in addressing various issues and challenges related to bullying and the students engaged in this phenomenon. Parent 3 (a mother of an 8th-grade student) remarked in this perspective, "I believe that the disease begins at home more than anywhere else. These practices are a part of how

some parents raise their children; therefore, you can't avoid it". In addition, one of the parents (mother) of a grade 7 student declared that "the issue is that it is not the children's responsibility when they exhibit such behavior rather, these are taught to them by their elders and parents at home". Similarly, parent 6 (a father of a grade ten student) stated, "I don't know for sure, but I think a child's home education is important. Most children mimic behaviours they observe in other individuals throughout their everyday lives. How we treat our friends, family, and even strangers at the supermarket will impact our kids".

Parent 10 (a mother of a sixth-grade student) reflected, "I believe that both children and parents are bullied at home and that bullying occurs there as well. They are probably growing up in a harsh atmosphere, which they may have come to accept as normal". The study participants gave specific instances when, as parents, they had done well, such as when they had dealt with misbehaviour. As a result, they harboured resentment toward the parents who did not implement these procedures and were thus to blame for their kids' disruptive behavior. Parent 6 (a father of a grade six student) was disappointed with the instructors for failing to acknowledge her efforts as a good parent and support the morals she had taught her children at home. Similarly, parent 6 (a father of a grade 7 student) had done everything he could to be a good parent.

Some parents questioned the teachers, teaching their children in school. They believed that teachers were ignorant of the bullying problem and ignored it because of other obligations. Even if the parent felt they were ineffective, one of their aims was to follow the anti-bullying policy procedures. While one waited for the bullying to worsen, another was prepared to step in. Parents developed a mistrust of the schools due to the bullying, which was not being addressed, and perceived that these motives increased the risk to their child. Parent 10 (a mother of a seventh-grade student) remarked, "It seems that neither the playground staff nor the instructors were aware of what was occurring inside the school". Most of the parents believed that it is not sufficient to just create a policy and display it somewhere without ensuring that it is established in the institution's culture.

Social Class System

The class system in society and school stimulates students to bully behaviour. Parent 9 (a fifth-grade student's mother) remarked, "I'm highly concerned about my girl's school these days, considering the top school environment and how these students develop into materialistic, impolite, and show-offs". Parent 2 (a father of an eighth-grade student) believed that "my kid was ridiculed for having an old school bag that was in good shape, his classmates teased him, he suffered a lot and was mentally disturbed". Parent 4 (a mother of a seventh-grade student) expressed her opinion stating, "I'm

unhappy and humiliated to announce that our generation is being raised by a bunch of so-called "upper class", "respectable members" of society who have awful morals and are unable to instil essential qualities in their children.

People must first and foremost be valued for who they are as people and let youngsters pick their friends independently. It illustrates what children are taught at home. Parent 8 (a father of a seventh-grade student) explained, "Bullying, in my opinion, is an attempt by the bully to make the victim feel bad about themselves so that they can feel better about themselves". Similarly, parent 2 (a mother of a fifth-grade student) expressed that children and teens have a strong desire to be accepted by their classmates, and bullying may significantly negatively affect their self-esteem. Peer acceptance affects a child's happiness, healthy self-concept, and academic success. Bullying could affect a child's sense of self-worth. Bullied people come to believe they are "worthless" as a result.

Students' Response and Consequences of Bullying

The study participants were asked, "Does your child usually let you know about bullying? In response, most parents reported that their children did not always tell them when someone was bullying them. Parent 1 (a sixth-grade student's father) said, "I'm not worried. My kids are excellent at protecting themselves". Similarly, Parent 3 (an eighth-grade student's father) explained, "I have permitted my kids that don't complain to me, handle the situation at your own and bully back to bullies". In addition, Parent 7 (a mother of a seventh-grade student) expressed great anxiety and remarked, "I saw the signs that my daughter had issues with her temperament, food, and sleep while experiencing bullying in the school". Moreover, parent 9 (a mother of a tenth-grade student) stated, "My child returned home unhappy. I asked him why, and he told me that his classmates teased him due to his height and chubby face". It implies that one should observe the children's emotional condition because some people may not express their anxieties explicitly.

Parent 1 (an eighth-grade student's father) remarked, "Assist your child in gaining self-esteem; encourage them to sign up for classes or activities in the community they like. Additionally, this will give you more self-assurance and introduce you to like-minded others". Similarly, parent 7 (a mother of a fifth-grade student) stated, "I talk to my daughter mostly to boost her confidence and widen her positive circle of acceptance". According to parent number 6 (a father of a grade ten student), the ideal strategy is to strengthen your children and instil in them the idea that being bullied does not make them any weaker. Bullies should be avoided at all costs since these are unimportant. Parent 4 (a

mother of a fifth-grade student) reflected, "I'm afraid I'm concerned about it as well because my daughter is a cool,

The adverse effects of bullying on those involved bullies' victims or bully-victims were examined by Smokowski and Kopasz (2005). According to the authors, bullies frequently have mental health issues, a variety of issues, some connected to behaviour and anti-social disorders. They exhibit a penchant for aggressiveness and substance misuse (Mckenna et al., 2005). On the other hand, victimization lowers self-esteem and increases the risk of developing an internalizing illness like anxiety. Bullying may have a harmful, long-term effect on victims' psychology. Bullying has numerous negative consequences, including mental health, substance misuse, and suicide. It is important to talk to kids to determine if bullying or another issue worries them. What if the child you bullied in school became the only surgeon who could save your life?

Schools' Response to Bullying

Most parents complained that the teachers disregarded them and did not appear to do anything to stop the bullying, which raised the risk to their children. Parents frequently felt helpless to change the situation due to these anxieties, and many of them thought that barriers were separating them from the school, leading to mistrust. Parents who claim that the school did not always believe them when they stayed that their child had been a victim, or the school did not feel the situation was as serious as the parent anticipated are the ones who often express anger because their kid had not experienced physical violence rather verbal abuse and social marginalization.

Separating students from the school led them to mistrust the teachers and school. Parents who claim that the school did not always believe them when they stated that their child had been a victim or that the school did not feel the situation was as serious as the parent anticipated are the ones who often express anger. Because the children had not experienced physical violence but rather verbal abuse and social marginalization, the mothers believed that their concerns had been disregarded. Parent 1 (a father of a fifth-grade student) reflected that "Most of the time, the school didn't take it seriously. My experience was the worst. I protested many times, but no one listened to me, and the school considered this complaint worthless".

Participant 6 (a father of a grade six student) shared his views: "Why do schools care so much about physical health but little about bullying issues? At least once a week, it is heard from the parents that the school is doing nothing while the younger kids are being bullied and that the school is not providing any help. It is so horrible that they are considering moving to escape it. That should never be done to youngsters. Similarly,

parent 1 (a father of a seventh-grade student stated, "A teacher was bullying her child. Parents think that schools provide a secure environment for kids. However, some educators are harsher and more biased against kids. Children frequently face problems similar to those she described but are afraid to share them with their parents.

Any complaint makes the teacher even harsher, and teachers must be trained to be more compassionate and accountable for hurting children's sensitive feelings. Participant 2 (a mother of a tenth-grade student) shared a horrible incident and reported that "my kid was ordered to stand in class because the fee was not paid. It saddened me that they punished a little soul. I promptly paid his dues, but I will never forget the humiliating, unkind behavior of the school administration".

Role of Teaching Staff

Teachers' role is crucial in addressing bullying by the students to their peers. Parent 7 (a mother of a fifth-grade student) shared the horrible incident "My son was the smartest kid in the class when another teacher enrolled her daughter in the same class. She received additional favours from all teachers and was selected for every activity". She remarked, "I don't know what's wrong with this generation; they are a bunch of privileged, selfish brats, I swear". It is disgusting how bullying is so easily acceptable in school, and teachers cannot do much because of the parents. This issue should be considered seriously, and one should talk to authorities and teachers". Parent 3 (a mother of a seventh-grade student) reflected that "changing school will teach children to escape better to teach kids to answer bullies, try to develop rapport with class teachers". Similarly, parent 9 (a mother of a sixth-grade student) shared an incident that her daughter was not good at mathematics, her teacher called her dumb and looser. The mother further added that "It is teachers' responsibility not to discourage students in front of other students. They must be rigorous to raise their students rather than fail them".

Parent 9 explained, "Each youngster has potential; it simply must be recognized and developed before they can shine! Every child is a topper in their specific skill, not their numbers; seek their skill and their grin, and your numbers will increase! The figures may not be the best, but they will be better than previously. I have always advised my children that they should never look at other students' grades; instead, they should look at their scores from the day before and attempt to improve; nothing else counts."

Parent 1 (a father of a sixth-grade student) described that teachers in our country are not trained in psychology, compassion, or love. They have merely graduated and nothing else. They enjoy judging students based on their heartfelt capacity rather than their particular quality, attractiveness, or personality. Bullying at school is, therefore, the

first experience of mental trauma for all children, regardless of whether they are brilliant, average, or below-average students.

Discussion

In this study, we examined how parents see bullying and discuss it with their children using data from 10 parents in a district of Punjab, Pakistan. Additionally, we looked at parents' levels of worry regarding bullying, their school of thought regarding why bullying occurs in schools, and the advice they provide to their kids to address the situation. Thus, the current research study adds to the knowledge concerning bullying. This research also contributes to the growing body of research that examines parents' perspectives on many issues, including bullying.

The findings of this investigation advance our understanding of bullying. The results revealed that over half of the parents were worried about their children being harassed at school, and some had extremely high concerns about this problem. They claimed that their concerns were sparked by their children. A quarter of the participants remarked that their children frequently informed them they had been bullied. All of these parents mentioned that they kept the lines of communication open with their kids so that they felt comfortable telling them anything that their kids had personalities that made them more vulnerable to bullying, that they didn't have much faith in the education system to stop bullying and that they were aware of the severe harm that bullying could do to kids. The findings show that many parents, regardless of age, worry and think that the school authorities can do more to eliminate bullying.

According to a study, society, professionals, and parents tend to categorize parents as either "great" or "poor" (McCormick 2010, 2016; Phoenix and Woollett, 1991). In addition, studies have shown that parents' self-examination can be harmful, leading to guilt, anxiety, and a diminished sense of self in mothers who feel pressured to be the perfect parent (Henderson et al., 2016). Therefore, it may not have been a surprise to parents who believed they had failed to safeguard their child that they eventually began to question their ability to be decent parents.

Another research that revealed ideas about what it means to be a good parent in a scenario of school bullying has underlined the significance of looking at parents' experiences in the context of their conceptions of the parental role. Hein (2014), for instance, found that parents self-reflect on how they could have influenced their child's victimization experiences. In this situation, parents could second guess their choices and feel powerless. Parents also acknowledged feeling guilty and a sense of failure for not being able to protect their children (Harcourt et al., 2015).

Conclusion

This study aimed to conduct an exploratory inquiry to gain a fresh perspective on bullying in schools and understand more about parents' experiences. The results are assessed in connection to how parents understand their parental obligations in light of their experiences with bullying shared by their children. Interviews illustrated that parents' concern about bullying and its adverse effects persist and that efforts to get kids to tell an adult about it typically fall short. With increased parental engagement in (and reinforcement of) the skills kids learn in school, bullying prevention training will become more successful.

The previous literature suggested that a wide range of research looks at the origins, symptoms, and effects of bullying. The question of why children do not report bullying to adults is also the subject of an expanding body of research. However, the vast majority of studies on bullying concentrate on bullying from the child's perspective and frequently ignore parents' opinions. This study will fill in some of what we consider a large literature gap. The discussion also touches on the implications for research and policy.

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