Studying the Implications of Bullying on Perceived Parenting Styles and Adoloscents Personality

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Abstract: Bullying at school is an age-old problem and is often viewed as "children will be children" attitude towards the problem. However the antecedents as well as the consequences of bullying faced by the victims as well as the perpetrators highlight the intensity and the graveness of the problem. Most bullying occurs without any apparent provocation on the part of the student who is exposed. Studies have shown that a child's perception of their parents' parental style varies according to their involvement in bullying (Myron- Wilson, 1999). The aim of the study is to examine personality and parenting styles of the perpetrators as well as victims of bullying. For the purpose of this study, a random sample size of 311 individuals (160 males 151 females) between the age-group of 16 to 17 yrs was considered. Standardized questionnaires were distributed among the sample. The Big-Five Trait Taxonomy (John & Shrivastava, 1999), The Peer Relations Questionnaire for Children (PRQ) (Rigby & Slee, 1994) and Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) were administered. For the purpose of analysis, higher order statistics viz, Multiple Regression was used on the data gathered. The obtained results were interpreted in the light of the theory.

Bullying if often ignored viewing it as "children will be children" attitude towards the problem. However the distressing effects it has on the victim, significant others and the bully himself highlight the need for a systematic investigation of bullying. Evidence suggests that time and again, more than half the children have been victimized and more than half have been bullies (Farrington, 1993). The aim of the study is to explore the relationship between the perceived parenting styles and personality traits of bullies' vis-à-vis victims.

Research globally has shown that the characteristic features of school bullying are consistent across various cultural settings. There is general agreement on the main features which constitute bullying. These are summarized by Farrington (1993) as centring around six key elements:

- It can include, physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation (Among children and adolescents this would include name calling, teasing, hitting or kicking, and rejection (O'Moore, Kirkham, & Smith, 1997)

- The bully is (or is perceived to be) more powerful than the victim

- The bully intends to cause fear and/or harm to the victim

- The act is unprovoked by the victim

- The act is repeated

- The act produces the desired effect

Bullying is different from other behaviours such as aggression, conflict, violence or disagreement - although it may involve all these. With bullying, there is power imbalance, more systematic, occurring repeatedly; and it embraces a variety of hurtful actions, including name-calling, social exclusion, having money taken or belongings damaged, as well as more obvious physical forms such as hitting and kicking (Smith, 1994).

In his book, Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do, Dr. Dan Olweus identifies characteristics of students who are most likely to be bullies and those that are most likely to be victims of bullying.

Bullies tend to exhibit the following characteristics:

- Strong need to dominate and subdue other students and to get their own way

- Impulsive and are easily angered

- Defiant and aggressive toward adults, including parents and teachers

- Show little empathy toward students who are victimized

- If they are boys, they are physically stronger than boys in general

The typical passive or submissive victims, according to Olweus's research, generally have some of the following characteristics:

- Cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn and shy

- Anxious, insecure, unhappy and have low self-esteem

- Depressed and engage in suicidal ideation much more often than their peers

- Do not have a single good friend and relate better to adults than to peers

- If they are boys, they may be physically weaker than their peers

Gender differences demonstrated across a number of countries (Smith et al., 1999) have shown that boys are more likely to use physical bullying while girls tend to use indirect or relational forms of bullying (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997; Olweus, 1993; Ostermanet al., 1998; Smith et al., 1999). However, the most common form for both is verbal bullying (Smith et al., 1999).

Bullying can have distressing effects on the lives of victims, who suffer loss of confidence and self esteem in social relationships. For the children who are bullies too, there is an increased incidence of later problems of alcohol abuse, domestic violence and violent crime in the community (Olweus, 1991). Thus it is important to know the factors that predispose children to become bullies, victims, bully/victims or none of them.

Smith (2006) suggests that personal and family dynamics along with parenting styles exhibited by parents plays a vital role in determining the character played by an individual in an episode of bullying. Parenting is a complex activity that encompasses a vast array of behaviours that work individually and together to influence child outcomes. In the pre-school and middle childhood years the parental and the family ethos is a key factor in shaping a child's behaviour.

Parent-Child relationships provide a basis for social interaction and in turn reflect on the individual's future relationships with peers, romantic partners and their own offspring. Children, who encounter difficult relationships with parents, may believe that coercion, violence and exploitation are essential to all relationships. These sets of beliefs will in turn have an impact on their new interactions and lead to similar behaviour in new social situations. These behaviours may then place them at a risk for bully or victim status among peers. (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001). Researchers have emphasized upon the emotional attitudes of parents, especially mothers in the formation of the characters of their children. A cold and rejecting attitude on the part of the

mother referred to as ''silent violence'' have been correlated with the bullying behaviour of the son (Olweus, 1993a).

Baumrind (1971) has proposed 3 different types of parenting styles:

Authoritarian: These parents are highly directive, value obedience and are more controlling, favour punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will of their child, show less warmth and nurturance and more distance and aloofness, and discourage discussion and debate. They are high on demandingness but low on responsiveness, maintaining order, communicating expectations, and monitoring the children carefully.

Permissive: These parents make fewer demands, and allow the children to regulate themselves for the most part, using little discipline. They are higher on responsiveness but lower on demandingness, requiring little maturity and conventionalism, and avoid confrontation of problematic behaviour.

*Authoritative***:** These parents fall in between the two types above, being flexible but firm, maintaining control and discipline but showing some reason and flexibility as well, and communicating expectations but allowing verbal give-and-take. They score as high on demandingness and responsiveness, and have clear expectations for behaviour and conduct which they monitor, and their discipline fosters responsibility, cooperation, and self-regulation. The general finding from research is that the authoritative style produces the best child outcomes.

Loeber and Dishion (1984) found that parents who practise inconsistent, highly aversive discipline techniques coupled with physical punishment are more likely to have a child who will be aggressive towards others. Researchers argue that children growing up in such families are exposed to models of aggression and bullying, and in the absence of effective monitoring by parents; these behaviours develop and generalize to the peer group. In a later study, Schwartz et al (2000) found that early harsh, punitive parenting can also lead to later victim outcomes. Pertaining to victims, Olweus (1993b) found that over protectiveness in parents is linked with victim status. Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd (1998) found that high intrusive demandingness by

parents, when combined with low responsiveness, predicted being a victim in both boys and girls.

The personality of an individual plays a large role in the presence or absence of bullying behaviour. A child's personality is greatly influenced by their upbringing and experiences. Decades of research have uncovered five basic personality factors that emerge repeatedly and consistently upon analyses of the traits most commonly used in natural languages and in psychological questionnaires to describe people (John and Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five factors of personality are generally known as:

Extraversion implies an energetic approach to the social and material world and includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness, and positive emotionality.

Agreeableness contrasts a prosocial and communal orientation toward others with antagonism and includes traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, and modesty.

Conscientiousness describes socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task and goal-directed behaviour, such as thinking before acting, delaying gratification, following norms and rules, and planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks.

Neuroticism contrasts emotional stability and even-temperedness with negative emotionality, such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad, and tense.

Openness to experience describes the breadth, depth, originality, and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life.

A personality based explanation of bullying was favoured by Olweus (1993). Eysenck's theory of antisocial behaviour (Eysenck, 1977) suggests that bullying could be found more frequently in people with high scores on extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. It is suggested that extraverts are more prone to crime and anti-social behaviour, because they pursue rewards without fear of consequences and are impatient and impulsive. The high neuroticism scorer has been described as anxious, moody, often depressed and having strong emotional reactions. Neurotic tendencies are believed to intensify emotional reactions.

Erin Shultz studied the relationship between bullying and the Big Five among college students and found that bullying in college students significantly correlated with extraversion and agreeableness. Victims tended to be more neurotic and less agreeable, conscientious and extravert than non-victims. They also scored higher than non-victims on emotional instability, indicating that personality should not be neglected as being a factor in understanding the bullying phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

- Operational definition of variables

1. *Bullying:* Repeated negative, ill-intentioned behaviour by one or more students directed against a student who has difficulty defending himself or herself. Most bullying occurs without any apparent provocation on the part of the student who is exposed. (Olweus, 1993)

2. *Parenting Styles:* Normal variations in parents attempt to control and socialize their children (Baumrind, 1991)

3. *Personality:* the dynamic organization with the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment (Allport, 1937)

- Sample

There were 311 students who took part in the study. The method employed was incidental sampling. It comprised of 151 girls and 160 boys of 16 and 17 years of age, from three colleges across Mumbai. They were made to sign on an Informed Consent form, the three questionnaires were administered to them and they were requested to respond as honestly as possible.

- Design

Correlation design

- Tools

The Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ) for Children: by Rigby & Slee (1994), helps us to determine bullies as well as the victims among the target sample. It consists of 20 items, 6 for bullying, 5 for victims, 5 for prosocial behaviour and others are filler items. The responses to the

items are in the form of a 4 point Likert scale where "1" stands for "Never" and "4" stands for "Very Often".

The Big-Five Trait Taxonomy: by John & Srivastava (1999), is a tool that examines the personality of an individual on the basis of 5 personality dimensions, namely, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness (to Experience). It consists of 44 items. The responses to the items are in the form of 5 point Likert scale, wherein "1" stands for "Disagree Strongly" and "5" stands for "Agree Strongly"

The Parental Authority Questionnaire: by Buri (1991), is a questionnaire that examines the perceived parenting styles on the dimensions of Permissiveness, Authoritarianism and Authoritativeness. It is a 30 item scale and responses to the items are in the form of 5 point Likert scale, wherein "1" stands for "Disagree Strongly" and "5" stands for "Agree Strongly"

RESULTS

The aim of the study was to assess the personality and parenting styles of bullies and victims. Regression analyses were also computed between the variables. Bullying and Victimisation were regressed with both parenting styles and personality individually. In the analysis, bullying significantly predicted perceived authoritarian parenting (β= 0.162, $p<0.004$) and an inversely related to perceived authoritative parenting (β =-0.184, $p<0.001$). Victimisation also predicted perceived authoritarian parenting (β =0.265, $p<0.00$) and inversely related to perceived authoritative parenting (β =-0.135, $p<0.017$).

Pertaining to bullying and personality, it was found that bullying significantly predicted neuroticism (β=0.161, $p<0.04$) and was inversely related to personality variables Agreeableness (β =-0.340, $p<0.00$) and Conscientiousness (β =-0.216, $p<0.00$). Victimisation also significantly predicted Neuroticism (β = 0.209, $p<0.00$) and was inversely related to Extraversion (β =-0.109, $p<0.05$) and Conscientiousness (β = -0.163, $p<0.004$)

DISCUSSION

In the light of the results it can seen that parenting styles and personality play a significant role in determining bulling or victimisation in adolescence.

With respect to Baumrind's Parenting styles, it was found that bullies perceived their parents as high on Authoritarian Parenting Style. This was consistent with the findings of Loeber & Dishion (1984) who stated that parents who practise inconsistent or highly aversive discipline techniques, coupled with physical punishment, are more likely to have a child who will be aggressive towards others. Also, Manning et al. (1978) found that Young children who harass or bully others in school tend to have over controlling and dominating home environments, indicating that this type of dysfunctional family doesn't produce empathy in a child. Similarly, victims also perceived their parents as high on Authoritarian Parenting Style. This is also supported by earlier findings of Kochenderfer-Ladd (1999) who stated that high intrusive demandingness by parents, when combined with low responsiveness, predicted being a victim. In a later study, Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit and Bates (2000) found that early harsh, punitive parenting can also lead to later victim outcomes.

The general finding from research is that the Authoritative parenting style produces the best child outcomes. (Baumrind, 1971). However, results of the study also indicated absence of authoritative parenting styles among bullies and victims.

Pertaining to Big 5 model of Personality, results indicated that bullying as well as victimisation significantly predicted the existence of personality trait of Neuroticism which is characterised by being anxious, moody, depressed, having strong emotional reactions all of which are common among bullies as well as victims.

The results also indicated the absence of personality trait of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness among bullies which is in keeping with findings of Tani et al., 2003 who stated that low empathy and hostile behaviour might reflect underlying personality characteristics typical of individuals who score low in Altruism, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Finally, there was an absence of Extraversion and Conscientiousness among victims which is again keeping with Tani et al. study which stated that victims tend to be more

shy, withdrawn, lack social acceptance which is typical of those who are low in conscientiousness and extraversion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the findings of this study suggest that personality and perceived parenting styles play an important role in the bullying and victimisation of children. When schools are dealing with the problem of bullying, family members need to be involved in the process. In this way the risk factors can be identified and dealt with in an effort to put an end to the behaviour.

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