Research Article

Bullying at High Schools: Scenario of Dhaka City

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Abstract: Incidence of bullying among school children is very common and well recognized. The present study explored the existing scenario of bullying in high schools in Dhaka city. Phenomenological approach was used to gather and analyze focus group discussion data from 60 parents, teachers and students from both English and Bangla medium school, selected through convenient sampling. The qualitative analysis using software NVivo, revealed seven forms of bullying such as verbal, emotional, exclusion, physical, sexual, cyber, and race, to be prevalent among high school children. Though bullying found to affect large numbers of high school children in both Bangla and English medium, according to teachers' report, physical and emotional bullying were more common in Bangla medium, while frequency of verbal, sexual, and cyberbullying were high in English medium. Teachers also reported that student of grade 9 and 10 experienced more sexual and cyberbullying than other classes. It was evident that bullying took place at anywhere and everywhere in the school premises, like in classroom, playground, bathroom, around the campus, or even in school bus. Common causes, probable consequences and prevention strategies on bullying were also identified. Seeking attention was found to be an important factor in bully behavior. Opinion of parents, teachers and students about experiences and probable prevention plan were considered to work out a helpful intervention program for bullying in the future.

Keywords: Bullying, High School Children, Dhaka city.

1. Introduction

Impact of bullying on psychological and social development of the school children has been an established yet an unspoken, silent phenomenon having far-reaching consequences like suicide, and aggression (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010; Gini & Espelage, 2014). Dan Olweus (1999) provided the commonly accepted definition of bullying in his book, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do:"A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself."* Bullying is a form of *violence* resulting from power game, where the less powerful is assaulted by the more powerful. Group behavior involving a real or perceived imbalance of power is a prominent feature in bullying (Nansel *et al*., 2001; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Research has revealed that bullying is one of the rising problems in Asia (Sittichai & Smith, 2015) and students around the world regularly report witnessing and experiencing bullying

(Eslea *et al*., 2003; Nansel *et al*., 2001; Rigby, 2002; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

According to UN and media reports, Bangladesh is no exception; rather the situation is more critical (Dhaka, 2016). Despite its grave consequences, it is seen as common practice in school children, and not addressed duly. Mostly, students and parents shy away from talking about it because of its sensitive nature. Even when taken into consideration, punishment and discipline within the class is the only action taken against it, making the situation worse. Lack of awareness and know how to deal with bullying among school teachers and school authority is the major concern to focus on.

School bullying is a multifaceted problem resulting in school dropout to behavior problem to emotional distress and social alienation (Nansel *et al*., 2001; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Zimmerman, 2003). It involves children of any age, including younger elementary grade-schoolers and even kindergarteners (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). Contrary to popular belief, boys are also the target of bully (Jimerson *et al*., 2010). In

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Bangladesh, bullying and harassment have more fatal consequences among young girls ("Statistics | Bangladesh | UNICEF," 2011).

There is a growing research interest on bullying in Bangladesh (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005; Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2001, 2004; Sultana, 2016), however, it is a new concept generally used synonymously to stalking or eve teasing by the common people. Bullying behavior is often repeated unless intervened; therefore, understanding bullying from our cultural perspective is imperative to address the issue clinically as well as politically. Ecological model asserts that bullying behaviors are sustained or inhibited because of a complex interplay of the sociocultural components within the model, namely the individual, family, school and peers, community, and culture (Espelage *et al.*, 2000).

The present study, therefore, was undertaken to have an evidence-based scenario of bullying in order to understand the phenomena existing among high school children. Objectives were to explore the nature and forms of bullying in high schools of Dhaka city. A number of schooling systems with distinctive feature exist in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2012) therefore the study further looked into whether the portrait of bullying differs in respect to medium of instruction, Bangla or English.

2. Materials and Methods

A phenomenological research design was adopted to look at person's perception about bullying experience. Among the various qualitative methods, focus group discussion (FGD) was the primary method used to allow participants to express their thoughtful insight with ease.

2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 60 equal numbers of students, parents and teachers taken from two High Schools of Dhaka city. Both Bangla and English medium high schools were conveniently selected taken feasibility of time and resource into consideration. Participants were randomly chosen from those who agreed to participate in each group. In total six FGDs were conducted and approximately equal numbers of male-female were included. Separate FGD was conducted for parents, teachers and students from both English and Bangla medium school to maintain

homogeneity. Table 1 presents the sample distribution of six FGDs.

2.2 Procedure

A topic guide was used to aid the moderator in achieving an extensive exploration of the nature and extent of bullying from the FGD. Topic guide consisted of a set of predetermined questions developed through reviewing the existing literature and problem analysis of the research topic.

Areas included for exploration were definition of bullying, forms, causes, experiences or knowledge about bullying. All these topics were explored through open-ended questions designed to acquire information on bullying issues from the participant's own perspective.

Participants for each FGD were selected randomly through lottery from those who responded to the call for research subject. Number of participants included in a group was extended to 20 to have a rich discussion. Informed consent was taken from each participant after preparing them for the study by explaining the intent, benefit and risk of being included. The researcher moderated all the six FGD. A trained psychology graduate served as a co-moderator for documenting the process. In addition, a digital voice recorder was used to record the discussions.

The moderator started with an introductory remark and opened the discussion with engagement questions to break the ice. Subsequently, the focal issues were presented and the moderator skillfully facilitated the group discussion by using exploration questions. Micro skills of probing and asks for clarification were used to make the discussion productive. The moderator summarized the group discussion and used existing questions to end the FGD. It took about 90 minutes, on average, to complete an FGD.

2.3 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10 was used to examine the collected data. All recorded data was transcribed into verbatim. Identification information was removed from the transcripts for maintaining confidentiality. Data were transcribed into text format from the audio files and compared with the co-moderators documentation. The word files of interview transcripts were imported into NVivo and subsequently coded for Principal component analysis.

Table 1. Sample distribution of Focus Group Discussion.

Schools	Group Number	Participants	Male	Female	Total Participants
Bangla Medium	Group I	Parents	5	5	10
	Group II	Teachers	6	4	10
	Group III	Students	5	5	10
English Medium	Group IV	Parents	5	5	10
	Group V	Teachers	4	6	10
	Group VI	Students	5	5	10

3. Results

Selected sample characteristics of the participants of FGD are given in Table 2. Mean age of students and parents for Bangla and English medium schools were almost equal, while mean age of the teachers of Bangla medium was higher (41.5) than that of English medium (37.5). Greater number of parents of English medium (97%) had graduated as compared to 90% parents in Bangla medium. All teachers were graduates; however preliminary analysis of data revealed that 70% of teachers of Bangla medium had M.Ed. degree. It is evident that the participants in three groups were homogenous and comparable for both types of school.

3.1 Findings from FGD

FGD transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to identify general views, perceptions, and experiences related to the broader categories; nature and extent, causes and consequences, and prevention strategies of school bullying. Open-, axial-, and selective coding were used to explore and identify salient themes from the FGD data.

Teachers, parents and students, all agreed and did recognize the happening and seriousness of bullying in school. Common words used in definition of bullying were 'intentional', 'aggressive behavior', 'power play'. One English medium teacher stated, "Bullying is an aggressive behavior when power imbalance is present. It takes place intentionally." Another teacher of Bangla medium school said, -*"It's a form of violence and abuse. Bullying is a serious issue. It happens repeatedly"*. Thus, bullying was acknowledged as 'a form of intentional aggressive behavior for power play at school'.

However, parents of Bangla medium though agreed upon the act of hostility at school but were unfamiliar with the word 'bullying' than their counterparts in English medium. -*"But there is an intention to harm. Bullying is similar to teasing, maybe a modern form"* (Parent of Bangla medium school).

Most noteworthy is that the students of grade 9 & 10 were very certain about the notion of Bullying. They were also aware of the myth of Bullying as a matter of fun, -*"Bullying is not a playful or friendly act that just happened in a way. It is repeated and it has an intention"* (Student of English medium school).

The three broad categories of salient themes along with descriptions are presented in Fig. 1 through 3.
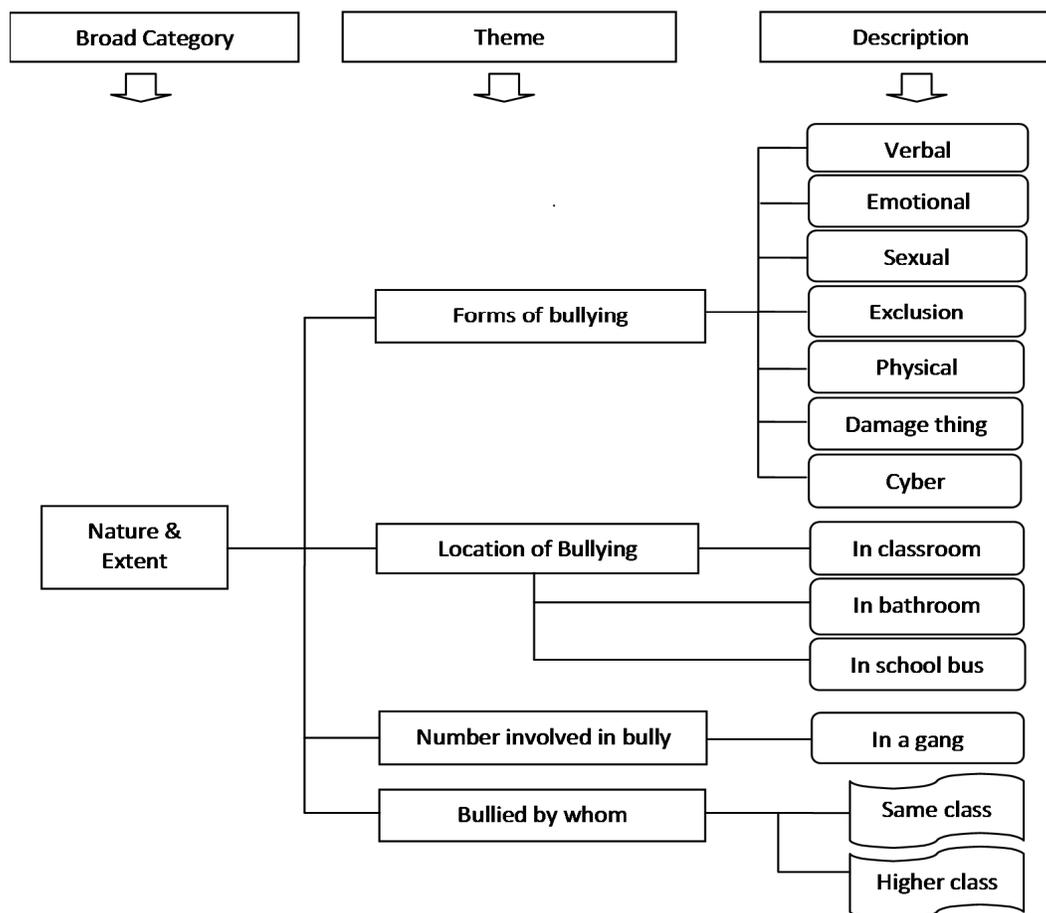

Fig. 1. Themes and description of broad category 'Nature and Extent'.

Table 2. Selected sample characteristics of FGD groups in both medium.

Medium	English			Bangla		
Group	Students	Parents	Teachers	Students	Parents	Teachers
Mean Age	14 years	42.5 years	37.5 years	13.75 years	43 years	41.5 years
(Range)	(11-17)	(30-55)	(25-50)	(11-16.5)	(32-54)	(30-53)
Education	≥Grade 8 = 60%	≥Bachelor = 97%	≥Bachelor = 100%	≥Grade 8 = 60%	≥Bachelor = 90%	≥Bachelor = 100%

Nature and extent category are shown in Fig. 1 depicted four major themes: forms of bullying, location of bullying, number of students involved in bully behavior and bullied by whom. Fig. 1 show seven distinctive patterns of bullying identified by the participants of all the groups. Among them verbal bullying like rumor, calling names, making fun were found in common phenomena in English medium school -*"Those students who disturb other students stay in groups, and intentionally call the juniors by sarcastic names, unnecessarily insult them, and hurt them by making fun"(a teacher of English medium).*

Similar emotional bullying was also recognized by teachers of Bangla medium, however, physical bullying was particularly mentioned and gender differences were highlighted. A teacher of Bangla medium shared -*"My opinion is that boys experience more physical bullying like punching, shoving and girls experience more rumor mongering and emotional bullying".*

Gang nature of bullying behavior was also depicted in their voice. Teachers of English medium high school expressed that student of grade 9 and 10 experienced more sexual and cyberbullying than other grades. Two-fourth of female students also agreed with that. As reflected by a parent of English medium school, ingenuous people were more likely to be a victim of bullying.

"My son is very simple and fat boy; he attends to everybody's command, whether junior or senior. He enjoys helping others. Students take the opportunity. He helps them in copying notes. They called him 'Bolda Motu' (Montu, the stupid). In this society, there is no space for simple people. Clever people cheat us and take opportunity. This is the reality" (a parent of Bangla medium high school).

Location of bullying revealed that bullying incident occurred everywhere in the school premises, like in the classroom, outside of the class, in the playground, bathroom, even on the school bus. Nevertheless, teachers hesitated to admit prevalence of bullies in school premise -*"It does not happen inside of school, usually outside of school. It may take place inside the school bus" (a teacher of English medium).* However, the fact was that it is not limited to school -*"I get upset, but it is now normal to be bullied by seniors. They don't even hesitate to do it in front of my house" (A student of Bangla medium school).* The act of bullying continues to extend outside of the school boundary.

Causes of bullying in Fig. 2 highlighted 'seeking attention' as an important factor for bully behavior. *"If a girl refuses a boy then he tries to harass her to get her attention. Sometimes bad students are involved in this type of activity because they fancy being identified like a macho man in the class" (A teacher of Bangla medium school).* Victim-perpetrator sequence was also identified. Students who bully others were more likely to have experience of being bullied and act out their unexpressed rage to settle scores vicariously. - *From my point of view about the causes of bullying, one of the important factors is that if a student is being bullied then he or she bullies others (A teacher of Bangla medium school)".*

Besides, physical structure, such as, short in size, wearing glasses, over or underweight, different race, religion, or socioeconomic background, disability were more at risk of being bullied. -*'I think we were being bullied by Bengali students because we are a different race, Bihari (Student of a Bangla medium school).*
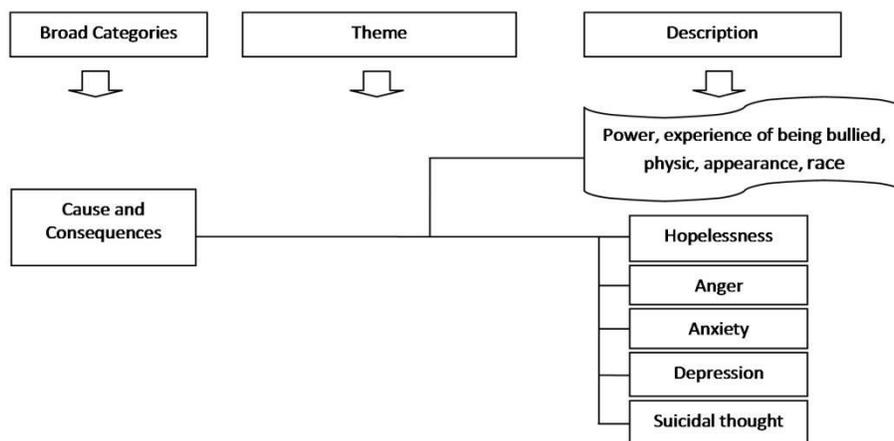

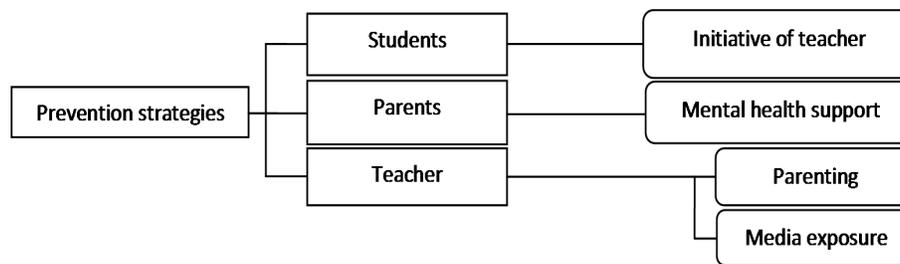**Fig. 2. Themes and description of broad category 'Causes and Consequence'.**

Fig. 3. Themes and description of broad category 'Prevention Strategies'.

Consequences of bullying in Fig. 2 show presence of psychological distress. Parents reported school absenteeism is a common consequence of bullying. Teachers also agreed to it. Participants of both English and Bangla medium described bullying as a serious issue having an impact on academic performances, psychological state like hopelessness, anger, anxiety, depression, even suicide. In response to 'feeling associated with being bullied', a female student of English medium said, "*A student always used to tell lies about me and at that time I felt angry and wished if I could give him such a punishment that he would not do that again with any other girl but our teachers are not so aware of this and my mother told me not to counter to him. At one time he will automatically stop this. But if you take action to punish then they will repeat this.* This also reflects the common notion of 'keeping silent'.

Effective ideas on ways to **prevent bullying** were generated from the focus group discussion with all the group participants. Mental health support, involvement of teachers, parents and media was focal points. Need for professional help from psychologists was put forward. In the words of a parent, "*Professionally trained psychologist should be assigned at every school. Ensure mental health facilities at all levels so that all become aware of bullying*".

4. Discussion

Exploration of the present scenario of bullying in high schools are in agreement with the reported news ("Statistics | Bangladesh | UNICEF," 2011) about the existence of Bullying as a form of violence at the high schools in Bangladesh having grave psychological impact on children's life. General agreement among all the groups points that, a large number of high school children in both Bangla and English medium was affected by bullying. Seven distinctive forms of bullying such as verbal, emotional, exclusion, physical, sexual, cyber, and race were identified. It resulted in internalized as well as externalized emotional distress; such as hopelessness, anxiety and also rage; besides the grave consequence of suicide. This scenario is no different than the other previous account of bullying having variety of demonstrations (Rigby, 2002; Solberg & Olweus, 2003) and causing multifaceted problem

(Nansel *et al.*, 2001; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; "Statistics | Bangladesh | UNICEF," 2011; Zimmerman, 2003). Incident of bullying had no physical boundary; it happened inside and outside school premises where adult supervision was limited (Salmon *et al.*, 1998; Sittichai & Smith, 2015).

Difference in type of bullying was noted between the two types of schools. Physical and emotional bullying were reported to be more prevalent in Bangla medium while verbal, sexual, and cyber were reported by English medium high school teachers. This may be due to the greater use of the internet as a tool for learning on top of entertainment by English medium school students than Bangla medium. Easy accessibility and opportunity to use the internet may have mediated cyberbullying among English medium school students (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Similar argument may also hold for more sexual and cyberbullying among students of 9th and 10th grade than other class. It also holds up for sexuality as a vital aspect of adolescents (Ponton, 2001).

Students who bully others have experienced being bullied (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Present findings supported the contention; however, hostile home experience may be a contributing factor that needs to be further studied. Similarly, attention seeking behavior (Jimerson *et al.*, 2010), defining characteristic of victim such as race, physic, social class were reported to be a probable cause of being bullied. Later findings are in contradiction with previous findings where except physical disadvantage, other factors did not have significant effect (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). This study noted racial issue; that Bihari (Pakistanis who were refused entry in Pakistan after liberation war) children were often been victimized. Gender difference was also manifested.

The evidence from this study underscored bullying as a concerning factor that needs to be addressed by all levels of stakeholders. Educators, as well as professionals who work with children, should not only raise voice but take proactive role against bullying in school. It should be shared responsibility is taken up for informed knowledge, and adult intervention. At the same time, operating on group dynamics to build group cohesiveness and self-worth should be the prime focus of school based programs aiming towards psychological wellbeing in general and bullying in particular.

Acknowledgment

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