A STUDY OF VICTIMIZATION OF BULLYING BY PEERS IN RELATION TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to investigate the effect of victimization of bullying by peers in relation to suicidal ideation among students. The sample comprised 100 Senior Secondary students (boys =50 & girls =50), who were randomly selected from different schools of Aligarh. The mean age of students was 16.77 years. Multidimensional Peer-victimisation Scale (Mynard & Joseph, 2000) and the Scale for Suicide Ideation (SSI; Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979) were used to assess bullying and suicidal ideation. The results of Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients showed that the overall/total scores of bullying was significantly positively related to suicidal ideation. Further, the result showed that out of four dimensions of bullying only three dimensions that is physical victimization, verbal victimization, and attacks on property were significantly positively related to suicidal ideation, while there was no significant relationship found between suicidal ideation and social manipulation dimension of bullying. In addition, the result of the t-test showed that boys scored significantly higher as compare to girls on all the variables that are suicidal ideation, overall bullying as well as its four dimensions (i.e., physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, and attacks on property). The results of this study would help the health-care professionals, counsellors, teachers, and parents as in understanding serious harmful consequences of bullying in the form of suicidal ideation, in developing of intervention strategies, and in organizing community level programmes for prevention of suicidal ideation and behavior among adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behavior among adolescents is continues to be one of the major focused problem for mental health care professionals and counsellors who is trying to understand the causes that lead to suicidal behavior. In India during the year 2015, more than fifty thousand (51787) suicide victims were in the age group of 14 and above years to below 30 years. Specifically speaking, out of total suicide (1,33,623), around 32.8% suicide victims were youths in the age group of 18 to below 30 years and around 7% suicide victims were below 18 years (National Crime Records Bureau, 2015). As cited by Balla (2019) suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds globally and 79 per cent of suicides occurred in low and middle-income countries in 2016.

Suicidal behaviour spans a spectrum of behaviours ranging from precursor behaviours such as suicidal ideation, suicide plan and suicide attempt to completed suicide (Abel, Sewell, Martin, Bailey-Davidson, & Fox, 2012).

As described by Samm (2012) suicidal ideations are seen as complex patterns of suicidal behavior requiring more attention through research for better level of understanding, prediction, and prevention. The term suicidal ideation refers to the occurrence of any thought about self-destructive behavior, whether or not death is intended (K. Van Heeringen, 2001b, as cited by Samm, 2012). Suicidal ideation encompasses phenomena ranging from passive suicidal ideation (e.g., death thoughts and wishes: Life is not worth living) to active ideation and planning, which might lead to actual suicidal behavior (De Leo & Krysinska, 2008a, p. 267, as cited by Samm, 2012). According to Bridge, Goldstein, and Brent (2006), suicidal ideation refers to thoughts of harming or killing oneself.

Several studies have shown that suicidal ideation is associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, hopelessness, and loneliness/isolation among young people. Apart for these well-known risk factors, some other factors which have also largely predicted suicidal ideation among adolescents. It is recognized that being bullied / peer victimization is one of the leading risk factors...
factor that predict suicidal ideation and behaviour among young people. Bullying behavior may be occurred in different form, most commonly as a perpetrator, victim, or both. Nowadays, ‘becomes a victim of bullying’ raise more attention among researcher, because of its increase risk of different serious consequences which can be seen in the various form of diverse problems like behavioral problems, emotional problems, poor school performance, depression and suicidal behavior among children and adolescents. Being bullied or victimization of bullying is defined in many ways by different researchers. According to Olweus (2001, p. 5–6) “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students”.

Previous studies showed that victimization of bullying by peers predicted suicide ideation and attempt among adolescents (Cui, Cheng, Xu, Chen, & Wang, 2011; Kaminski & Fang, 2009; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007). Rigby and Slee (1999) in a study of adolescents (aged 12-18 yrs.) found bullying at school with low social support to be significantly related to suicidal ideation.

Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) found adolescents with suicidal ideation to be likely to report having peer victimisation. Jutengren, Kerr, and Stattin (2011) in a study on 880 junior high school students (mean age = 13.72) in Sweden, found that peer victimization was predictive of self-harm. Although harsh parenting was not predictive of self-harm, this link was moderated by adolescents’ gender. Rudatsikira, Muula, and Sizia (2007) found that subjects who reported having been bullied were more than twice as likely to contemplate committing suicide as those who had not been bullied.

Portzky, De Wilde, and van Heeringen (2008) examined Dutch and Dutch speaking Belgian adolescents in which data were analyzed on 4,431 Belgian and 4,458 Dutch 15-16 year-old school pupils. Their results showed a significantly higher prevalence of deliberate self-harm in Belgian adolescents than in Dutch adolescents. They were at higher risk for the experience of several life events such as being bullied at school or exposure to suicidal behavior in family and friends.

Additionally, Asante, Kugbey, Osof, Quarshe, and Sarfo (2017) in a study on senior high school adolescents in Ghana, found that being bullied, physically attacked, involved in a physical fight and food insecurity remained risk factors for suicidal behaviour (i.e. ideation, plan and attempt) after adjusting for other factors.

Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, Marttunen, Rimpelä, and Rantanen (1999) conducted a study on 16 410 adolescents aged 14-16 from Secondary schools in two regions of Finland. They found that depression was equally likely to occur among those who were bullied and those who were bullies. It was most common among those students who were both bullied by others and who were also bullies themselves. When symptoms of depression were controlled for, suicidal ideation occurred most often among adolescents who were bullies.

Cheng et al. (2010) among a nationally representative sample of 9015 Chinese students in middle schools in Beijing, Hangzhou, Wuhan, and Urumqi, found that students who had been involved in a physical fight, often felt lonely, or had considered suicide in the past 30 days were more likely to report being bullied.

Some studies found that those who are both bullies and bully victims have more suicidal ideation. In a cross-sectional study in which 1718 seventh and eighth-grade students from 2 Korean middle schools participated, Kim, Koh, and Leventhal (2005) found that compared with the students who were not involved with school bullying, victim-perpetrators reported more suicidal/self-injurious behaviors and suicidal ideation in the previous 6 months. In female students, all 3 school bullying groups had increased suicidal ideation for the previous 2 weeks but not in male students. Liang, Flisher, and Lombard (2007) in a sample of 5074 schoolchildren in grade 8 (mean age 14.2 years) and grade 11 (mean age 17.4 years) at 72 Government schools in Cape Town and Durban, South Africa, found bully-victims (those that are both bullied and bully others) showed largely comparable violent, anti-social and risk taking behavior profiles to bullies. Bully-victims showed comparable suicidal ideation and smoking profiles to victims. Moreover, Pranjic’ and Bajraktarevic (2010) found that adolescents who were victims and those who were bully victims were more likely to have suicide ideation compared to uninvolved subjects. Discontent with financial situation is a vulnerability factor associated with elevated levels of depression in victims. Herba et al. (2008) in a study of Dutch children (n = 1526, mean age = 12.29 years), however, did not find bully-victims (children who are victims and who also bully others) to be reporting higher levels of suicide ideation compared to children uninvolved in bullying.

However, other studies indicate that bully victims and not the perpetrators were having suicidal ideation (Rudatsikira et al., 2007). Skapinakis et al. (2011) conducted a study in which 5614 pupils 16-18 years old and attending 25 senior high schools were screened in the first phase and a stratified random sample of 2431 were selected for a detailed interview at the second phase. They found victims of bullying behavior were more likely to express suicidal ideation. In contrast, being a perpetrator (“bullying others”) was not associated with this type of ideation.

Several research evidence showed that peer victimization is related to poor mental health (Rigby, Slee, & Martin, 2007) and is a major risk factor for suicidal ideation and attempt but this effect is moderated by gender. In addition, Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, and Gould (2008) on a sample of 2,342 high-school students found that all types of peer victimization was related to high risk of depression, ideation, and attempts compared to students not victimized. Infrequent victimization was also related to increased risk, particularly among females. The more the types of victimization the higher the risk for depression and suicidality among both genders.

Furthermore, in a general community sample of 2,095 youth (aged 15-24 years) in a metropolitan Japanese city, Hidaka et al. (2008) found that for males and females, attempted suicide was independently associated with experience of school bullying.

Laukkonen, Honkalampi, Hintikka, Hintikka, and Lehtonen (2005) in a study found that suicidal ideation (SI) was reported by 64% of subjects, of whom 20% received no psychiatric diagnosis and 58% had depressive disorders. SI in boys was
METHOD

reliability coefficient of SSI was .83 (Cronbach, 1951) of .04 to .72. Further, they found .89 Coefficient alpha, KR significant (i.e. the item with the total scale score and that 16 of the 19 coefficients were in an item analysis ideation. Beck et al. (1979) also demonstrated different types of validity (i.e. concurrent validity, discriminative validity, and construct validity etc.) for SSI.

Multidimensional Peer-victimisation Scale: To assess the levels and types of peer victimization among adolescents, the Multidimensional Peer-victimisation Scale developed by Mynard & Joseph (2000) was used. It is a 16-item measure with 4 subscales assessing physical and verbal victimization, social manipulation, and property attacks. It comprises of 4 aspects of victimization experienced by students, viz. physical victimization, social manipulation, verbal victimization, and attacks on property. Items are scored on 3-point scales describing the frequency of victimization (1 = "not at all", 2 = “once”, 3 = “two or more times”). Point values are assigned as: Not at all = 0; Once = 1; More than once = 2. Scale scores were computed by summing item responses. Scores on the total scale have a possible range of 0 to 32; scores on each of the four subscales have a possible range of 0-8. Higher scores reflect more victimization.

Demographic Information: Apart from the above, a Personal Data Sheet was used to get demographic information about adolescents.

Procedure

A set of questionnaires comprising Personal data sheet, Multidimensional Peer-victimisation Scale, and a Scale for Suicidal Ideation were administered in a class room situations. Participants were instructed that answer the questionnaires as per given instructions in each questionnaire. Most of the students took approximately 10 to 30 minutes for completing the questionnaires. After the collection of data, scoring of the responses was done according to the scoring procedure prescribed for the scales. SPSS 16 of Windows software was used for analysis of data.

RESULTS

Means, Standard Deviations, Standard Error of Mean and obtained range of scores with possible score of the variables are displayed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Suicidal Ideation</th>
<th>Dimensions /Type of Victimization</th>
<th>Total (Overall) Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Verbal Social Attack on Property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>12.630</td>
<td>2.200  3.450 2.530 2.720</td>
<td>10.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>5.830</td>
<td>2.151 1.001 1.672 1.048</td>
<td>6.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEM</td>
<td>.583</td>
<td>.200  .020 .187 .208</td>
<td>.631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0-31</td>
<td>0-7   0-8 0-6 0-8</td>
<td>0-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Score</td>
<td>0-38</td>
<td>0-8 0-8 0-8 0-8</td>
<td>0-32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation coefficients between overall peer victimization and its four dimensions (i.e., physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, and attacks on property) with suicidal ideation are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Dimensions /Type of Victimization</th>
<th>Overall Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Verbal Social Attack on Property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal Ideation</td>
<td>.198 .280 .160 .286</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=100. *p<.05. **p<.01, two tailed.
It is observed from Table 2 that adolescents’ overall/tot al victimization of bullying by peers was significantly positively related to suicidal ideation. Out of four dimensions of victimization of bullying only three dimensions that is physical victimization, verbal victimization, and attacks on property were significantly positively related to suicidal ideation among adolescents.

Table 3 Mean, SD and t-values showing gender differences on different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Variables</th>
<th>Boys (N = 50)</th>
<th>Girls (N = 50)</th>
<th>t-value (df = 98)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal Ideation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Victimization</td>
<td>5.295</td>
<td>2.840</td>
<td>3.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Victimization</td>
<td>3.720</td>
<td>2.061</td>
<td>2.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Manipulation</td>
<td>3.040</td>
<td>1.702</td>
<td>2.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack on property</td>
<td>4.060</td>
<td>2.840</td>
<td>1.973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two tailed).

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that there were significant gender differences in suicidal ideation. Four dimensions of bullying victimization by peers (i.e., physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, and attacks on property), and overall / total victimization. The mean score of suicidal ideation was significantly higher among boys as compared to girls. Moreover, results showed that the mean scores on physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, attacks on property, and overall bullying victimization by peers were significantly higher among boys as compared to girls.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the impact of victimization of bullying by peers in the occurrence of suicidal ideation among adolescents. It was found that bullying was significantly positively correlated with suicidal ideation. Moreover, results of the correlational analyses also showed that out of four subscales of bullying, three subscales (i.e., physical victimization, verbal victimization, and attacks on property) were significantly positively correlated with suicidal ideation among students. The significant correlations indicates that students who have had more victimization of bullying by the means of physical, verbal, and attacks on property are at greater risk for suicidal ideation than those who have had no or low victimization of bullying by these ways. These results strengthen the findings of previous researches conducted by Asante et al. (2017), Klomek et al. (2008), Jutengren et al. (2011), Rudatsikiraet et al. (2007), and Verkuyten and Thijs (2002) who found in their study that subjects who reported having been bullied were more likely to having suicidal ideation and behavior than those who had not been bullied. Similarly, Hesapçılő, Meraler, and Erkan (2018), among 1173 adolescents from Turkey, found that bullying victims, bullies, and people in the bullying cycle have higher suicide tendencies, higher depressive symptoms, and lower self-esteem than non-victims, non-bullies and people not involved in the bullying cycle, respectively. Further, they also found that being bullied increases the suicide ideation risk with an odds ratio of 1.447 and bullying increases the suicide ideation risk with an odds ratio of 1.663. Additionally, in a more recent study conducted by Cho (2019) among Korean youth revealed that out of three subgroups of suicide ideation (i.e., serious-risk, moderate-risk, and low-/non-risk suicide ideation), the odds of being a member in a serious-risk suicide ideation group were greater for youth who were bullied than those who were not when compared to a low-/non-risk ideation group.

To see the gender differences on peer victimization and suicidal ideation is another objective that was examined in this study. Analyses showed that both boys and girls were differ significantly on the levels of peer victimization and suicidal ideation. These findings are consistent with prior researches conducted by Laukkonen et al. (2005) and McMahon et al. (2010) that showed suicidal ideation and self-harm was higher for boys who had been bullied than those without this experience. Furthermore, Shiba, Rajput, Goutam, and Rajawat (2018) among school going adolescents of Rohtak in India also found in their study that more boys reported being victims of bullying. Additionally, result of present study that suicidal ideation to be high among boys find consistent by Ibrahim, Amit, Din, and Ong (2017), who also found among 232 youths in Malaysia (aged between 15 and 25 years) that suicidal ideation was higher among male participants compared with female participants.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, findings of the present study indicating that presence of high level of victimization of bullying by peers may leads to increase level of suicidal ideation among adolescents. Thus, the results of the study support and extend the literature on the association between victimization of bullying and suicidal ideation and behavior among adolescents. These results draw attention to awareness and understanding of the serious consequences of victimization of peer bullying in the form of suicidal ideation and behavior and underscore the need for reducing bullying among adolescents. It would help the health- care professionals, counsellors, teachers, and parents in developing and organizing different intervention programmes for reducing bullying so as to avoid its harmful effects.

**References**


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Step Approach.