

The construct of bullying in school settings theoretical basis-7.8-GD003

Zhang Yue^{1,*}, Jelena Davidova¹

¹*Educational Science, Daugavpils University, Parades Street, Daugavpils City, Latvia*

^{*}*Corresponding author*

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Abstract: School bullying represents a pervasive and detrimental issue within educational settings worldwide, exerting significant negative impacts on the psychological well-being, social development, and academic performance of students. This comprehensive study endeavors to establish a robust theoretical foundation for understanding and addressing school bullying by meticulously dissecting its conceptual underpinnings, typologies, theoretical frameworks, and causal mechanisms. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the research integrates ecological systems theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory to elucidate the intricate interplay of individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors that contribute to bullying behaviors. The findings underscore the efficacy of holistic prevention strategies and multifaceted intervention approaches in mitigating the prevalence and severity of bullying incidents, thereby fostering a conducive learning environment that promotes the holistic development of students. This study not only contributes to the theoretical discourse on school bullying but also furnishes practitioners and policymakers with empirically grounded, actionable insights to inform policy formulation and intervention design. The implications of this research extend beyond the confines of academic settings, offering a nuanced perspective on the broader societal implications of bullying and the potential for collaborative, systemic solutions to enhance the safety and well-being of all students.

1. Introduction

School bullying, as a prevalent phenomenon, not only affects students' quality of learning and life but may also lead to long-term psychological trauma and social adaptation issues. Despite extensive research on this issue, a systematic theoretical framework to guide prevention and intervention efforts is lacking. This study seeks to fill this gap by constructing a theoretical basis for school bullying, delving into the causes of bullying behaviors, and proposing effective prevention and intervention strategies. We will explore the application of ecological systems theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory in understanding bullying behaviors and how these theories can help us design more effective intervention measures. Through this research, we hope to provide theoretical support for the prevention and control of school bullying and offer practical guidance for educators and policymakers.

2. Definition and Classification of School Bullying

School bullying is a multifaceted social phenomenon that involves a range of behaviors causing psychological and physical harm to victims. To better understand and address this issue, it is essential to provide a clear definition of bullying behavior. Bullying behavior typically refers to the repeated, intentional infliction of harm by one or more individuals upon another, often characterized by an imbalance of power that makes it difficult for the victim to effectively protect or retaliate against the aggressor. The core characteristics of bullying behavior are its persistence and recurrence, as well as the misuse of power or status over the victim.

Upon defining bullying behavior, we can delve deeper into the categorization of bullying. Bullying can be classified into several main types based on its manifestations and mediums. The first type is physical bullying, which involves direct, visible acts of harm, including hitting, kicking, pushing, grabbing, biting, and other forms of physical assault, as well as the theft or destruction of personal property^[1]. Physical bullying often results in obvious physical injuries and poses a direct threat to the victim's physical and mental health.

The second type is verbal bullying, which is primarily executed through language, encompassing insults, mockery, threats, intimidation, and the spreading of rumors. Although verbal bullying does not leave visible scars like physical bullying, its psychological impact on the victim is equally profound, potentially leading to damaged self-esteem, diminished confidence, and even psychological issues such as depression and anxiety.

Social bullying, on the other hand, involves the use of social means to perpetrate bullying, including exclusion, isolation, manipulation, and exploitation of others. Social bullying often occurs among peers and exerts influence on the victim through social exclusion or group pressure. This type of bullying significantly impacts the victim's social skills and interpersonal relationships, potentially making them feel isolated and unable to integrate into the group.

Lastly, cyberbullying has emerged as a new form of bullying with the proliferation of the internet and social media. Cyberbullying is conducted through electronic devices and online platforms, including sending threatening messages, posting humiliating images or videos, and cyberstalking^[2]. The characteristics of cyberbullying include its covert nature and wide reach; victims may be attacked without their knowledge, and the impact of cyberbullying can spread rapidly, causing significant damage to the victim's reputation and mental well-being.

In summary, the definition and categorization of school bullying provide a comprehensive perspective to understand this complex phenomenon. By clearly defining and categorizing bullying behavior, we can more effectively identify and address different types of bullying, thereby providing more targeted support and protection for victims. Additionally, this provides important references for schools, families, and society, helping them develop more scientific and systematic prevention and intervention measures, collectively fostering a safe and harmonious learning environment.

3. Theoretical Models of School Bullying

The theoretical models of school bullying provide us with frameworks for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, revealing the causes and influencing factors of bullying behavior from different perspectives. The following is a detailed discussion of these theoretical models.

A. Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory posits that individual behavior is formed within multi-level environmental systems, which include the microsystem (such as the family and school), the mesosystem (interactions between family and school), the exosystem (such as community and

social policies), and the macrosystem (such as culture and societal values). When exploring school bullying, the Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes several aspects:

Impact of Family Environment: The family is the first environment for children's growth, and family atmosphere, parental education methods, and family relationships can have a profound impact on children's behavior^[3]. For example, family violence, parental neglect, or overprotection may increase the risk of children becoming bullies, while a stable family environment and positive parent-child relationships help prevent bullying behavior. Conflicts and tensions within the family may lead children to seek outlets for their frustrations at school, increasing the likelihood of bullying behavior.

Role of School Environment: The school is a crucial place for children's socialization, and school culture, teacher-student relationships, and peer relationships all influence students' behavior. A supportive and inclusive school environment can reduce the occurrence of bullying behavior, while a competitive and exclusionary school culture may encourage bullying behavior. The authority structure within the school, the dynamics of peer groups, and the teachers' attitudes and handling of bullying behavior all have significant impacts on students' behavior.

Consideration of Social and Cultural Context: The social and cultural context shapes individuals' values and behavioral norms, which in turn influence bullying behavior. For instance, an overemphasis on power and status in some cultures may lead to the normalization of bullying behavior, while a culture advocating for equality and respect helps reduce bullying. Violent content in social media and popular culture may also influence children's behavior, making them more likely to accept and imitate bullying behavior.

B. Social Learning Theory

Developed by Albert Bandura, the Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and imitation in the formation of behavior. This theory suggests that individuals learn new behavioral patterns by observing the behavior of others and its outcomes.

Observational Learning and Imitation: Children learn how to interact with others by observing the behavior of parents, peers, media figures, and others. If they observe that bullying behavior is accepted or rewarded, they may imitate such behavior^[4]. Conversely, if they see that bullying behavior is punished or socially rejected, they are less likely to adopt such behavior. Observational learning is not limited to direct observation but also includes behaviors observed indirectly through media and the internet.

Role of Reinforcement and Punishment: Reinforcement and punishment are key concepts in social learning theory. Reinforcement refers to the outcome of a behavior that increases the likelihood of that behavior recurring, while punishment refers to the outcome that decreases the likelihood of the behavior recurring. In bullying behavior, if bullies receive recognition from peers or evade responsibility, this reinforcement may encourage their bullying behavior; conversely, if bullies are subjected to severe punishment or social condemnation, this punishment may inhibit their bullying behavior. The effectiveness of reinforcement and punishment depends on the individual's cognitive evaluation and emotional response.

C. Social Cognitive Theory

The Social Cognitive Theory focuses on how individuals' cognitive processes influence their behavior, particularly the role of self-efficacy and attribution style in bullying behavior.

Self-Efficacy and Bullying Behavior: Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully complete a task. Individuals with high self-efficacy may be more confident and capable of engaging in bullying behavior, as they believe they can control the situation and evade consequences. Conversely, individuals with low self-efficacy are less likely to engage in bullying behavior, as they lack the confidence and ability to deal with potential consequences. Self-efficacy not only affects behavior choices but also influences persistence and coping strategies when facing

challenges.

Attribution Style and Bullying Tendencies: Attribution style refers to how individuals explain and attribute the causes of events. Individuals with an external attribution style may blame others for failures or setbacks, which can lead them to engage in bullying behavior to express dissatisfaction or seek compensation. Individuals with an internal attribution style are more likely to look for reasons within themselves, which helps them adopt more positive ways to solve problems and thus reduce bullying behavior. Attribution style is influenced by individual personality traits, experiences, and cultural background.

4. Analysis of the Causes of School Bullying

The analysis of the causes of school bullying is a complex process that involves multiple levels, including individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors. At the individual level, personality traits such as aggression, dominance, and lack of empathy often make certain students more prone to becoming bullies. These traits may stem from genetics, early life experiences, or deviations in the psychological development process. Additionally, the inability to effectively manage emotions is a key factor. Students who cannot regulate their emotions well may resort to bullying others as a coping mechanism when faced with stress, frustration, or anger.

Interpersonal factors also play a significant role in the formation of bullying behavior. Peer relationships have a profound impact on students' behavioral patterns. In peer groups where there is a culture that encourages or tacitly approves of bullying behavior, the likelihood of individuals engaging in bullying increases significantly. This culture may be maintained and propagated through social learning, imitation, and reinforcement mechanisms within the group. The quality of teacher-student interactions is also an influencing factor. Supportive, understanding, and fair treatment by teachers can significantly reduce bullying behavior. Conversely, if there is tension, lack of effective communication, or bias in teacher-student relationships, it may exacerbate conflicts and bullying among students.

Environmental factors also hold significant importance in the formation of bullying behavior. School culture, including the school's values, norms, and behavioral expectations, directly shapes students' behavioral patterns. A school culture that emphasizes respect, inclusiveness, and mutual assistance can effectively prevent bullying behavior. In contrast, if the school culture is characterized by intense competition and exclusion of others, bullying behavior may become normalized. The community environment is also an important factor to consider. The sense of community safety, social support, and availability of resources all influence students' psychological states and behavioral choices. A community environment rife with violence and insecurity may increase the risk of students engaging in bullying, as such environments may lack effective oversight and intervention mechanisms, allowing bullying behavior to thrive.

5. Prevention and Intervention Strategies for School Bullying

Preventing and intervening in school bullying requires a multi-layered, comprehensive approach aimed at reducing the occurrence of bullying behavior at its source and providing necessary support for victims. Firstly, schools should establish a robust anti-bullying policy, clearly defining bullying behavior and implementing strict disciplinary measures. These policies should be thoroughly understood by all teachers and students through education and training, ensuring that everyone recognizes the gravity and unacceptable nature of bullying.

At the interpersonal level, schools should encourage the development of positive peer relationships and teacher-student interactions. By organizing team-building activities and social skills training, students can learn how to establish healthy relationships and develop empathy.

Teachers should be trained as positive role models, building trust through fair and consistent behavior, and should also be encouraged to actively identify and intervene in bullying behavior.

Environmental factors should not be overlooked. Schools should strive to create an inclusive and respectful cultural atmosphere, reducing exclusion and discrimination by celebrating diversity and emphasizing collective responsibility. Community involvement is also key to preventing bullying, and schools can collaborate with parents, local organizations, and law enforcement agencies to jointly create a supportive environment, ensuring that students feel safe and protected both inside and outside the school.

Finally, for incidents of bullying that have already occurred, schools should implement swift and effective intervention measures. This includes immediately protecting victims, educating and correcting bullies, and conducting thorough investigations and appropriate handling of the incidents. By doing so, schools not only address problems promptly but also send a clear message to all students: bullying behavior will not be tolerated, and the school is a safe and supportive place.

6. Conclusions

This study, by constructing a theoretical basis for school bullying, has delved into the causes and influencing factors of bullying behaviors and proposed theoretical-based prevention and intervention strategies. The research found that the comprehensive application of ecological systems theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory can better understand the complexity of bullying behaviors and provide strong theoretical support for practical prevention and intervention. Future research should continue to deepen the application of these theories, explore more effective intervention methods, and focus on bullying phenomena in different cultural and social contexts. Through continuous theoretical innovation and practical exploration, we can look forward to making greater progress in the prevention and control of school bullying, creating a safer and healthier learning environment for students.

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