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SELF-ESTEEM AND COPING SKILLS OF VICTIMS AND NON-VICTIMS OF BULLYING IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

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Abstract

Good self-esteem and coping skills are essential to maintain a strong, happy and healthy life. The present study examined the self-esteem and coping skills of victims and non-victims of bullying in public school. The sample consisted of 150 participants (75 bullied and 75 non-bullied) who were selected through convenience sampling technique from different public schools of Dhaka city. The Bangla version of the California bullying victimization scale, the Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and the coping scale were used to achieve the research objectives. Result of the study showed that bullying was negatively correlated with self-esteem and coping skills whereas self-esteem was positively correlated with coping skills. Result also showed that there were significant differences in self-esteem and in coping skills between victims and non-victims of bullying. The findings of the present study will advance our understanding about the negative impact of bullying on children's mental health and will help mental health professionals to develop bullying awareness program for teachers and parents.

Introduction

Many children and adolescents experience a number of emotional and social difficulties in the process of growing up. Difficulties in peer relationships are associated with negative change in self-concept and feeling of self-worth that may impair school adjustment[1-2] and bullying is one of the common maladaptive types of peer interaction among elementary and middle school students.

Bullying is a universal phenomenon that is affecting school aged children around the world. It is a conscious, and intentional aggressive action planned to hurt, bring distress, and create terror[3]. Eighty six per cent of children aged 12 to 15 years reported being bullied at school[4]. However sometimes it goes unreported and when it is unreported, victim's self-esteem and coping ability become gradually poor[5].

Bullying can occur to any person regardless of their age, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, national origin or any other background factor and no blends of personalities can give surety that a child will or will not become the victim of bullying. Victims of

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bullying display some common characteristics, such as shyness, inwardness, low self-confidence, sadness and anxiety. They are often insecure, depressed and engage in suicidal ideation much more often than their peer[6].

Bullying is a kind of youth violence which intimidates young people's development. Families and friends are frequently facing the detrimental effects of bullying and the overall wellbeing and security of schools, neighborhoods, and societies are at risk. It has a harmful effect on school functioning, physical health, self-perception and academic achievement[7-9]. Anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, psychometric symptoms were most common in victims of bullying and bullies as well[10]. In the most severe cases, the victims of bullying fall of severe depression and engage in suicidal behavior[11].

Bullying to children can happen any place, but it commonly occurs at or near school spaces where adult observation is restricted or non-existent (e.g. entrances, lobbies, canteens, play area, buses, locker rooms, and classrooms). Bullying by peers associates with sicknesses, school avoidance, poor academic performance, increased fear and anxiety, and suicidal ideation as well as to long-term internalizing complications involving low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression[12-13].

There are many forms of bullying. The four common types are physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying and cyber bullying. Electronic aggression, or "cyber bullying", has now become very common. While physical, verbal or social bullying usually take place at school premises or work, cyber bullying occurs over internet. Similar to physical bullying, cyber bullying also targets youth societies, such as children and teenagers. Cyber bullying can produce severe psychological damages in victims[14-15].

Violence in school can affect students' self-esteem level. Children who have low self-esteem are more prone to victimization by bullies whereas bullies tend to have high self-esteem[16]. Agatston *et al.*[17] found that cyber bullying reduces people's coping skills and self-esteem. It damages our positive self-esteem and stimulate us to attempt suicide[14].

Coping and self-esteem are positively correlated. The person whose self-esteem is high has also high coping skills[18]. Bullying can damage our coping capability[5,19-20]. Bullying victims develop depression, low self-esteem, and low coping skills whereas non-victims have higher coping skills than victims of bullying[21].

There are many ways to cope with bullying. Prior evidence suggests that some students ask friend's advice, seek adult's help, report the occurrence to a teacher or ignore it and walk away to cope with bullying[22-24]. According to Lazarus *et al.*[25-26], there are two main functions of coping : either it creates stress by altering the problems or it regulates the emotional response to the problem. Maladaptive coping results in emotional maladjustment, passive avoidance, cogitation and termination, substance abuse, and depressed educational attainment[27].

The present research was done to see the association between self-esteem and coping skills of victims and non-victims of bullying in public schools in Bangladeshi context

because the number of bullying behaviors are increasing day by day and affecting the school aged children's wellbeing and social functioning[28]. This research can be a valuable source of information about the mental state of bullying victims for others to pursue more research in future.

The objective of the present study was to see the relationship of bullying with self-esteem and coping skill. The study also investigated whether there were any differences in self-esteem and in coping skills between victims and non-victims of bullying.

Materials and Methods

One hundred and fifty students were selected conveniently as study participants from different public schools in Dhaka city. Among them 74 (49.33%) were boys and 76 (50.67%) were girls. They were also divided into victims (50%) and non-victims (50%) of bullying. They were students of class five to class eight and their age ranged from 12 to 14 years.

The following instruments were used to collect data:

California bullying victimization scale (CBVS): Bangla version of The California bullying victimization scale[29], originally developed by Felix *et al.*[30] was used to asses bullying victimization among elementary and middle school. The CBVS include eight items related to bullying victimization behavior, and it is a five point scale (0 = Never, 1 = Once in the past month, 2 = 2 or 3 times in the past month, 3 = about once a week, and 4=several times a week). The test-retest reliability for Bangla version was found to be.80 and internal consistency was 0.80[29].

Coping scale: The scale was originally developed by Folkman and Lazarus[26] and was adapted by Huque[31]. The scale consists of 22 items. The measure is 4 point Likert type scale with 1 (I usually don't do this), 2(I usually do this sometimes), 3 (I do most of the time), 4 (I do this always). Highest score of the scale is 88 and the lowest score is 22. The reliability of the coping scale was reported to be highly significant (r = 0.86), and the test-retest of each subscale was also reported highly significant (r = 0.80)[31].

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale: An adapted Bangla version of Rosenberg self-esteem scale was used[32]. The scale was originally developed[33] to measure adolescent's feeling of self-worth or self-acceptance. Ii is a ten item Likert type scale with four point response format (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). The scale ranges from 10 - 40 with higher score representing higher self-esteem. Five items estimate positive feelings and five items estimate negative feelings about self. Items 3, 5, 8, 9, 10 are reversed scored. The test-retest correlations are typically in the range of 0.82 to 0.88, and Cronbach alpha for various samples are in the range of 0.77 to 0.88[32].

After taking permission from the school authority and getting informed consent from the participant, the questionnaires were given to each participant individually. Although

the questionnaires contained written instruction, the students were given extensive verbal instruction to further clarify the task and the meaning of some of the items. They were also required not to omit any item in the questionnaire. They were assured that the data would be kept confidential and would be used only for research purpose. After accomplishment of their task, the answered questionnaires were collected from them and they were given thanks. It took four weeks to collect all the data. Data were analyzed in Pearson product moment correlation and t test.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the self-esteem and coping skills between the victims and non-victims of bullying. For this purpose the obtained data were analyzed by correlation and t test.

Table 1. The correlation of bullying with self-esteem and coping skills.

Variables	1	2	3
1. Bullying	1		
2. Self-esteem	–0.822**	1	
3. Coping skills	–0.829**	0.996**	1

**p < 0.01.

Table 1 shows that bullying has significant and negative correlations with self-esteem (r = – 0.822) and coping skills (r = – 0.829), and self-esteem has a significant and strong positive correlation with coping skills (r = – 0.996).

Table 2. The mean, standard deviation and t value of the self-esteem between the victims and non-victims of bullying.

Bullying	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Victims	75	12.01	1.555			
				–125.8	148	0.000
Non-victims	75	39.36	1.061			

p < 0.01.

As shown in the Table 2, the mean scores of the self-esteem of the victims and non-victims of bullying were 12.01 and 39.36, respectively. The result shows that the two groups (victims and non-victims) significantly differed in self-esteem (t = –125.8, p < 0.01).

As shown in the Table 3, the mean scores of the coping skills of the victims and non-victims of bullying were 26.67 and 86.79, respectively. The result shows that the two groups significantly differed in coping skills ($t = –175.505$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3. The mean, standard deviation and t-value of the coping skills between the victims and non-victims of bullying.

Bullying	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Victims	75	26.67	2.591			
				– 175.50	148	0.000
Non-victims	75	86.79	1.445			

$p < 0.01$.

The results showed strong associations of bullying with self-esteem and coping skills among victims and non-victims of bullying. Correlation results (Table 1) showed that bullying has significant and negative correlations with self-esteem ($r = – 0.822$) and coping skills ($r = – 0.829$). This means increase in bullying leads to decrease in self-esteem and coping skills in students. When adolescents experience bullying they feel inferior, depression, fear and anxiety. Victims of bullying become unhappy and lonely at school, and get a fewer good friends. Such feelings cause school avoidance and poor academic performance. The consequences of such experiences are low self-esteem and negative self-concept about themselves. They cannot fight the situation as bullying also damages their coping capability. The present findings are supported by the previous studies which also found that victimization by bullying has been linked to low self-esteem and poor coping skills[12-13,16-17,34].

The result of Table 1 also showed significant positive correlation between self-esteem and coping skills ($r = 0.996$). This finding is also consistent with previous findings. When someone is confident in his own abilities he develops various coping strategies to reduce his stress. He can deal with any stressful condition with his strong coping skills. So the person whose self-esteem is high has also high coping skills[18].

Tables 2 and 3 showed significant differences between victims and non-victims of bullying in their self-esteem ($M = 12.01$ and $M = 39.36$) and coping skills ($M = 26.67$ and $M = 86.79$), respectively. It is seen from the results that non-victims have higher self-esteem and coping skills than victims of bullying. It is obvious that non-victims of bullying can cope and adjust with any bad situation because of their higher self-esteem. Roberts and Andrews[21] also found that bullying victim has depression, low self-esteem, low coping. They also found that non-victims have higher coping skills than victims of bullying.

However, this study has some limitations. Data were collected conveniently and the sample size was small. So further research is necessary with large sample to explore more

variables, e.g., peer relationship, school influence, family characteristics, socio-economic factors, and cultural factors. Despite the limitations the findings can help to create the awareness among general people, educators and mental health professionals about the serious damages of bullying. It can also help them to provide proper education and counseling to both victims and non-victims of bullying. Support from the family, friends and school can be useful to bully victims in reducing stress, protecting mental health and enhancing coping mechanisms.

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