**Is Bullying a Universal Problem?**

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Bullying builds character like nuclear waste creates superheroes. It’s a rare occurrence and often does much more damage than endowment. – By Zack W Van.

With new technological advancements, bullying has been increasing rapidly. The bully likes to target others to manifest their dominance, aggression, stress or anger. This all has a negative impact on the bully and targets both. Bullying leads to mental health issues, physical problems and academic effects. According to the National Centre for Education Statistics (2017), research conducted in the United States articulates that 20% of students aged 12-18 years experience bullying globally. I was enthused by the movie “Karate Kid” and my best friend was bullied in school which led me to research this topic.

Mental health problems

Bullying leads to mental health problems, which range from stress and worries, experienced as fragments of everyday lifespan to solemn long-term conditions. This involves changes in emotion, behaviour or thinking.

They can be associated with distress and problems in social, work or family activities. Untreated mental illness can cause severe emotional, behavioural and physical health problems. Bullying can result in complications linked to mental illness including sorrow, reduced gratification of life, Self-harm and harm to others, which includes suicide as well. Children who are bullied tend to miss work at school which results in absenteeism.

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Bullying has been a quiet, but ongoing problem in Pakistan as well. In many schools, teachers are not able to address the problem of bullying due to a lack of knowledge, and the burden of workload. Shamsi et al., (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study to investigate 153 teachers’ knowledge regarding bullying in five private and public schools in Karachi. Of the students who were bullied; 70 percent had headaches, 56 percent had backaches, 74 percent were depressed and 68% had low self-esteem. Sadly, more than half of the teachers lacked knowledge about bullying, and thus bullying symptoms went unnoticed.

Research was carried out to examine mental health and bullying among Pakistani students. 335 Pakistani university students participated in this survey and the results showed that the students who were bullied showed signs of depression, were lonely, had sleep problems and suicidal ideation. (Bibi et al,2019)

Another consequence of bullying can be academic problems, resulting in a disturbed school environment and abnormal social interaction between a bully and a victim. These issues result in several problems like failure in exams and diminishing attendance. If this issue isn’t highlighted it can result in serious consequences as students might not be able to establish a successful career and might resort to options like suicide.

Naveed et al., (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study in which they surveyed 2315 children from seven public and private schools in Bahawalpur, Faisalabad, Lodhran, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan, Thatta and Nawabshah. 27 percent of the students were bullied at school which in turn affected their academic performance.

Being bullied in the past was a strong indicator of becoming a bully themselves. Moreover, mothers who were housewives had mentally sound children.

Working mothers had children with high chances of depression, emotional disturbance, and poor school results, which resulted in them becoming victims of bullying. This highlights the patriarchal system that prevails in Pakistan.

The most potent way of countering bullying at schools is to have sessions with students so that they are aware of bullying, its consequences and solutions. Parents should keep a check on their children by asking them about school activities. School Faculty should be vigilant about students’ academics and proactive measures should be taken if they see something wrong or different. Counselling facilities should be available to seek help related to any social-behavioural problem.

The anti-bullying campaign in Greece “The Smile of the Child” was founded in 2013, to protect children’s rights. For Europe’s Anti-Bullying Campaign (E-ABC), six organizations from Greece, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Italy worked together to identify students who were bullied. They devised an educational tool for professionals to identify the issue and solve it proactively. This successfully created an activation against bullying (European Commission) “No Bullying Zone” is an anti-bullying campaign in Pakistan. They aim to run workshops for young people and families, to understand what bullying is and how to stop it. This will help spread awareness of this not-so-spoken-about issue in Pakistan (Being Women, 2018).

Writing this report has enlightened me about bullying and its aftermath. My friend who was a victim of bullying, always appeared phased out in front of people and her progress in academics declined gradually. I always thought that maybe she was exaggerating. After this report, I have a heightened sense that Bullying is a global issue and is prevalent in individuals due to deficient moral support and an overdeveloped superiority complex which needs rectification. My perspective has changed, I stepped out of my comfort zone and latched on to the investigation of various experiences of individuals who were molested through bullying. I helped my friend by supporting her and going over this report’s findings with her. I think that students should reach out to their parents, teachers and friends so that their moral support system is enriched, and this system must ease out the path carved for the students to express themselves beyond the boundaries of shyness, fear, biases, and social norms so that their confidence can again elevate to an adequate level.

In my opinion, the issue of mental health problems was strongly linked to my question as when a student is bullied, he/she suffers from mental health issues which adversely influence the student’s academic performance. After conducting this research my question is answered. Bullying is a global problem which is slowly being highlighted. Bullying is not amusing and for a student, it is arduous to face it until he/she speaks out for themselves. We all have to step forward against bullying because until we all speak out it will continue and grow. As Barack Obama once stated “Each of us deserves the freedom to pursue our version of happiness. No one deserves to be bullied.”

*The writer is a freelance columnist.*