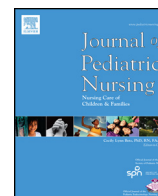




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## Factors Affecting Jordanian School Adolescents' Experience of Being Bullied

Abeer M. Shaheen<sup>a,\*</sup>, Sawsan Hammad<sup>a</sup>, Eman M. Haourani<sup>a</sup>, Omayyah S. Nassar<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Dept. of Community Health Nursing, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan<sup>b</sup> Dept. of Maternal & Child Health Nursing, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to identify the Jordanian school adolescents' experience of being bullied, and to examine its association with selected socio-demographic variables.

**Design and Methods:** This cross sectional descriptive study used multi-stages cluster sampling technique to recruit a sample of in-school adolescents in Jordan ( $N = 436$ ). The Personal Experiences Checklist was used to measure the experience of bullying. Descriptive statistics and parametric tests were used in the analysis.

**Results:** Relational-verbal bullying was the most common form of bullying while cyber bullying was the least common type. Male adolescents experienced bullying more than females. In addition, adolescents belonging to low-income families experienced bullying more than those from moderate-income families. Finally, being bullied was negatively correlated with academic performance of students.

**Conclusions:** This study indicated that risk factors for bullying are multifaceted which necessitate the development of prevention and intervention strategies to combat bullying taking into consideration these factors.

**Practice Implications:** Schools should introduce environmental changes to discourage bullying and establish a policy with specific guidelines of what constitutes bullying behavior and expected disciplinary procedures. Staff training on information about the definition of bullying, current trends, and the effects of bullying is also recommended.

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## Introduction

Bullying at schools is a serious problem that violates the fundamental rights of children. The prevalence of bullying among school students is wide and well documented across different countries (Laeheem & Sungkharat, 2012; Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). The prevalence of bullying victimization (parent-reported bullying victimization among children) was 19.2% in the total Nordic countries (i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) in 2011 (Bjereld, Daneback, & Petzold, 2015). In another study conducted in Sweden, the frequency of bullying victimization (self-report of bullying involvement in the last two months) once or more was 10.6% (Carlerby, Viitasara, Knutsson, & Gådin, 2013). In China, about 25.7% of school students reported being bullied once or more in the past 30 days (Cheng et al., 2010). An Australian study revealed that 8–12% of school students reported being bullied frequently (every few weeks or more) (Lester, Cross, Dooley, & Shaw, 2013). The prevalence of bullying among the Jordanian school students was the highest 44.3% compared to other Arab countries including; Lebanon 33.6%, Oman 38.9%, Morocco 31.9%

and United Arab Emirates 20.9% (Fleming & Jacobsen, 2010; Kazarian & Ammar, 2013).

School bullying is a hostile behavior that occurs repeatedly and in a systematic manner by an individual or a group to gain power, prestige, or goods. It involves an imbalance abusive use of physical or psychological power from the bullies (perpetrators) which make it difficult for the target group to defend themselves (Casebeer, 2012). Bullying is associated with negative long and short physical, psychological, and social outcomes. Bullying increases the risk of emotional impairment, psychosomatic symptoms, lack of self-confidence, running away from home, alcohol intake and drug abuse, absenteeism and accidental or perpetrated injuries (Cheng et al., 2010; Gini & Pozzoli, 2013; Jernbro, Svensson, Tindberg, & Janson, 2012; Lepore & Kliewer, 2013; Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). The effect of bullying extends into adulthood; for instance, those who were bullied during their childhood are at an increased risk of psychiatric morbidity and poor health in their adulthood (Sourander et al., 2011; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013).

There are many types of bullying including; physical, verbal, relational, cyber, and cultural-based bullying. Physical bullying involves physical violence such as shoving, kicking, or locking indoors. Verbal bullying includes name-calling or hurtful teasing. Physical and verbal forms of bullying are considered the direct types and can be easily identified and addressed by school authorities. Relational bullying involves

\* Corresponding author at: Faculty of Nursing, University of Jordan, Amman 11942, Jordan.

E-mail address: abeer.Shaheen@ju.edu.jo (A.M. Shaheen).

social manipulation of relationships and is considered the indirect form of bullying since the person or the group of persons doing bullying is not necessarily identified. Relational bullying usually includes damaging the self-esteem, harming the social status, or excluding the target from a desired group (Casebeer, 2012; Hunt, Peters, & Rapee, 2012). A more recent form of bullying is referred to as cyber bullying which is defined as an intentional and aggressive act conducted repeatedly by an individual or a group using electronic means of communication over a period of time toward a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself (Fanti, Demetriou, & Hawa, 2012). Having a social media profile may be a strong predictor of cyber bullying regardless of the time spent on these sites (O'Dea & Campbell, 2012).

Cultural-based bullying is another type of harmful behavior that occurs due to differences based on culture, religion, language, national origin or national status (Scherr & Larson, 2010). Immigrant students, for instance, who have recently moved from one country to another, are at increased risk of being frequently bullied by their peers (Strohmeier, Kärnä, & Salmivalli, 2011). Bullying victimization is more prevalent in ethnically heterogeneous classes than other homogeneous classes (Vervoort, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010).

In Jordan, one national study ( $N = 1166$ ) that examined bullying among adolescent school students revealed that bullying was significantly correlated with students' emotional wellbeing and psychosomatic symptoms. Bullied students reported more psychosomatic complaints and frequent tiredness, nervousness and dizziness than non-bullied students. The study has recommended further investigations to examine bullying and its associated factors within the Jordanian culture (Shaheen, Nassar, Saleh, & Arabia, 2014). Another study which investigated the experience of bullying in a sample of Jordanian school children from Amman revealed that the prevalence of bullying was 47% ( $N = 433$ ). Bullied students reported being truant from school and disliking school than those who were not bullied (Al-Bitar, Al-Omari, Sonbol, Al-Ahmad, & Cunningham, 2013).

Published studies revealed that bullying is a complex multidimensional problem associated with different factors (Fanti et al., 2012; Huang, Hong, & Espelage, 2013; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Shaheen et al., 2014). Socio-demographic factors including; gender, age, and socioeconomic status are individual factors that affect bullying. The results of the World Health Organization's global survey entitled "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children HBSC" showed that boys exposed to bullying as victims and perpetrators were more than girls in all of the forty countries included in the survey (Molcho et al., 2010). Other studies conducted in Turkey, Sweden, and China revealed similar findings (Atik & Güneri, 2013; Carlerby et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2013). However, a Chinese study conducted by Cheng et al. (2010) found that rates of bullying were similar for boys and girls but the forms of being bullied differed according to gender. Trends in victimization of bullying by age suggested that rates of victimization are higher among younger children compared to older children and adolescents (Huang et al., 2013).

Studies that investigated the effect of socioeconomic status on bullying indicated that students from lower-socioeconomic status families have a high risk of being victims of bullying (Fu, Land, & Lamb, 2013; Jansen et al., 2012). Parents' educational level, employment status and income were used as indicators for family socioeconomic status. Low educational level of parents, parental unemployment, and low family income increased the risk of bullying among students (Fu et al., 2013; Jansen et al., 2012). One study conducted in Netherlands used parents' educational level and employment status as indicators of family socioeconomic status. This study found that parental educational level was the only indicator of socioeconomic status related to bullying victimization (Tippett & Wolke, 2014). Another study was conducted in Greece used parental education, parental employment, and family economic status found that none of the socioeconomic indicators was associated with peer victimization (Magklara et al., 2012).

Academic achievement is an important school level factor that is related to bullying. Low academic achievement scores increased the risk

of being bullied (Fu et al., 2013). Research studies in eight Asia-Pacific countries indicated that students with low academic achievement scores reported more incidences of being bullied compared to those with high academic achievement scores (Huang et al., 2013). Some studies that linked between bullying and academic achievement found that students who are being bullied are at higher risk of demonstrating poor academic achievement (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010).

The Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) revealed that bullied students reported higher rates of tobacco use (Fleming & Jacobsen, 2010). In addition to that, the HBSC survey found that bullying was a strong predictor of smoking and drinking (Vieno, Gini, & Santinello, 2011). Another study revealed that the risk of smoking initiation was significantly higher among students who were victims of bullying (Weiss, Mouttapa, Cen, Johnson, & Unger, 2011). A longitudinal Finnish study revealed that being frequently victimized at age eight predicted daily heavy smoking even after adjusting for childhood family background (Niemelä et al., 2011).

There are few studies which examined bullying and its associated factors within the Jordanian culture. Thus, the aim of the current study was to assess the Jordanian school adolescents' experience of being bullied in relation to four forms of bullying (i.e. relational-verbal, cyber, physical, and cultural-based bullying), and to examine differences and associations in their experiences of being bullied in relation to selected factors (i.e. age, gender, socioeconomic status, smoking behavior, and academic achievement). The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Describe the Jordanian school adolescents' experience of being bullied in relation to four forms of bullying including; relational-verbal, cyber, physical, and cultural-based bullying.
- Examine differences in the Jordanian school adolescents' experiences of being bullied in relation to selected factors including; age, gender, socioeconomic status, smoking behavior, and academic achievement.

## Methods

### Sample Size

The study sample was calculated by using G power soft program. Utilizing Z test indicating descriptive study using  $\alpha = 0.05$  two tail level of significance, effect size = 0.2 (low medium), power = 0.8 at least 369 students was needed for this study.

### Participants

In Jordan, there are different sectors that contribute to education, the public education sector represents 57%, the private education sector represents 36.7%, and the United Nations Relief and Work Agency sector (UNRWA) represents 2.9%. Other sectors that contribute to education are the Ministry of Awqaf, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Social Development, and Ministry of Defense. These sectors were excluded from the study because they contribute to education in small percentages. Primary education in Jordan is mandatory by law from the age of six until the age of sixteen (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

A three-stage cluster sample technique was used to draw the study sample. The basic sampling unit was the classroom. Therefore, classes were selected with proportion to schools within the educational sectors.

At the first level, the researcher randomly selected school directorates that represent the public, private, and UNRWA sectors of education. Then schools were randomly selected within each directorate from a list that is available online by the Ministry of Education (2010a). Five public schools, four private schools, and two UNRWA schools were randomly selected to represent the proportion of education presented by each educational sector.

At each selected school, the researcher chose one class of each of the grades from 6th to 10th. Classes were chosen by writing class numbers

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