

Current Situation and Causes of School Bullying among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of school bullying incidents in China. Compared with the previous bullies directly beating and abusing classmates, the current form of school bullying is a new form-cyber bullying. Teenagers have various forms of school bullying, and cause great harm, which is not only physical harm but also psychological harm, seriously harm the mental health of teenagers. What reason is worth thinking about.

KEYWORDS

Adolescents; School Bullying; Current Situation; Causes.

1. ADOLESCENTS

International organizations such as the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and UNICEF Fund for Activities have varying definitions of adolescence due to differences in sociocultural, institutional, economic, and political factors across countries, regions, and organizations. According to Baidu Baike, adolescents refer to the transitional period from childhood to adulthood, encompassing the human population during this transformation. Generally, adolescence is divided into two stages: 14-17 years old and 18-25 years old, aimed at preparing children for their transition into adult roles (Baidu Baike). Adolescence, often described as a "stormy period," is considered the second critical development stage in life (Fuhrmann et al., 2015), characterized by unique physiological and psychological features.

2. DEFINITION OF SCHOOL BULLYING

The pioneering research on bullying was conducted by Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus, who defined bullying as "the repeated, systematic abuse of power, through physical or psychological means, by one or more individuals or a group against one or more individuals who cannot easily defend themselves" (Olweus D, 1978). He further emphasized the intentionality, repetition, and imbalance of power in school bullying (Olweus D, 2010). In May 2016, the Office of the State Council Education Supervision Committee issued the "Notice on Carrying Out Special Governance of School Bullying," defining school bullying as "intentional or malicious acts of bullying and humiliation, including physical, verbal, and online means, committed by students against other students in primary and secondary schools" (Wang Weidong, 2016). Ren Mintao views school bullying as a deliberate and harmful behavior suffered or inflicted by students during school hours, which can manifest through physical violence, verbal insults, relationship sabotage, or cyberbullying (Ren Mintao, 2017). He not only highlights the characteristics of school bullying but also specifies

its forms. Moreover, numerous Chinese policies have provided clear definitions of school bullying. The Ministry of Education and other departments issued the "Comprehensive Plan for Strengthening the Prevention and Control of Bullying Among Primary and Secondary School Students," which, for the first time, explicitly defines student bullying as "intentional or malicious acts of bullying, humiliation, causing physical harm, property loss, or mental damage through physical, verbal, or online means, committed by one individual or group against another individual or group, occurring inside or outside schools (including primary and secondary schools and vocational schools), and involving students" (Ministry of Education). This plan further refines the definition of school bullying by addressing its harmful consequences.

In summary, based on the definitions provided by scholars and policies, school bullying can be conceptualized as deliberate and repeated acts of bullying and humiliation, perpetrated by one or more students against another student or students, through physical, verbal, or online means, within or near school premises, resulting in physical or psychological harm.

2.1. Diverse Forms of School Bullying

School bullying among Chinese adolescents takes on various forms, primarily encompassing physical bullying, verbal bullying, relational bullying, and cyberbullying. Physical bullying involves direct physical contact, such as pushing, slapping, and kicking; verbal bullying utilizes insults, ridicule, and humiliation; relational bullying isolates victims by exploiting the bonds among classmates; while cyberbullying spreads malicious remarks about others online, inflicting harm on the victims. Early research into school bullying identified these tactics, with direct physical contact like pushing, slapping, and even kicking (especially girls kicking each other's stomachs) being prevalent. Verbal bullying, as categorized by Lin Ruiqing (2007) into ten types, commonly manifests as cursing, taunting, insulting, and even intimidating. Furthermore, relational bullying, leveraging camaraderie among classmates, can isolate victims, sometimes by a few individuals or even the entire class. With the advent of the information age, cyberbullying has gained popularity, disseminating harmful content online to victimize individuals.

2.2. Frequent Occurrence of School Bullying Incidents

In recent years, school bullying incidents among Chinese adolescents have occurred frequently, exhibiting an upward trend year by year. According to relevant statistical data, the incidence rate of school bullying in Chinese primary and secondary schools is relatively high, severely impacting adolescents' physical and mental health as well as their academic life. Across countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 23% of students report experiencing bullying at school several times a month (OECD, 2022). Adolescents, being in their puberty, possess immature minds and psyches, lacking comprehensive understanding of their actions and filled with curiosity towards novel experiences. Additionally, insufficient attention has been paid to this issue. Some students with personality flaws may resort to physical violence or extreme measures in response to dissatisfaction with others' words or deeds, turning schools into hotspots for bullying. In reality, many people have an ambiguous understanding of school bullying, failing to recognize various forms of it, and numerous children are victims of it. With the rapid development of the internet, many school bullying incidents have come to light, making us acutely aware of their frequent occurrence in recent years. The case of a student being buried alive as a result of bullying in Hebei in 2024 underscores the brutality of this issue.

2.3. Severe Consequences

School bullying inflicts severe harm on its victims, not only physically but also psychologically, leading to issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. Long-term bullying victims may

exhibit extreme behaviors like disliking school, skipping classes, or even contemplating suicide, imposing a heavy burden on families and society.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF SCHOOL BULLYING PHENOMENA

3.1. Individual Level

Students often have cognitive biases towards school bullying, and physical or personality flaws in victims can trigger bullying incidents.

Firstly, adolescents have cognitive biases towards school bullying. Bullying behaviors in school bullying incidents are diverse and multifaceted. Due to the complexity of bullying behaviors and the failure of schools, teachers, and parents to properly guide students in understanding them, many students believe that only physical bullying constitutes school bullying. The overt nature of physical bullying makes it easy to identify and qualify, thereby attracting heightened attention from classmates, teachers, and parents. As a result, most students' perceptions of school bullying are limited to physical bullying, and the harm caused by more subtle forms of bullying, such as verbal, relational, and cyberbullying, is often overlooked. This long-term neglect can foster the proliferation of verbal bullying, harming the physical and mental well-being of victims, bullies, and bystanders alike. Furthermore, misperceptions about the roles in bullying situations can lead to victims being labeled as "always bullied," fostering a belief that they are perpetual targets for the entire class. However, this is not the case. Prolonged bullying can make victims struggle to adapt to school life, leading them to deviate from proper behavior and potentially even engage in aggressive acts towards those weaker than themselves, reversing their roles. Additionally, bullying behaviors negatively impact bystanders, as the "role model" behavior of bullies can be imitated by others, triggering a chain reaction of bullying incidents and creating new bullies.

Secondly, victims often have physical or personality flaws. Students with distinct physical characteristics, such as disabilities, obesity, thinness, or short stature, are more likely to become targets of bullying. Research indicates that overweight and obese children are more prone to bullying by peers, which can lead to depression (Sofia H et al., 2021). This issue persists into adolescence, where such situations are common in schools. Additionally, victims often have personality flaws. Feng Lishu categorizes victims into two types: aggressive victims and withdrawn victims, noting that victims tend to be biased, timid, sensitive, avoidant, easily provoked, and lack self-control (Feng Lishu, 2019). Juvonen's research also highlights that victims often have low self-esteem and negative self-perceptions (Juvonen et al., 2014). These personality flaws make them vulnerable to bullying, and they may hesitate to report it, leading to continued abuse and harm to their psychological and physical well-being. In contrast, outgoing and assertive students are more likely to speak up against bullying and recover quickly.

3.2. Family Factors

Parents are children's first teachers, and their personalities, willpower, character, behavior habits, and emotional states are all influenced by the family environment. Karyn L's research suggests that parental upbringing and family factors are associated with both risk and protective factors for bullying victimization (Karyn L et al., 2022). Thus, the occurrence of school bullying is related to family atmosphere and parenting styles.

Firstly, there is a lack of family education. When parents are absent or the family structure is incomplete, children may not receive sufficient education and care, leading to feelings of insecurity and mistrust, making them vulnerable to bullying or perpetrating bullying (Dong Shenghong, 2018). In many families, parents are preoccupied with earning a livelihood and have little time to educate their children, resulting in a lack of love. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, belonging and

love are fundamental. Additionally, incomplete family structures, such as single-parent households, can also lead to a lack of love for children, especially adolescents who are more sensitive and prone to feelings of insecurity, making them more susceptible to bullying or perpetrating it.

Secondly, family environments can be harsh. Parents with low educational levels and limited self-awareness may resort to violence to discipline their children, causing personality flaws such as timidity and avoidance. These children may hesitate to report bullying incidents to parents or teachers, fearing harsher punishment. In some families, parents' disagreements and quarrels in front of children can cause psychological harm, leading children to seek solace through bullying others.

3.3. School Factors

Schools are the primary venues for school bullying, and factors such as school atmosphere, inadequate management, and unfair treatment by teachers can contribute to its occurrence.

Firstly, the school atmosphere plays a crucial role. Research consistently finds that negative school atmospheres characterized by scarce resources, high dropout and transfer rates, prevalent problematic behaviors (including bullying), or a perceived lack of order are associated with higher rates of peer bullying (Malinski R, 2020). In disorderly schools where fights and brawls are common, students may normalize bullying and perceive it as harmless play. This atmosphere can even influence well

Secondly, Teacher Bias. Teachers tend to be overly subjective in their treatment of students, giving more attention to those with good academic performance, leading to psychological imbalance among students with poor grades. Over time, students with poor grades may come to believe that teachers have given up on them, and subsequently give up on themselves.

3.4. Social Factors

Rapid social development has led to the emergence of various social issues.

Many of these issues, however, subtly influence people's words and actions. Negative impacts from some mass media and inadequate legal systems are both factors that can trigger campus bullying.

Firstly, Negative Impacts of Mass Media. With technological advancements, mass media, including books, television, and the internet, serves as the primary means of disseminating knowledge. However, it also has a negative impact on adolescents. In particular, violent and brutal scenes in some films and TV programs are presented to young people, who may mimic them out of curiosity. Additionally, the rise of online gaming has also had an adverse effect on adolescents, especially those with violent gameplay. Influenced by social learning theory, when students watch violent scenes in games, they observe and mimic violent behavior, thereby acquiring it. When conflicts or disagreements arise in school, they may resort to violence to resolve them, leading to frequent occurrences of campus bullying or violence.

Secondly, Inadequate Legal Systems. In 2016, China issued the "Notice of the Office of the State Council Education Supervision Committee on Conducting Special Governance of Campus Bullying," requiring all primary and secondary schools to carry out special governance of campus bullying, which involves deliberate or malicious physical, verbal, or online bullying, humiliation, or harm to students. In 2018, the State Council issued the "Notice of the Office of the State Council Education Supervision Committee on Carrying Out the Implementation Year of Prevention and Control of Bullying Among Primary and Middle School Students." Local governments have also successively introduced a series of local regulations to govern campus bullying. Despite the issuance of relevant policies, due to imperfect national legislation mechanisms, the handling of bullying incidents has not risen to the level of legal issues but remains at the moral level. For example, the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors" clearly stipulates that minors have special rights

beyond those of ordinary citizens, protecting some minors from legal sanctions, giving students the misconception that they do not need to be accountable for their actions.

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