

Bullying among Kazakhstan School Learners and Overcoming Strategies

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ABSTRACT: Bullying often involves harm to others, especially adolescents. The purpose of this study is to assess the prevalence of bullying, identify risk factors, and assess the relationship between bullying and the psychological status of adolescents who face this problem in the region of Kazakhstan. The research was conducted on 224 students between the ages of 11 and 16 using an online survey in a validated Google Form to investigate the prevalence and risk factors of bullying, as well as questionnaires to assess the psychological consequences of bullying. In response to the question, Where is bullying most common?, 42.8% of the participants answered “on social networks,” 33.5% answered “in the yard, on the street,” and 23.7% answered “at school.” About 20% of the participants spent more than 12 hours on the Internet every day, and the overall estimated prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying was 42.8%. In addition, 26.3% of the participants had a significant deterioration in academic performance due to cyberbullying. Approximately 20% of all participants considered dropping out of school, 19.7% considered stopping Internet use, and 21.1% considered harming themselves as a result of bullying. Furthermore, 75% of schoolchildren were victims of bullying. Unfortunately, schools are not entirely safe environments for children. Schoolchildren talked about the negative effects of bullying, negative childhood experiences, and trauma. Currently, researchers focus on "bullying" and its psychological consequences. Some researchers have identified characteristics of bullying victims, such as low self-esteem, poor social connection, aggression, anxiety, and complicated family relationships.

KEYWORDS: Bullying, cyberbullying, adolescents, psychological consequences, public health, Kazakhstan

Introduction

The development of society and the use of technical tools and digital technologies in our everyday life have made human life easier, but have also led to more complicated relationships between people. This creates difficulties in the relationships of adolescents, who do not have much life experience and can have harmful effects on them. One of them is the problem of bullying and cyberbullying among today's adolescents.

Bullying is considered a serious public health problem with short- and long-term physical and socio-emotional consequences for adolescents. A large amount of research shows that adolescents who have been bullied have an increased risk of mental, emotional, medical, and

behavioral problems, especially intrapersonal problems such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and loneliness. According to numerous surveys, the estimated rates of traditional and cyber-bullying among school children range from 9% to 49% (Carlyle & Steinman 2007; Greenleaf et al. 2014; Griffiths, Wolke, Page, & Horwood 2006; Ringwalt & Shamblen 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel 2009; Wang, Iannotti & Luk 2010). In Kazakhstan, there is a lack of reliable information about adolescents in the regions. While a sufficient amount of research on bullying is available worldwide, it has not yet been well-studied in Kazakhstan.

According to UNICEF, in 2020 in Kazakhstan, 63% of children witnessed violence and discrimination, 44% were victims and 24% committed acts of violence and discrimination against other children in school. It is almost impossible to establish exact statistics of bullying in Kazakhstan due to the fact that school administrations prefer to hide cases of bullying.

Even the fact that from March to July 2022, the telegram bot Bala Qorgau of the Committee for the Protection of Children's Rights received more than 500 appeals and this fact speaks of the relevance of the problem of bullying among the adolescents. Most of the questions related to conflicts in families, relationships between children and teachers, benefits for large families, bullying and organizing summer holidays.

Bullying always aims to harass the victim, cause fear in her, demoralize, humiliate, subjugate. UNESCO highlights some features of bullying in schools:

- It is asymmetric - on the one hand, there is an offender who has strength and power (physical and/or psychological), and on the other - a victim who does not have such resources, but there is a need for support and assistance.
- It is carried out intentionally, aimed at causing physical and mental suffering.
- Undermines the victim's self-confidence, destroys health, self-respect and human dignity.
- This is a group process that affects not only the offender and the victim, but also the witnesses of violence, the whole class (group) where it occurs.
- It does not stop on its own: protection and help are always needed, both for the victims and the initiators of bullying (offenders), and witnesses.

According to the increasing awareness about bullying as a public health problem and understanding of how bullying affects physical, mental, emotional and behavioral health, as well as academic performance, significant efforts have been made at the level of programs and policies to address bullying behavior.

The connection and cooperation of a child or adolescent with other adult people is an important buffer against problems caused by bullying. The family is one of the strongest factors influencing the development of the adolescent.

As a result, families can also play a role in prevention of bullying. Parents can and should recognize symptoms that may indicate that an adolescent is being bullied, such as:

- Physical injury, headaches, sleep disturbances, or other physical symptoms that are not fully explained by a known medical condition.
- Depression, anxiety, self-injurious behavior (common in girls) and anger, aggression and risk-taking and impulsive behavior (more common in boys).
- Lower grades or test scores than in previous years.
- Poor peer relationships, health problems and aggression, which can be experienced by both persecutors and victims.

School bullying is defined as physical, verbal, psychological assault/intimidation in a physically/psychologically unequal environment, committed intentionally, voluntarily and systematically at intervals against a less powerful peer without an element of incitement, with the

intent to cause fear and anxiety/harm in the victim. Therefore, this study is important for identifying bullying behavior, where the adolescent could face bullying and contributing to information about bullying in school and among adolescents.

School bullying is observed among people of all levels of education, but adolescents aged 13-15 years are at the highest risk group. Bullying has this kind of symptoms such as social isolation, physical and verbal bullying. The verbal and physical bullying can be seen, and it is considered as a direct bullying, while social isolation is considered indirect bullying because it occurs in a less visible way. A number of different factors have been identified in school bullying, and generally we could divide it into three main groups: individual, family, and school factors. School bullying strongly affects student achievement, physical and psychological health, and these negative consequences can last in their lives for many years. For this reason, school bullying is a problem that health professionals such as teachers, school administration, school nurses, psychologists, counselors and physicians must handle with care. Identifying the reasons for bullying in schools and taking effective measures to prevent bullying must be ensured by a multidisciplinary team so that adolescents cannot be harmed by bullying behavior.

Results

In 2022, we conducted a research within the framework of the project BR18574152 "Development of measures to prevent bullying against children and study of relevant aspects" which will be published jointly with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the target-funding program of the Science Committee. The aim of this study is to improve understanding of the current situation and explore the role of bullying at the school and prevention of this issue in educational organizations.

Why it is important to know about situations from the lips of adolescents who are living with this, they can provide information for educational organizations, managerial decision-making in order to own the situation and have knowledge in terms of regulation and further development of policy and to take measures about bullying in Kazakhstan.

One of the main barriers to the development of affordable and high-quality pedagogical and psychological help for adolescents who are bullied in Kazakhstan is the lack of information about bullying among schoolchildren.

The results of the research within the framework of the project BR18574152 "Development of measures to prevent bullying against children and study of relevant aspects" will be published jointly with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It shows the leading role in the treatment, prevention and support of adolescents who suffer from bullying and cyberbullying in Kazakhstan.

In the first stage of the research, was chosen a quantitative method - a questionnaire survey of adolescents. The project team developed a program and questionnaire for 5-10th grades of pupils at the school, which consists of 18 questions, including open-ended and alternative questions. The results were processed in the SPSS program. Several regions were selected, including districts of Turkestan city, Shymkent city, Oskemen, Atyrau and Astana.

The number of respondents was 224.

The results of the questionnaire we can see in the table below (Table 1):

Table 1. The comparison of the answers among the regions in Kazakhstan

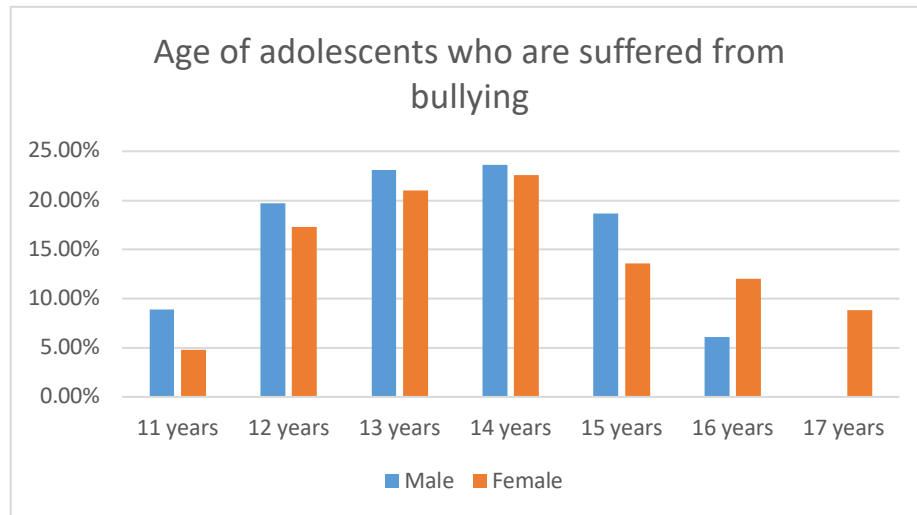
Questions	11-16 years adolescents							
	Astana		Atyrau		Shymkent		Oskemen	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Do you know what bullying is?	76%	24%	42.5%	57.5%	76%	24%	72%	22%
Have you come across situations where some people bully others?	55.6%	42.1%	46.4%	52.6%	55.6%	42.1%	54.1%	44.1%
Have you been a victim of bullying?	7%	87.7%	2.6%	92.4%	7%	87.7%	5%	92.1%
Have you come across situations where teachers put pressure or bullied on schoolchildren?	26.3%	67.8%	3.3%	75.8%	26.3%	67.8%	26%	67%
Do you feel that adults are not doing enough to help adolescents who are victims of bullying?	17%	19.3%	14.7%	13.1%	17%	19.3%	17%	20%
Do you think bullying can be prevented in an educational organization?	57.9%	14.6%	61.5%	15.2%	57.9%	14.6%	54.9%	14%
Do you believe that you are underestimated and disrespected in class?	25.1%	69%	6.8%	69.3%	25.1%	69%	24.1%	69%
Do you often feel lonely and anxious?	15.2%	51.5%	13.5%	54.7%	15.2%	51.5%	14.2%	62.1%
Do you think my classmates are better than me?	9.4%	65.5%	10%	69%	9.4%	65.5%	9.2%	68.5%
Do you have friends among your classmates?	73.7%	21.6%	74.8%	3.2%	73.7%	21.6%	74%	26%
Are there any classmates in your class that you don't like?	42.1%	52.6%	38.2%	55.1%	42.1%	52.6%	39.1%	60.9%

It is difficult to reach pupils who suffer from bullying. Currently, pupils who suffered from bullying are separate categories that live with stigmatization and some kind of persecution (victimization), which makes this category out of reach. And the strategy of working with educational organizations was chosen precisely for this reason.

Discussion

It is difficult to see the whole situation, to get more informative and reliable answers for in-depth analysis, to learn more from the questionnaires, because people avoided answering some questions. It is likely that these questions were more sensitive to them than others (see Figure 1).

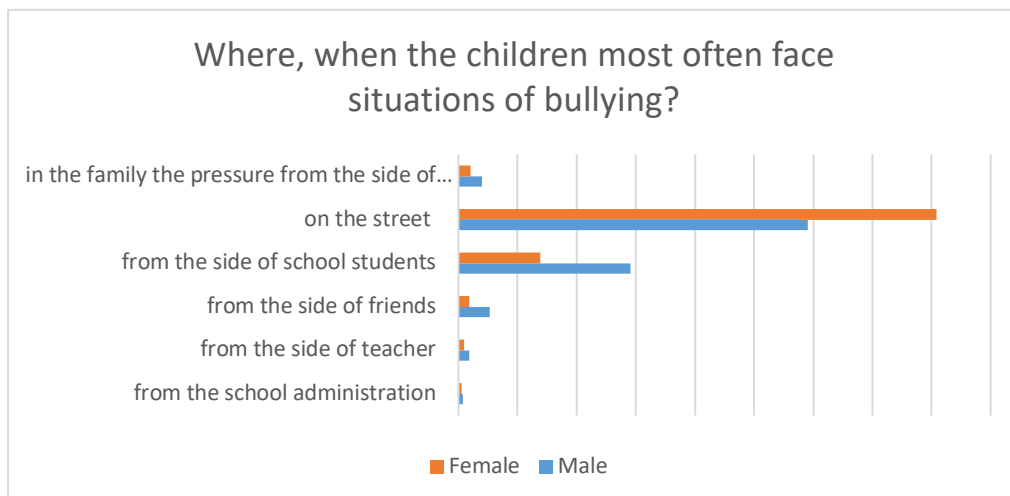
Figure 1. The age of respondents in the two groups, male and female



We put the results of the survey on a special chart and compared their indicators. Clearly, we could say that 76% of the pupils at the school who are surveyed are aware of what bullying and cyberbullying are. Only 24% said that they were not aware of this issue.

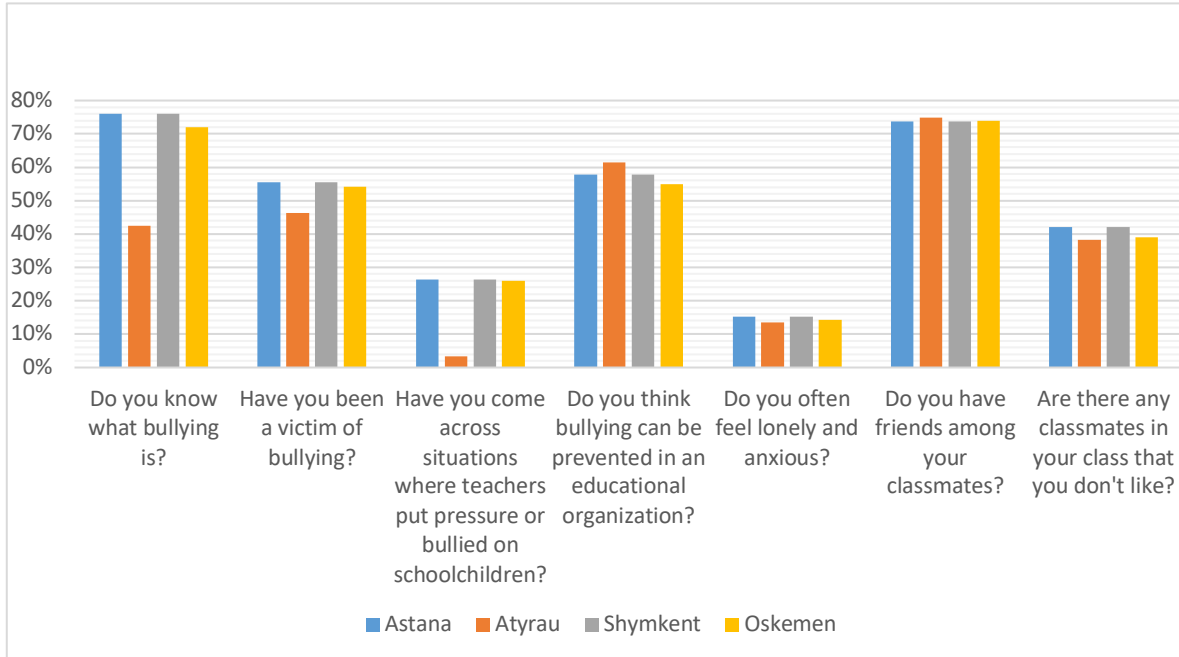
In response to the question, "If you have met bullying, in what form have you seen it?" mostly pupils (55%) emphasized insults, 38% of the respondents said that they were humiliated and mocked, while 7% of the pupils said that they used physical force and violence. From the respondents' answers, we can see that bullying can happen anywhere in our society. The main evidence for this is the question, "Where is bullying most common?" with 46.2% of pupils saying that they experience it at school, 46.2% saying they experience it on social networks, on the Internet, and 32.7% writing that acts of pressure and violence take place in the yard and on the street. Based on the results of this study, we can conclude that violent incidents occur in all places where teenagers gather. We received the largest scattering of opinions for the East Kazakhstan region, where answered that 59,1 % in the Kazakh group and 80,8 % in the Russian group wrote that acts of pressure and violence occur in the yard and in the street (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The groups which faced bullying



According to the answers of the respondents, 20% of the participants spent more than 12 hours on the Internet every day, and the overall estimated prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying was 42.8%. In addition, 26.3% of the participants had a significant deterioration in academic performance due to cyberbullying. Approximately 20% of all participants considered dropping out of school, 19.7% considered stopping Internet use, and 21.1% considered harming themselves as a result of bullying.

Figure 3. The regional comparison of the bullying



In their answers, the majority of adolescents described that the victims of bullying and cyberbullying are often children with weak character, physical health, unclear vision, unstable and low self-esteem (see diagram Figure 3).

If we consider the responses of adolescents at school, it can be seen that there are gaps in the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying by adults. In this direction, it is felt that students notice phenomena such as insufficient conducting of explanatory work and educational measures or failure to recognize and prevent them in time. It seems that pupils don't speak openly when they face violence because they don't expect help from the side of adults, teachers. Most of the adolescents noticed such a phenomenon on the part of adults in time and said that such violence could be prevented if the aggressor received his punishment.

Adolescents at school reported that they turn to different categories of people as the first people they turn to for help when dealing with bullying and cyberbullying. It was also of great interest to us to know this. As we can see from diagram 3, schoolchildren said that in case of violence or pressure from others, they think that it is better to go to the school administration, then they ask help from their parents, thirdly, they expect help from the school psychologist, and also they expect help from the teaching staff. Of course, the reason why the help of classmates is in the last place is understandable, even if they defend themselves, it would not be bad. However, classmates may not be indifferent to the oppression of their peers. He did not hide that he expected help from his classmates, as he knew that they would help him when he was closed.

As we can see from the table, it is possible to know that most of the children of teenage age are victims and witnesses of violence. They also have different beliefs and attitudes regarding self-protection and the provision of safety by school administration and parents.

Conclusion

From the responses of the adolescents shown in the above diagrams and tables, it can be seen that the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents in school is taking place, and this phenomenon is perceived by every pupil as a normal everyday activity. However, given that each student's perception leads to different emotional consequences, we predict that their defensive actions and attitudes will also end up with different results. Therefore, we provide specific recommendations for timely prevention of bullying and cyberbullying by adults.

Recommendations

- In order to prevent bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents, it is necessary to strengthen the organization of measures to improve human qualities through systematic educational influence and workshops, talking with school social pedagogues, psychologists and class leaders.
- In order to prevent bullying and cyberbullying among the parents of teenagers, it is necessary to carry out literacy work on the part of the school.
- It is necessary to identify children who are victims or perpetrators of bullying, to work with them individually through school social pedagogues, psychologists and class teachers.
- Collective measures should be taken to establish cooperation with teaching staff and parents.
- Psychological and educational activities, weeks and decades should be held among schoolchildren to educate them about about bullying and cyberbullying, its consequences and their individual responsibility to prevent it.

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