

The Impact of Environmental Factors on Adolescents' Involvement in School Bullying

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Abstract. This article analyzes the environmental factors contributing to adolescents' school bullying involvement. Compared with internal factors such as psychosocial factors, environmental factors are more likely to be manipulated, so the study of environmental factors of school bullying is of profound practical significance for the prevention and control of school bullying. Through systematic analysis and conclusion of relevant literature on environmental factors that cause school bullying in Google Scholar, these environmental factors are frequently influencing aspects of bullying, such as social context: (immigration issues, poor academic achievements, low socioeconomic status, community, and inferiority), school: (physical, emotional, and social environment), peer influence: (normative social influence and group think), family: (family economic conditions, parental conflict and the quality of the family environment and family-of-origin parenting styles). Those environmental factors that have potential negative effects on the physical and mental health of adolescents are revealed so as to offer insight into finding feasible ways to reduce campus violence.

Keywords: School bullying; adolescents; family; social environment.

1. Introduction

Bullying among adolescents is widely recognized as a global issue, which has resulted in a significant amount of literature and research in the fields of education and psychology [1]. Bullying has been documented to occur in various settings, including educational institutions, households (e.g., sibling bullying), correctional facilities, and workplaces [2, 3]. Due to their increased vulnerability to risk factors at the individual, familial, communal, and societal levels during this developmental stage, adolescents are a priority demographic in the management of public health and education policies [4, 5]. Recent prior work has focused primarily on internal factors such as psychosocial adjustment difficulties or cognitive dissonance [6, 7]. The present article attempted to investigate the influence of environmental factors on adolescents' involvement in campus bullying.

2. Method

The Google Scholar database and the Web of Science database were used to perform this extensive literature review. In regard to school bullying, the following search phrases (and their variations) were entered: "school," "violence," and "bullying." In order to further analyze each environmental factor, the following terms were used for the literature search: "social," "community," "school climate," "family," "parent," "risk," and "factor." These keywords are not present in every literature at the same time. As long as the literature includes some of the above keywords, it is likely to become the object of inclusion. In addition, since this literature review is aimed at teenagers, it will confirm whether the object of the literature is about adolescents when deciding whether to include the literature. Additional articles found in supplemental sources like Proquest were added to create a more thorough literature analysis. According to the following inclusion criteria, studies were chosen. (i) The literature contains some analysis related to the phenomenon or tendency of bullying in school. (ii) The literature is in English. (iii) The target of the literature analysis was adolescent abusers.

3. Environmental Influencing Factors on School Bullying

3.1. Peer Influence

Most of the construction and definition of the many roles that students play in bullying situations occur within the framework of peer interactions. It is indisputable that peer interactions play a vital role in school bully-victim problems [8, 9]. The roles of bullies were categorized as the leader (who initiates and directs the bullying), accomplice (who actively participates in the bullying), and supporter (who finds amusement or provides encouragement for the bullying). In addition to the target, other roles include bully-victim (students who alternate between being a bully and a victim, potentially provoking others and facing retaliation), defender (who offers assistance to the target), and bystander (who witnesses but chooses not to intervene) [10]. In socio-psychological studies, bullies are often described as rejected, controversial, and average-popularity individuals with a wide range of social impacts on their peers [11]. They often have strong positive attitudes towards the use of aggression in peer interactions and often misunderstand peers' intentions, indicating that other students provoke them [1].

However, only a minority of children who bully others lack social skills, indicating that bullying is not a defensive response to an angry situation but rather intends to gain social outcomes [12]. According to the bully dominance hypothesis, it is posited that some children engage in bullying behavior with the intention of assuming a position of authority within their peer group [13]. Bullies who function as ringleaders, garnering support from followers and reinforcement, along with a substantial number of passive bystanders, may experience heightened feelings of gratification. Concerns regarding peer rejection and group status among adolescents reach their peak subsequent to the onset of puberty [14]. There may be heightened motivation during this stage of middle adolescence to engage in bullying behavior (as a means of asserting dominance) and to endorse or reinforce acts of bullying (in order to avoid peer rejection or becoming a target oneself) [10].

3.2. School Climate

School is an important direct influence factor on school bullying because it is the schools and the surrounding schools where bullying occurs. The school climate and school environment heavily influences school bullying [15]. Wherein the atmosphere teachers, administrators, and other employees created, the culture of norms and values, including school punishment, is crucial [16]. Interpersonal school atmosphere and school reactivity to violence are two main categories that can be used to classify these aspects [17]. In terms of Interpersonal school atmosphere, relationships between students as well as those between students and teachers, are indicative of reduced levels of relational aggressiveness [17], which may develop into school bullying. It is possible that school involvement can foster relationships among students and lessen bullying [18]. In terms of school reactivity to violence, if the school attaches importance to the punishment measures for campus bullying, it will effectively restrain the behavior of school bullying. Bullying incidents happen more frequently in public schools than in private ones. It is perhaps because teachers in private schools are typically more concerned with upholding the school's reputation. Bullying is frequently combated to a higher extent there [16]. Moreover, strict punishment will force students to develop a sense of rules. School bullying is often related to issues that are caused by students with a lack of awareness of rules, like breaking the rules or failing to follow the lesson plan [18]. Therefore, cultivating awareness of rules can also help reduce involvement in school bullying.

3.3. Family Environment

Inappropriate parenting is closely related to school bullying. Authoritarian parenting in low socio-economic conditions is associated with more aggressive and reactive violence [19]. These families are more likely to lack cohesion and warmth, have a high need for power, and tolerate aggressive behavior [19]. Experience with a lack of parental supervision or active parental involvement in life is also common for bullies [20].

Family discord also has an impact on school bullying. First, discord between parents and parental conflict can lead to a higher likelihood of violent behaviors in their children [21]. While for parent-child discord, growing up in families where parents fight or where physical or sexual abuse exists is a predictor of children becoming bullies [22].

The socio-economic condition of the family is also an issue. Socio-economic inequality significantly affects violent behaviors [23]. Adolescents with less educated parents are more likely to become bullies [24, 25]. Meanwhile, they are more likely to come from families with low socio-economic status [24], especially from migrant families with low parental education levels and rural hukou [25].

3.4. Social Context

Poor community or neighbourhood environment is an important factor in school bullying [26]. At the community level, school violence is linked to the social context of the school and the low level of community involvement. When it is unsafe, unorganized and aggressive, bullying is more likely to occur [27].

Racist bullying also plays a big part. A markedly religious identity or religious minority status is at a greater risk of school bullying [28]. Besides, immigration and ethnicity are associated with school violence [29]. Bullies are more likely to commit bullying when their targets are ethnic minorities, immigrants or refugees or even when they speak their own language at school [28, 30]. Regarding the ethnic composition of schools, adolescents of minority status are more likely to be bullied when they are the minority group at school, but conversely, they are more likely to commit bullying when they are the majority group [31].

The influence of exposure to media violence on bullying is common. Media violence is indeed associated with aggression. For example, people who play violent video games show more aggression for a short period of time [32, 33]. While exposure to media violence can desensitise people to violence, which means people will gradually become accustomed to the stimulation of media violence [34]. Even many exposed to media for a long never commit violence [35]. However, the potential for violent behaviors increases in the presence of other risk factors for aggressive behaviors [36]. This means that media violence does not act alone on violence but rather interacts with other factors.

4. Implications

Findings suggest that school bullying can be targeted for prevention and intervention from specific factors. These risk factors, including social, school, family, and peer influence, point out what kind of environmental factors are more likely to lead to school bullying for adolescents, which can be controlled or eliminated to combat the problem of bullying. Preventions and interventions should be based on the different characteristics of these contexts to increase the effectiveness of implementation. Meanwhile, these measures require isolated action by society, schools, and families and a linkage among them to fulfil their preventive and intervention roles better.

However, the consistency of findings needs further study. Despite the studies mentioned above and others confirming the impact of these environmental factors, a longitudinal study about peer affiliation did not find significant effects of school environmental factors on bullying or victimization. Moreover, the consistency across countries has been partly demonstrated, while it is difficult to generalise an original finding to a different region [37]. More cross-national research and targeted localisation are still to be done.

Furthermore, recent studies have gradually increased the number of longitudinal studies based on the previous cross-sectional ones. Regarding the role in the longitudinal development of bullying, the influence of school climate, as well as communities and families [38, 39](Bowes et al., 2009), was emphasized. However, more research is still needed to examine the changes in the impact of different factors on school bullying over time, especially in their interactions. Case studies can also be developed to enrich relevant data and information and to explore new research perspectives.

5. Conclusion

This article highlights the importance of the environment in which adolescents live by analyzing and concluding the significant influence of environmental factors on adolescents' involvement in campus bullying. Factors such as family, school, and peers are important aspects of the environmental environment that motivate adolescents to involve in campus bullying. These factors are more easily controlled than internal psychological factors because of their dominant and easily identifiable characteristics. Through the analysis, this article will provide some guidance for the work related to adolescent physical and mental health. By reducing and suppressing the negative factors that affect the bullying of adolescents and paying attention to the mental health status of adolescents, the situation of adolescent bullying may be reduced. For this reason, besides teenagers, people who live and work with adolescents, especially those whose work is closely related to adolescents, such as parents, teachers, and scholars who study adolescent education and mental health, should pay attention to the results and analysis process of this article. So there is an opportunity to improve the environment in which adolescents live in terms of reducing bullying in schools.

Author Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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