

EXPLORATION OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES (KAP) ON BULLYING MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AMONG K-12 TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Bullying is a commonly occurring problem in schools which can lead to many adverse consequences. The present study aimed to explore the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) model on bullying management strategies among K-12 teachers, to understand the current awareness about bullying and its effect among K-12 teachers and to explore the extent to which both genders are bullied.

This study utilizes an exploratory research design. A purposive sampling technique was used and N=20 (10 males and 10 females) K-12 teachers teaching in six different governments and private schools of Islamabad were selected to be interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. The collected data was then analyzed through the thematic analysis scheme.

Eleven major themes were identified: teachers' awareness of the term bullying, the impact of knowledge about the term bullying, different trends of bullying, the attitude of teachers toward bullying, perception of teachers regarding bullying, the harm done by bullying, practices to reduce bullying, the importance of bullying management strategies, suitable students' responses to bullying according to teachers, the reaction of teachers toward acts of bullying teachers and, knowledge of teachers about the extent to which both genders are bullied. Conclusion: The findings of this study help experts from educational departments, policy-makers and psychologists to understand bullying and develop effective training programs for teachers and interventions for students.

Keywords:

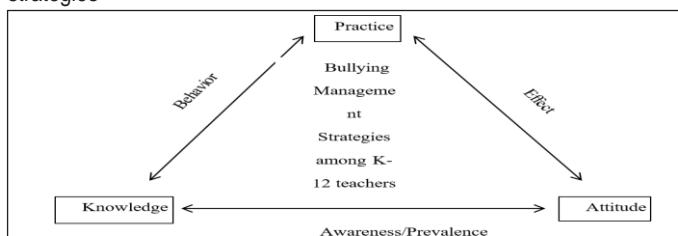
INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as any behaviour or act which has elements of aggression and includes repeatedly undesirable and destructive actions which are caused due to differences in power between the victim and the doer of bullying. There are several forms of bullying which include physical bullying, psychological bullying, verbal bullying, sexual bullying etc. If a student reflects aggressive behaviours one to two times a month, only then is a student considered bullied (UNESCO, 2019, p. 14).

Management strategies are very necessary for minimizing bullying among students. This can be done if teachers become extra vigilant about the happening taking place in classrooms, washrooms, laboratories, playgrounds, canteens etc. as these places are mostly neglected in sense of attention. If a teacher observes any case of bullying, he/she must stop the students and inform the administrators. Parents of the student who bullies others should also be involved but questioning should not be done by the victim as it would hurt the student emotionally by feeling embarrassed. Strict actions should be taken along with the implementation of anti-bullying documents among the schools to set positive expectations (American Psychological Association, 2011). Knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) form a trio which directs and forms a base for all the phases of life on a societal level and these 3 pillars are important for the well-being of the people which not only includes the physical health of the people but mental health too. As far as communities are concerned, people become aware of the knowledge, attitude and practices and make them socially compliant and productive. Knowledge is the ability of people to acquire, attitude is defined as people making interpretations of the knowledge and further forming opinions out of them and practice is the application of the knowledge in the right way to make progress (World Health Organization, 1995, p. 10).

Figure 1

Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) model for bullying management strategies



KAP surveys, which aim to extract whatever is understood (knowledge), thought (attitude), and executed (practiced) in relation to the subject matter, are intended to be representational investigations of the population of interest. Such surveys may evaluate wellness-related attitudes and behaviours to study certain conditions or certain remedies (Andrade et al., 2020). In the current study, we will explore the Knowledge, attitudes and practices of bullying management strategies among K-12 teachers and how these variables are interlinked with one another.

This study aims to explore the Knowledge, attitudes and practices on bullying management strategies among K-12 teachers. This study is significant as there is a lack of literature based on the knowledge, attitude and practices of the teachers regarding bullying behaviour and its prevention of the K-12 students in Pakistan. This study aims to highlight how awareness about bullying among teachers is necessary to deal with such issues and how proper training and management strategies should be adopted to cope with this problem. Bullying among both genders is common, which will be observed through this study highlighting which gender is at greater risk of being bullied.

To conduct this study, we will be using a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey for data collection as this method is easy to execute and it provides essential information making it easy to for analysis and interpretation of the data. KAP survey also helps in focusing on the levels of awareness in any domain and sheds light on how the sample's knowledge, attitude and practices about certain behaviour can be determined leading to the implementation of interventions in different settings such as academia and healthcare (Andrade et al., 2020). To make our study more specific we have chosen to work with a sample of K-12 teachers because they deal with incidents of bullying among their students in one way or another. Thus to investigate the K-12 teacher's knowledge, attitudes and practices on bullying management strategies the topic of our research is "Exploration of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) on bullying management strategies among K-12 teachers"

The research objective of this were to explore knowledge, attitude and behavioral practices about bullying, among K-12 teachers in Pakistan and to understand the current awareness about bullying in both the genders and its effect among K-12 teachers.

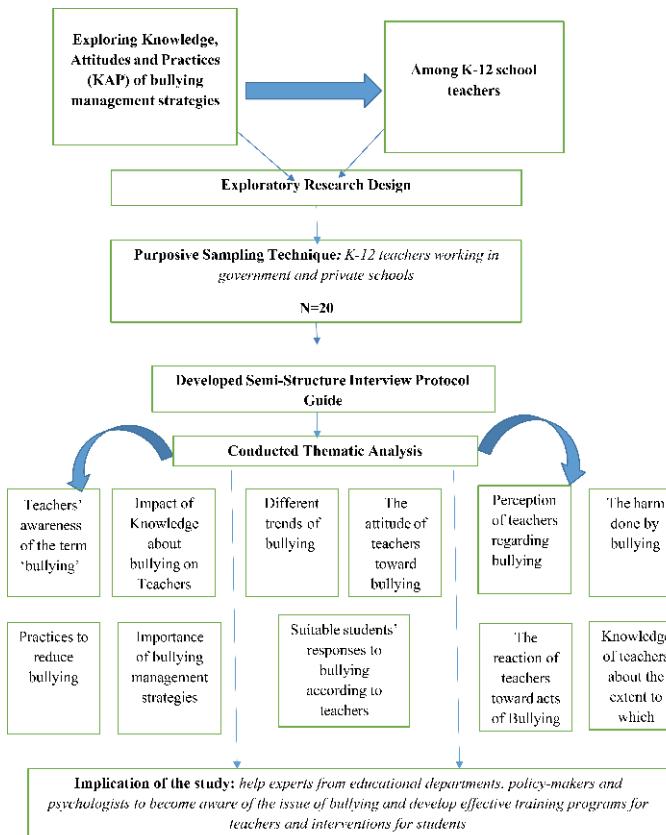
Material and Methodology

After obtaining the ethical review letter from COMSATS ethical review board dated on 5th May 2023 and after following the American Psychological Association's (APA) ethical guidelines for research were taken into account for this study.

This study employed an exploratory research design to examine the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of K-12 teachers toward bullying among students. The aim was to explore the existing issue of bullying, especially given the lack of detailed information about teachers' awareness and responses to it. The exploratory design is particularly useful when limited information is available on a subject, enabling the identification of new insights and associations among variables. In this case, the study focused on uncovering how teachers' knowledge and attitudes shape their approaches to bullying, highlighting the need for greater awareness and understanding of the issue within educational settings. Data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers from both private and government schools in Islamabad, with participants ranging in age from 22 to 50 years. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, ensuring a diverse group in terms of gender, qualifications, and socio-economic backgrounds. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved, meaning that no new significant information emerged from additional interviews. The semi-structured format allowed for in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and perspectives, with open-ended questions focused on their knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding bullying management.

Thematic analysis was used to process and analyze the interview data. After transcribing the audio recordings, the researchers coded the data and identified recurring themes and patterns. This method allowed for the identification of both individualistic and collective themes, offering insights into how different teachers perceive and address bullying. Thematic analysis also ensured that the findings were not just descriptive but provided a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding bullying in schools. Through this process, the study contributed valuable knowledge to the field, highlighting the gaps in teachers' understanding and the need for further professional development in managing bullying.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



RESULTS

In this chapter, the data collected from the sample was analyzed to assess teachers' awareness, perceptions, and responses toward bullying, with eleven key themes identified. The analysis revealed important insights into how K-12 teachers understand and approach bullying in schools. These themes included teachers' awareness of bullying, the impact of knowledge about bullying, the different trends and types of bullying, teachers' attitudes and perceptions, and the consequences of bullying. The study also explored teachers' practices to reduce bullying, the importance of management strategies, and their understanding of appropriate student responses and their reactions to bullying incidents.

Teachers generally demonstrated awareness of the term bullying, understanding it as verbal, physical, emotional, and harmful behavior. However, their definitions varied based on personal beliefs. Knowledge about bullying was found to be essential for teachers in addressing bullying situations effectively, though many respondents indicated a lack of comprehensive understanding. This lack of awareness highlighted the need for training and professional development to enhance teachers' ability to identify and manage bullying situations, particularly since students often report bullying to peers rather than to staff.

The study also examined the different trends of bullying, identifying a connection between bullying and both aggressive behaviors and emotional vulnerabilities like low self-esteem. Teachers noted that bullying often leads to academic and social struggles for victims and perpetrators alike. Teachers expressed a generally negative attitude toward bullying, recognizing its harmful psychological effects, such as anxiety and depression. Despite this awareness, many teachers felt ill-equipped to handle bullying effectively and called for more training to enhance their response strategies and prevent bullying in schools.

In terms of addressing bullying, teachers emphasized the importance of implementing bullying management strategies, such as increasing monitoring and providing psychological support for victims. Practices to reduce bullying included fostering awareness, using counseling, and creating anti-bullying committees. Teachers also identified the significance of gender differences in bullying, noting that boys are often more involved in physical bullying, while girls tend to be more emotionally affected. The study underscored the need for comprehensive approaches that involve both students and educators in tackling bullying, with clear, consistent strategies to prevent and respond to such incidents.

DISCUSSIONS

The first major theme that was highlighted was the impact of knowledge about bullying on teachers. When asked about their knowledge of the term 'bullying', most of the K-12 teachers responded with a lack of knowledge, the participants responded in the following manner

"No such management strategies have been taken so I have no idea so far". "I don't have enough knowledge about bullying or its management".

This shows that the majority of respondents believed that they lack knowledge about bullying and its management strategies. Thus, they are not equipped enough to fully understand or describe the term 'bullying'.

Research findings showed that new teachers do not describe bullying in terms of the three characteristics of intent to harm, recurrence, and power imbalance received some support.

Most studies found that new teachers failed to include all three characteristics of bullying when asked to define or discuss bullying. This finding shows that preservice teachers might not have adequate knowledge of the fundamental characteristics of bullying (Dawes et al., 2022). Questions asked about how one would deal with bullying situations were answered in the following way "Making the children aware of their behavior and making them think of what it would be like to be in their shoes".

"Once people realize what bullying is and how it affects other people then they would be more careful with their words and actions".

This shows that most of the K-12 teachers believe that creating awareness about bullying actions and behaviors is the key step to tackling the problem of bullying.

When acting to stop bullying, teachers have a variety of options at their use, some of which are thought to be more effective than others. Do teachers who believe in their own abilities more often make different strategic decisions than those who do not? When questioned preschool and school instructors were to indicate how they would react to a specified bullying scenario, they were unable to find any correlation. As demonstrated, teachers should have confidence in their ability to stop bullying. But according to several studies, both in-service and pre-service teachers feel unprepared to deal with bullying and exhibit a wish to get training to control bullying (Fischer et al., 2020).

When asked about how teachers can apply the knowledge of bullying management strategies, most of the respondents replied

"Applying management strategies in early cases of bullying always seems wise before things get serious".

"I will create awareness among students that bullying exists and will guide parents and children about this that they need to give attention to bullying". This shows that teachers can apply the knowledge regarding bullying management strategies in a positive way leading to fruitful results, but this is only possible if enough training is given to teachers to cope with the issue of bullying, as stated by teachers

"Management strategies on bullying are never taught in schools".

"At the school level, they don't take bullying as an issue so no management strategies are there regarding bullying".

According to existing literature, teachers' attitudes towards bullying, their inability to understand which ways to take action against bullying, and their limited awareness of bullying and its effects on students are the primary explanations of the disparity in views between educators and pupils regarding intervention in bullying conduct (Kucukturan & Gokler, 2012).

Knowledge regarding different trends of bullying was also interviewed in which respondents replied to the forms of bullying

"Current trends of bullying are verbally harassing others to degrade them or to lower their social standing, spreading rumors".

"Making fun of kids in class based on their clothes, bags, backgrounds, the color of their skin, and grades".

This shows that teachers know about different forms of bullying including the signs of bullying which include "low confidence", "introvert", "withdrawal" and "self-doubt".

Instructors need to understand the definition of bullying, be aware of how it affects those who are impacted unfavorably, are prepared to manage instances of bullying and be aware of the best strategies to employ in such circumstances (Oldenburg et al., 2016)

Bullying can lead to fear among students and to these statement teachers replied in this manner "Ustad ko chhye ke wo bacho k mental level ko samjh saky aur unke nafseeyat ko samjhey aur unke har qism k masail may unka sath de ker unka dar khatam ker saky".

This shows that bullying has a great impact on the lives of the students which not only harms them emotionally but socially and academically leading to feelings of personal failure and rejection.

Bullying can be the cause of significant adverse emotional and somatic implications, consisting of anxiety, depressive disorders, low self-worth, lower participation in academics, isolation, and sensory overload, in addition to thoughts about committing suicide and even committing acts of suicide. According to researchers, victims of bullying may also experience similar characteristics associated with child abuse and neglect (Plexousakis et al., 2019).

This can be proved by the responses of the participants which are as follows
"It adds negatively to their personal growth".

"It leads to emotional harm Social harm Physical harm".

The knowledge regarding the importance of bullying management strategies can be explained through the major themes of the benefits of intervention, the importance of teacher training, and the lack of teacher training or intervention. The usefulness of intervention can also be explained in a way that knowledge regarding interventions to tackle the problem of bullying is the key to eradicating the issue of bullying.

Suspension and expulsion of students who engage in bullying, training for educators regarding intervention, lessons in classrooms teaching respect and compassion to learners, steady monitoring by adults in an institution, working together with student's parents regarding their conduct, and the implementation of anti-bullying guidelines across the entire school are all examples of tactics for intervention. After the Columbine High School shootings in 1999, bullying guidelines were introduced in the US. In light of growing knowledge concerning pupil misbehavior and concerns about the security of educational institutions, these measures have become more widespread. The term the word "policy relates to a broad range of enforcement mechanisms, encompassing legislation, regulations, guidelines, and directives. The legal position and power of the person who created the policy determine how these terms are defined. At all three levels of government in the United States, policies governing K-12 education, including those about bullying in schools, can be developed (Hall, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to explore knowledge, attitudes, and practices about bullying management strategies among K-12 teachers. It was found that the majority of the K-12 school teachers did have little knowledge about the term bullying which does affect their knowledge and perception, but the level of knowledge was not up to mark for the teachers to fully understand the nature of bullies along with the different types and trends of bullying existing in today's modern time. Thus this insufficient knowledge creates an obstacle to deeply understanding bullying behaviors, identifying different bullying acts, and taking effective, timely action against them to minimize such incidents in the future. Teachers also adopt various practices to control the problem of bullying among their students according to their understanding which may or may not be fruitful in reducing bullying behaviors and providing support to victims. In addition, as a result of the current knowledge, attitudes, and practices present, bullying awareness is present among some but not all of the K-12 teachers. However, the current level of awareness among teachers is not sufficient enough to control the problem of bullying and more awareness needs to be spread to effectively tackle this problem in Pakistani schools as awareness is the first key step in understanding the nature of the problem, identifying the root cause of the bullying behaviors and also understanding the negative consequences that bullying yields which can be dangerous for the victims. Furthermore, the current study also sheds light on how bullying does not discriminate against genders, it can and does affect both genders. Hence, it would not be inappropriate to assume that one gender may be more bullied than the other or that one is more sensitive to the mental and physical damage and harm caused by such bullying acts than another. So educators need to be mindful of this to correctly identify bullying behaviors and incidents among their students to effectively manage situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation for current study is to manage bullying behaviors and incidents by developing anti-bullying committees and policies. The school administration should also focus on including effective bullying management strategies as a part of their teacher's training and should also conduct seminars for teachers and students to create more awareness regarding the increasing issue of bullying.

LIMITATIONS

The current study has some limitations in terms of sample selection. The sample for this study was based on only a limited number of teachers which included only twenty teachers. In addition, there is a literature gap regarding bullying and its management strategies specifically related to Pakistan.

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Active Participation in Methodology	RK, ZS
Interpretation Analysis & Discussion	RK

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None Declared

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Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.