

Teachers and bully teenagers in the Saudi society



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work was studying the problem of bullying among adolescent pupils from the teachers' perspective in Ha'il, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It also attempted to describe the characteristics of bullies and their victims. The objective of the study was to identify how Saudi teachers diagnose the problem of school bullying and deal with it. The study used both diagnostic and descriptive methods. A survey was conducted in public education schools. The sample of this study consisted of 346 male teachers. The researchers used the Richard Geiger equation to determine the size of the study sample individuals and determine the targeted sample size. The results of the study show that from the teacher's point of view, bullying follows a pattern that reaches its peak at the middle school stage, when the students are in their teens, and then it tends to decrease by the end of high school years. The effects of bullying deeply influence the future of the victims. Further, the sample of the study considered the factors outside the school environment, associated with the social environment in general, to be the main motivations and causes of school bullying. The results of the study are consistent with the studies that identify the serious effects that bullying has on its victims including shame, introversion, fear, and learning difficulties, and show that bullies deliberately challenge moral obligation and transgress social norms and consider them as motivation and justification for bullying. The results of the current study are also in line with what other studies have confirmed that teachers are essential actors in the educational process who can play a crucial role in diagnosing and addressing the problem of bullying. The advantages of controlling peer-to-peer conflict are limited as compared to understanding and directing the very nature of adolescence and the peer culture. The study recommends training programs for the teachers and supervisors. Sports, cultural and recreational activities must be given prime importance. Further, scientific research and monitoring centers should be funded so that this problem can be handled effectively.

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1. Introduction

School life represents a life experience for adolescents in the process of building their character. It contains positive aspects such as attaining cognitive development, building social relationships, acquiring responsibility, and achieving independence. However, it may also turn into a painful experience and suffering that continues

through the rest of life. It seems that exposure to violence in its physical and symbolic forms appears to be one of the most conspicuous factors in difficult childhood or adolescence experience. Currently, it is a well-known fact that peer violence is a prominent aspect of this experience which is clearly reflected in the phenomenon of school bullying.

Bullying is a complex behavior associated with a number of dimensions including health, education, and age. It has remained the focus of research since the early 1970s. It has been commonly defined as a deliberate act of aggression by a group or individual repeatedly and over a certain period against a victim who cannot easily defend himself (Farrington, 1993; Hymel and Swearer, 2015; Olweus, 1978; Smith, 2014; Swearer et al., 2010).

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This area continues to attract the attention of the researchers who attempted to characterize bullying, measure its spread, characteristics, and forms, and analyze its motivation and effects (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017). Various research studies show that bullying penetrates different societies. With technological advancement, it has transcended the traditional social environment and transformed into cyberbullying on social media (Field, 2018; Durak and Saritepeci, 2020).

Bullying has also attracted the attention of certain international organizations (UNICEF, 2017). Familiar face violence in the lives of children and adolescents considers bullying to be a verbal or physical assault by a pupil or group of pupils against a less powerful and less influential fellow. It happens when one pupil or a group of pupils say bad, obscene, or disturbing things to another pupil. It also occurs when a pupil is repeatedly harassed or when deliberately excluded from peer-to-peer activities. Bullying is not a quarrel between two pupils of the same strength or harassment in a friendly or funny manner.

Bullying inflicts pain and physical harm through speech or harmful behavior (UNESCO, 2018). Unlike isolated incidents of peer-to-peer abuse, it is a frequent behavior. Various surveys measure it based on the indicator set in the 2018 development goals according to which bullying is when the victim is exposed to such behavior at least once or twice a month' (UNESCO, 2019).

World Health Organization, (WHO, 2021) defined bullying (including E-bullying) as undesirable aggressive behavior by a group of children or adolescents who have no relationship with the victim. It involves constant physical, psychological or social harm, often in schools and other places where children and adolescents gather physically or online.

Richardson and Fen Hui (2018) considered that the bullying outbreak highlighted current shortcomings in the social system and the possibility of future social losses. Therefore, addressing this problem is important because parents, teachers, decision-makers, and policymakers have a responsibility to ensure that the pupils under their care are safe from all physical, psychological, and social harm. Teachers have received considerable attention as they are the key actors in the educational process and an indispensable party in diagnosing, dealing with, and treating the problem (Yoon and Bauman, 2014). The researchers note that analyzing the role of the teacher within the school to address this problem helps to make therapeutic and preventive programs work (De Luca et al., 2019). Studies conducted on the teachers' ways of dealing with bullying in schools illustrated that there was a difference in their attitudes and methodologies.

From these viewpoints, it can be said that teaching staff is among the most reliable sources to learn about the characteristics of the problem and ways to prevent and treat them. The closeness to the pupils allows teachers to accurately diagnose the prevalence of the problem and identify the bullies as well as the victims.

Bullying is widespread all over the world and is constantly increasing, with over one in three pupils aged (13-15) suffering from peer bullying on a global scale. An almost identical proportion of pupils engage in physical assault. While the risk of assault is generally similar for both genders, females are more vulnerable to forms of psychological and symbolic assault, while males are at a greater risk of physical violence and threats (UNICEF, 2017; Gauthier, 2007).

School bullying is considered great health and educational problem within Saudi society. UNICEF (2017) reported that 27% of young Saudis aged (13-15) were reported to be exposed to bullying and peer-to-peer violence which is spreading worldwide (UNICEF, 2017).

This phenomenon is in opposition to the objectives set by the Saudi Official Education Policy in the field of education which aims at providing adults with different skills and knowledge and improving constructive behavioral trends in accordance with their ages (MOE, 2021a). There are 203.000 public education schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with 390.000 teachers and more than 105.000 administrative staff, accommodating more than 4.5 million children and adolescents (MOE, 2021b). Therefore, schools offer a very important social environment with both positive and negative aspects. They can, however, bring several risks for the younger generations including the risks of violence, assaults, and dangerous behavior.

In addition to activating awareness campaigns aiming at 'raising awareness of the phenomenon of bullying among school staff, pupils and parents, and involving them in the process of addressing the behavior of aggression within and outside the school' (NFSP, 2021), the Saudi government has been interested in implementing a research project entitled 'Track Study to Measure Effect of the Peer Violence Prevention Program in Schools'.

This project is an extension of comprehensive surveys on school bullying as part of the 'Undesirable Childhood Experiences', which have spread in Saudi society and have a significant negative effect on the life of the pupils (AlMuneef et al., 2018). In particular, these experiences are represented by domestic and social violence and physical, sexual, and psychological child bullying.

The findings show that in the first 18 years of their lives, nearly 32% of the sample had experienced four or more types of poor childhood experiences (AlMuneef et al., 2014). The study also monitored the expansion of this phenomenon in the unsafe school environment, concluding that a few of its most serious effects are children's hatred towards school, racism, aggression, and isolation. (AlBuhairan et al., 2016). Some researchers have also observed that exposure to bullying in childhood increases the possibility of dangerous behavior in adults and recommended the prevention of bullying to be included on the Ministry of Education's national agenda (AlMuneef et al., 2018).

The research studies conducted in Saudi universities address the phenomenon of school

bullying and its causes at the family, educational, social, and school levels (Alsubhin and Alqudat, 2013). They also have diagnosed its implications and effects on the level of psychosocial adaptation among pupils with learning disabilities (Abu Al-Diyar, 2012). Other studies have attempted to identify patterns of e-bullying and concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between e-bullying and traditional school violence practices (Al-Enezi and Obaid, 2017). Some researchers studied the factors related to the teachers' awareness of the phenomenon of school bullying, their training to handle it, and the effectiveness of the role of social workers in this area. They concluded that although there is awareness of the riskiness of the phenomenon, there is a need to develop awareness, educational and therapeutic programs. In addition to the Olweus (1978) Bullying Prevention Program that aims at reducing existing bullying problems among students, there is a need to further train teachers with advanced approaches and strategies to cope with this problem (Al-Qahtani, 2008; Bentan, 2019).

With this backdrop, the present research aims at studying the problem of bullying among adolescent pupils from the teachers' perspective in Saudi society through a survey in Ha'il which is in the North of KSA. Teachers, being the closest individuals to the pupils in terms of social and educational development, are not only responsible for their education, but also the reformation of their behaviors.

The objective of the study is to identify how Saudi teachers diagnose the phenomenon of school bullying and how they treat it. The subsidiary objectives are to:

1. Determine the definition of bullying and its prevalence in the school from the teachers' viewpoint
2. Determine the description of teachers for bullies
3. Identify teachers' descriptions of the pupils who are victims of bullying
4. Survey teachers' ways of treating bullying and preventing it

2. Research methodology

The study uses both diagnostic and descriptive methods. It is based on an analysis of related literature regarding the phenomenon of bullying. It attempts to identify the manifestation of bullying in Saudi society (Ha'il region in the north of the Kingdom). A survey was conducted in public education schools. The sample of this study consisted of 320 male teachers having 5-15 years of professional experience.

2.1. Research sample

Table 1 is a detailed description of the sample of the research.

Table 1: Research sample

No.	Education	No. of schools	No. of teachers
1	Preparatory	106	1768
2	Elementary	57	896
3	High	42	866
	Total	205	3530

The researchers used the Richard Geiger equation to determine the size of the study sample individuals and determine the targeted sample size as given in Eq. 1.

$$n = \frac{\left(\frac{z}{d}\right)^2 \times (0.50)^2}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left[\left(\frac{z}{d}\right)^2 \times (0.50)^2 - 1\right]} \quad (1)$$

where n is targeted sample size, N is the size of the study population, z is standard score corresponding to (0.95) standard level equals (1.96), and d is allowable error rate equals (0.05).

Based on the above-given equation, the size of the targeted sample was determined, i.e., 346. The following steps were followed for simple random sampling:

- The researcher chose the neighborhood location through the administrative division of the city of Ha'il (central, North, South, East, and West).
- The number of schools in each department or educational institution has been determined to include all stages of school (preparatory, elementary, and secondary).
- A random sample of schools was selected and then the questionnaires were distributed among the teachers.
- Based on the application, 26 questionnaires were excluded, and the number of correct questionnaires was 320.

2.2. Statistical methods

This study used the following statistical methods:

- Repetitions and percentages
- Arithmetic mean
- Calculating the mean according to the Likert Quadrant Scale through the Eq. 1:
- Range=(largest value-smallest value)
- Mean=4-1=3
- Determining the length of confidence limits through the equation
- Length of confidence=mean÷number of questionnaire responses
- Length of confidence limits=3÷4=0.7
- Add the length of the confidence limits to the smallest value to get the following rating:
- If the value of the arithmetic mean for the paragraph ranges between (1) and (1.75) the response score is classified as "unaccepted"
- If the value of the arithmetic mean for the paragraph ranges between (1.76) and (2.50) the response score is classified as "neutral"

- if the value of the arithmetic mean for the paragraph ranges between (2.51) and (3.26) the response score is classified as "accept"
- If the value of the arithmetic mean for the paragraph ranges between (3.26) and (4) the response score is classified as "strongly accept"

2.3. Questionnaire

An e-questionnaire was designed to match research objectives. It was then arbitrated by external competent arbitrators and tested procedurally on a small group which was approximately 10% of the total sample. Later, the necessary amendments were made to reduce the margin of error, bring clarity in questions to get accurate answers.

3. Results and discussions

3.1. Diagnosis of bullying from the teachers' viewpoint

Teachers define bullying as childhood and adolescent experience (65.63%) It is a result of imbalances in the pattern of socialization, upbringing, and education (34.37%). This problem is moderately widespread (28.13%) but this percentage is considered weak as only (12.5 %) of those who consider it to be widespread are important. However, what is more, noticeable is the percentage of those participants who consider bullying as being rare. This leads to the assumption that they may have a different definition of bullying or a special assessment of such behavior.

As shown in Fig. 1, 62.5 % of the participants have considered that bullying increases in the school environment, and the majority believe that it follows a pattern, which starts from preparatory school and reaches its peak in elementary school but begins to decline in high school.

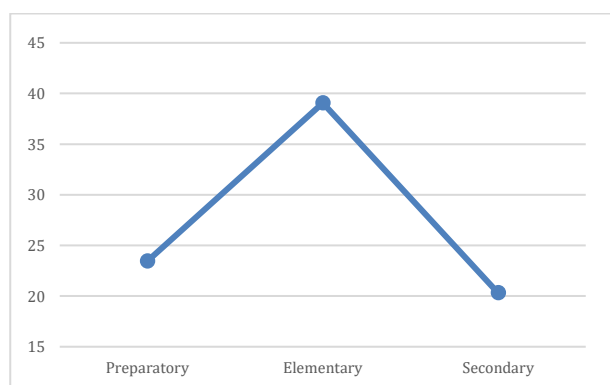


Fig. 1: The pattern of the phenomenon of bullying rises and decreases due to school stages

3.1.1. Spatial and time areas of the spread of school bullying

As for the places where bullying spreads, 80% of the sample considered it to be the school. It is

particularly high in places such as the schoolyard and is considerably less in passageways, stairs, and toilets. But it spreads at a great rate outside the school environment (20%). The places where bullying spreads are shown in Fig. 2.

In terms of the times at which bullying takes place, the majority of the sample felt that it increases in the absence of monitoring, particularly during breaks (42.19%); when the teacher is temporarily away from the classroom (34.38%); and at the time of leaving school when the pupils are in the streets (20.31%).

3.1.2. School bullying patterns

The study illustrates that school bullying has different forms, including physical and symbolic. Verbal violence is ranked at the top (92.19%), followed by the mockery of physical structure (obesity, extreme thinness, disability, and pronunciation) (89.06%), and then physical violence (kicking, pushing with hands and legs) (60.94%). The new form, e-bullying, that is bullying through text messages and posting pictures reaches 62.50%.

The percentage of 54.69% from the sample considered that the mockery of academic performance (poor scores, making mistakes, learning difficulties, and stumbling) is among the common patterns of mockery. It is followed by mockery based on social class or level (poverty, wealth, and father's profession) (48.44%). The blackmailing behavior comes towards the end which results in exclusion from peer group activities (45.31%).

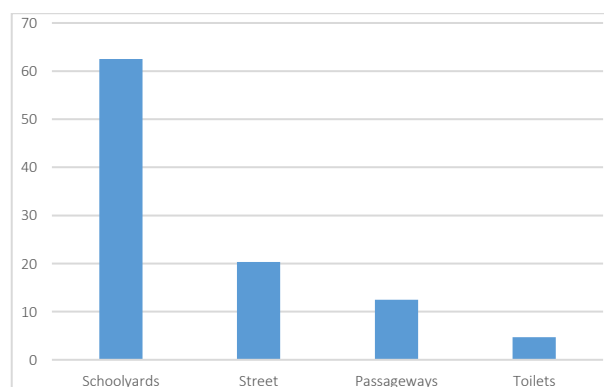


Fig. 2: Places where bullying spreads

3.1.3. Teachers' description of bully pupils

The sample defined the pupils who committed bullying in terms of physical structure, social, educational, and behavioral characteristics. 76.56% of the sample agreed that the pupils who commit bullying often have strong physical structure and are mostly elder peers. This characterization is in line with the results of most of the studies that claim bullies to be dominant and strong.

As reported by the sample, bullies do not have a high educational level (73.44%). They belong to different social groups and their social class is not, in

any way, related to school bullying. Moreover, the bullies have some interconnected characteristics. They are naughty, do not follow the rules, do not respect the authority of supervisors (90.63%), are irregular in their studies (82.81%), and their behavior is physically violent (96.88 %).

3.1.4. Teachers' description of bullying victims

The sample diagnosed the pupils as bullying victims based on their physical, psychological, and social specificity. Bullying victims include younger pupils (89.06%), pupils with physical specificities, such as obesity, extreme thinness, and speech stumbles (79.69%), and on a psychological level, pupils with weak character (93.75%) and pupils with prominent signs of shyness and introversion (82.81%). These characteristics motivate bullying and maybe, at the same time, are the consequences of being bullied. As shown in Fig. 3, socially, most of the victims belong to less affluent levels. Only 18.75% of the sample consider affluent pupils as victims. In addition, more than half of the pupils who are being assaulted are from outside the region. A significant number of victims are academically outstanding (32.81%), but a large number suffer from school failure. The question arises as to whether this is one of the driving reasons for being a victim of bullying or the resulting effect. Bullying also has a direct effect on academic performance.

3.1.5. Causes and motivations for bullying

The study illustrated that teachers believe that bullying is mainly caused due to factors outside the school. On the one hand, it is caused due to external factors like friends coming to school (3.34), poor family discipline (3.30), social culture (3.19), and media content promoting violence, conflict, and physical strength (3.13). On the other hand, the effect of internal factors, i.e., those associated with relational patterns within the school, is reduced, for example, the influence of colleagues within the school (2.84), is followed by the factor of poor awareness within the school (2.70) and then the responsibility of the school to secure controls (2.63).

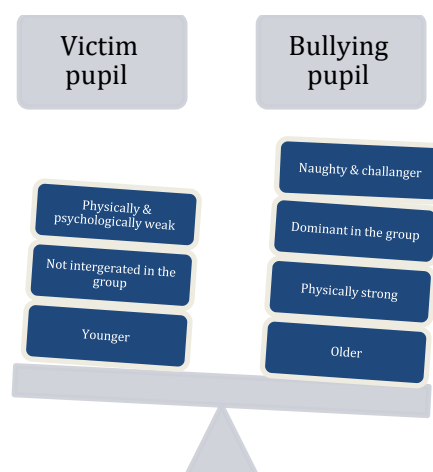


Fig. 3: Power imbalance in bullying

3.1.6. The effects of bullying on victims

The majority of the sample confirmed that school bullying has a strong effect on the victims' social behavior due to which they are unable to interact and form groups. Bullying leads to psychological difficulties such as introversion, isolation, and loss of self-confidence. All of these have a direct impact on school performance since the victim may face educational difficulties. The sample did not deny the negative effects of bullying on health (50%).

3.2. Forms of teacher's dealing with bullying and its prevention

3.2.1. Dealing with bullying

The sample considered that school bullying is now a part of childhood and adolescence although they did not deny that it reflected an imbalance in the way of upbringing as stated in the definition of bullying. Perhaps, this was the view that made them believe that school bullying had to be dealt with by using educational methodologies. Protecting victims from the assault and then warning and monitoring the bullies are their main aims. This three-way combination is about protection, warning, monitoring, and guiding, which the teacher uses to reduce the negative effects of bullying. They resort to the punitive method only when it is inevitable. Furthermore, teachers also turn to parents and hold them accountable but at a relatively low ratio (45.31%) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Forms teachers' actions against bullying

Variable	%
Taking punitive actions	85.94%
Just inform parents and hold them accountable	45.31%
Awareness and guidance	90.63%
Warning	92.19%
Protecting the victims	93.75%
Monitoring	92.19%

3.2.2. Bullying prevention

Teachers' educational methodology confirms their perceptions of the prevention of school bullying and its negative effects. It is a participatory awareness methodology based on the principle of guidance and reforms by teachers' and parents' collaboration with the help of competent authorities and experts as well as conducting research studies to understand and address the problem. The regulatory solution remains available as violent behavior may go beyond its simple verbal or provocative character to become seriously harmful. Table 3 shows forms of bullying prevention.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study have followed the general trend set by previous studies in diagnosing school bullying since this problem attracted the attention of many researchers by the end of the

1970s. While the recent studies highlighted that the severity of the problem is increasing, its dimensions and the characteristics of those concerned have not gone beyond the generally applicable framework. However, there have been some developments in the forms of bullying such as the emergence of e-bullying. The research also conformed to the results of previous research studies that identified the effects of bullying on its victims and its impact on them in the next stages of their lives. These effects are interrelated having psychological (shyness, introspection, fear, learning difficulties, etc.) and relational (introversion, inability to integrate, exclusion, etc) dimensions.

Table 3: The forms of bullying prevention

Variables	%
Supporting social and psychological guidance	100.00%
Training courses for teachers	76.56%
Involving parents in preventing bullying	93.75%
Taking deterrent regulatory action	84.38%
Adopting educational methods to develop the spirit of cooperation and acceptance of the other	93.75%
Contacting concerned authorities or specialists to treat the phenomenon.	87.50%
Conducting studies and researches to understand, interpret and treat the phenomenon	89.06%

These effects have a deep impact on the future of victims as a result of their poor and difficult childhood experiences (AlBuhairan et al., 2016; AlMuneef et al., 2018; Blake et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2017; Field, 2018; Gini et al., 2008; Hutzell and Payne, 2012; Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017; Richardson and Fen Hui, 2018; Salmivalli and Isaacs, 2005; Smith, 2014; UNESCO, 2019; Durak and Saritepeci, 2020). The interrelated effects of bullying are shown in Fig. 4.

The research confirmed that bullying follows a pattern that reaches its peak in elementary school and is commensurate with the adolescence stage. This is in agreement with the results of research studies that analyzed the content of 153 specialized studies that bullying reaches its peak between the ages of 12 to 15. It then tends to decline by the end of high school years (Cook et al., 2010) with the possibility that it will then turn from its physical form to relational form (Rivers and Smith, 1994).

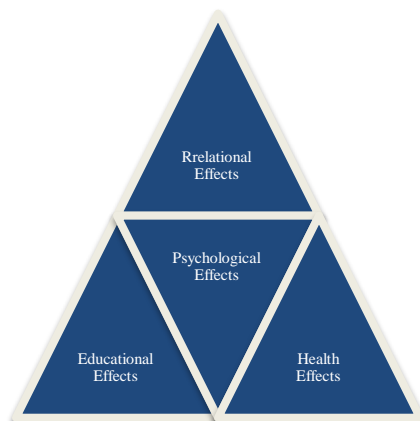


Fig. 4: School bullying interrelated effects

The research confirmed that the schoolyard is the main place where bullying behavior takes place as pupils gather without direct supervision from teachers and supervisors and therefore can freely express their attitudes. 'Symbolic interactive' theory considers schoolyard as a stage, where roles are determined, just like in a theatre, between actors: hero, victim, and audience (Goffman, 1959). However, this phenomenon has gone beyond the boundaries of the schoolyard and extended to the streets as well as to the virtual space via text messages and images on social media. From this point of view, the symbolic interactive dimension is essential in studying school bullying. The advantages of controlling peer-to-peer conflict are limited as compared to understanding and directing the very nature of adolescence and the peer culture. Adolescence is the stage of keeping pace with society by accepting and understanding social standards.

The result of the study is in line with the previous studies in clarifying the power imbalance between the bully teenager and his victim. The present research focuses on male adolescents only. The previous studies also claim that boys are more likely to be bullying victims and some researchers are also of the view that there are gender differences in bullying patterns. Most of the studies agree that males are more likely to be engaged in physical bullying and physical assault, while female bullying is more likely to be verbal and relational. This is confirmed by the World Health Organization, (WHO, 2021) which states that 'boys are usually more likely to be physically bullied while girls are more likely to be psychologically bullied' the diagnosis of the characteristics of bullies shows that they are unable to understand social ideals and standards. Therefore, they lack social skills and have an imbalance in their social adaptation patterns. This study conforms to the results of previous studies, that to drive and justify bullying, bullies think of bullying as a moral commitment and they exceed discipline to gain social advantages (Caravita et al., 2014; Herge et al., 2016; Hutzell and Payne, 2012).

However, other studies have considered that the character of the bullies cannot be understood from a single angle and their motivations vary according to their situations. They may have 'Narcissism' psychological dimensions, a sense of grandeur, arrogance, and emotional cruelty manifested in a lack of empathy or shyness (Reijntjes et al., 2016). Moreover, it may also be their way to integrate into a group and win the support of its members (Toblin et al., 2005).

The study sample considered the factors outside the school environment, associated with the social environment in general, to be the main motivations and causes of school bullying. However, they did not deny that teachers had the main responsibility to confront it by adopting educational techniques (including protection of victims, warning the bullies, and raising awareness), using a participatory approach (by the contribution of parents, specialists, and experts), and conducting studies (to further

understand the problem). To achieve this, training programs for teachers and supervisors in schools are needed. The importance of taking punitive measures in case of serious damage and outbreak cannot be denied. From this viewpoint, this study is consistent with other studies which have illustrated that the teachers are key elements in the educational process and an indispensable party in the diagnosis and treatment of bullying (De Luca et al., 2019; Yoon and Bauman, 2014). They also play an important role in warning the pupils that this behavior is unacceptable and harmful (Saarento et al., 2015).

If the teacher adopts a passive attitude towards bullying and does not intervene in confronting it and protecting the victims, s/he is indirectly encouraging it. Psychological and social care for victims is, therefore, of great importance (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017), and to achieve this objective, there is a need for various actors in the educational process to cooperate (Troop-Gordon and Ladd, 2015). The effect of the most commonly used strict punishing methodology, ranging from a warning to dismissal, has been proven to be limited and relatively not very effective.

5. Recommendations

This study recommends that the problems of bullying should be considered as a trans-social phenomenon. There is a need for collaboration at an international level in terms of sharing practices and conducting studies to confront and prevent bullying. Taking advantage of the international programs will help in this regard. As bullying is considered a social, educational, and health problem, there is a need to establish a collaborative approach at the national level to address and prevent it. For example, educational institutions, media, communications, social workers, and psychologists should work together to achieve this goal.

The study also recommends establishing regulations for the schools which are specifically facing the problem of bullying ensuring that the victims of bullying are quickly monitored and taken care of and the bullies are tracked and followed up. In order to strengthen positive relationships and spirit of cooperation among pupils and direct their energies towards healthy competition, sports, cultural and recreational activities must be given prime importance. There is a need for training courses to support the teachers in enhancing their competence to deal with bullying in school. Scientific research and monitoring centers should be funded so that the dangerous behaviors in young people can be studied and addressed.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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