



Social Class and Bullying Behavior among Female High School Students of Sargodha, Pakistan

Hamna Khalid

*BS Scholar, Department of Sociology & Criminology,
University of Sargodha
Hamna9126@gmail.com*

Kaleem Ullah

*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology,
University of Sargodha
Kaleem.ullah@uos.edu.pk*

Abstract

Bullying is a pervasive social problem with significant implications for adolescent development and school safety. While extensive research has examined bullying as an individual or psychological issue, fewer studies have explored it from a criminological and structural perspective, particularly in relation to social class. This study investigates the relationship between socio-economic class and bullying behavior among female high school students in Sargodha, Pakistan. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 120 students selected through stratified random sampling from public and private secondary schools. Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were employed to examine patterns, forms, and frequency of bullying across socio-economic groups. Findings reveal a high prevalence of bullying, with students from relatively lower socio-economic backgrounds reporting significantly higher exposure to frequent and repeated bullying. Bullying was also found to have adverse academic, psychological, and social consequences. From a criminological perspective, the results highlight bullying as a form of everyday social victimization shaped by class-based power relations within school environments. The study underscores the need for class-sensitive, preventive, and policy-oriented interventions to address bullying as a social harm rather than merely an individual behavioral problem.

Keywords: *Bullying, Social Class, Victimization, Criminology, Adolescents, Pakistan*



Introduction

Bullying represents one of the most common forms of violence and victimization experienced by adolescents in educational institutions worldwide. Criminology increasingly recognizes bullying as an early manifestation of aggressive and deviant behavior that reflects broader social inequalities and power structures. Within school settings, bullying operates as a mechanism through which dominance, exclusion, and control are exercised, often mirroring wider socio-economic hierarchies present in society.

Social class plays a critical role in shaping students' vulnerability to victimization. Adolescents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds often lack social capital, institutional support, and power, making them more susceptible to repeated bullying. Despite the growing international literature on bullying and inequality, empirical research from developing countries, particularly Pakistan, remains limited. Moreover, most existing studies approach bullying from psychological or educational perspectives, neglecting its criminological dimensions.

This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between social class and bullying behavior among female high school students in Sargodha. By framing bullying as a form of social victimization influenced by structural inequality, the research contributes to criminological debates on youth victimization, social harm, and inequality in institutional settings.

Literature Review

Bullying as a Form of Social Victimization

Bullying involves repeated aggressive behavior characterized by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. Criminological perspectives conceptualize bullying as low-level but persistent victimization that can normalize aggression and contribute to later delinquency. Victims of bullying often experience psychological trauma, social exclusion, and academic disengagement, increasing their long-term



risk of marginalization. (Ahmad, W.A., et al (2020) Trends in bullying & emotional, behavioral difficulties among Pakistani School Children. Journal Interpersonal violence.

Socio-Economic Status and Bullying

Research consistently demonstrates a relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and increased exposure to bullying. Studies have shown that income inequality, relative deprivation, and low social status within schools heighten the risk of victimization. From a criminological standpoint, bullying can be understood as a manifestation of structural inequality, where students with fewer resources are targeted due to perceived weakness or lack of power. (Chen, L., Liu, Y., & Wang, X. 2024)

Bullying in the Pakistani Context

Empirical studies on bullying in Pakistan are scarce and largely descriptive. Existing evidence suggests that bullying is widespread in secondary schools, particularly among female students, but rarely examined through a social class or criminological lens. This study builds on international research while providing context-specific evidence from Pakistan. (Ahmad, W.A., et al (2020); (Shafiq, F., Ahmad, M., & Khalid, M. N. 2022)

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed to examine the relationship between socio-economic class and bullying behavior.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample comprised 120 female students aged 16–20 years enrolled in public and private secondary schools in Sargodha. Stratified random sampling was used, with school type serving as a proxy indicator of socio-economic class.

Data Collection Instrument



Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections: (1) socio-economic class indicators, (2) bullying experiences and frequency, and (3) academic, psychological, and social impacts of bullying. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics summarized prevalence and patterns of bullying, while inferential tests examined associations between socio-economic class and bullying frequency.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participation was voluntary.

Results

The findings indicate that bullying is highly prevalent among the respondents, with a majority reporting having experienced bullying during the current school year. Verbal and social forms of bullying were the most frequently reported, followed by physical and cyberbullying. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reported significantly higher frequencies of repeated bullying compared to their higher socio-economic counterparts. (Al-Darmaki, F., Al-Kiyumi, A., & Al-Harthy, S. 2022)

Bullying was found to negatively affect academic performance, including reduced concentration, nervousness during examinations, and class avoidance. Psychological impacts included lowered self-esteem, self-doubt, and feelings of embarrassment, while social consequences involved isolation and difficulty forming peer relationships. (Tippett, N., & Wolke, D. 2014)

Discussion

From a criminological perspective, the findings support the view that bullying is not an isolated behavioral issue but a socially structured form of victimization. Socio-economic class emerged as a significant factor shaping



students' vulnerability to bullying, reflecting power imbalances embedded within school environments. (Elgar, F. J., Craig, W., Boyce, W., Morgan, A., & Vella-Zarb, R. 2009). The results align with theories of social inequality and victimization, suggesting that bullying functions as a mechanism through which social dominance is reproduced. (Romera, E. M., Ortega-Ruiz, R., Runions, K., & Falla, D. 2019).

The high prevalence of bullying among female students also challenges assumptions that aggression is predominantly a male phenomenon, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive criminological analysis. (Inoue, A., Kawakami, N., & Tsuchiya, M. 2024).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates a clear relationship between social class and bullying behavior among female high school students in Sargodha. Bullying emerges as a form of everyday victimization shaped by socio-economic inequality, with serious academic, psychological, and social consequences. Addressing bullying therefore requires structural and policy-level interventions that reduce inequality, promote inclusion, and strengthen institutional responses within schools.

Implications for Criminology and Policy

The findings highlight the importance of recognizing bullying as a criminological issue linked to social harm and inequality. Policymakers and educational authorities should develop class-sensitive anti-bullying strategies, strengthen reporting mechanisms, and integrate social justice perspectives into school discipline policies.

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