

# Differences in Bullying and Victimization according to Gender and Grade Level

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the differences in bullying and victimization among a sample of primary school students. The study sample consisted of 629 students in grades from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, their ages ranged from 12-17 years (mean = 14.49, standard deviation = 1.17). They were selected from four public schools, two for males and two for females. Two scales were used, one for bullying and the other for victimization. Results of the study revealed that males reported bullying their peers significantly more than females. Likewise, males reported more victimization than females. Grade level differences emerged with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders indicating significantly more victimization than 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Directions for future research are provided.

**Keywords:** Bullying, Victimization, Bullies, Victims, School Students, Adolescents.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers have devoted considerable attention to bullying to understand the dimensions of this social phenomenon, which has negative effects for school students (Al Ali et al., 2025). Olweus (1993) defined bullying as follows: "A student is bullied or becomes a victim when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions by one or more students." According to Marano (1995), this definition includes three key elements. The first is that bullying involves repeated aggressive behavior; the second is that this behavior is intentional, passive, and aimed at causing harm; and the third is that the behavior is directed from a stronger student toward a weaker one. Additionally, bullying is considered a form of aggression and is typically categorized as verbal, physical, or relational (Shore, 2005). It is further defined as repeated negative behaviors intended to harass or harm another person, it is carried out by someone with greater power over the victim (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006).

Olweus (1993) identified three forms of bullying: verbal, physical, and social/relational. Verbal bullying is based on the use of words to emotionally hurt another student, including teasing, name-calling, cursing, or threatening. Physical bullying refers to causing physical harm to the victim through actions such as pushing, hitting, or damaging their personal belongings. Social or relational bullying involves influencing others to exclude or reject the victim to isolate them socially, and this may occur through rude gestures or intentional social exclusion. Olweus also classified bullying into two categories: direct and indirect. Direct bullying refers to the overt attacks on the victim, such as verbal and physical aggression. Examples of direct bullying include threatening, pushing, hitting, threatening, and mocking. Indirect bullying—also referred to as psychological bullying (Jaradat, 2016; Lumsden, 2002)—includes behaviors such as social isolation and spreading rumors (Olweus, 1993), urging others not to accompany a particular student, attempting to persuade others to hate someone (Atlas & Pepler, 1998), or deliberately refusing to speak to a certain student (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006).

It is worth noting that the forms of bullying presented above represent general categories and encompass any behavior that can be considered indicative of bullying. For example, behaviors related to sexual bullying may take physical forms (such as coercing someone into engaging in certain sexual acts), verbal forms (such as using sexually derogatory names), or social forms (such as spreading sexual rumors about someone).

Studies indicate that there are three groups of children involved in the problem of bullying: Those who bully others only, those who are victims only, and bully-victims, who tend to alternate between the two roles.

Children who bully others tend to share several characteristics: they lack emotional empathy, refuse to acknowledge that their victims are weaker, and insist that the victim provoked them. They also frequently misinterpret their peers' behaviors and attribute hostile intentions to them. Bullies in primary school generally enjoy a moderate level of popularity. Research further indicates that as these bullies progress to higher grade levels, their popularity declines, though it does not reach the low levels typically associated with victims (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997).

Children who are bullied are typically characterized as cautious, submissive, anxious, weak, sensitive, unpopular, quiet, lacking self-confidence, and possessing low self-esteem (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002; Reid et al., 2004). Smith and Sharp (1994) found that victims have limited assertiveness skills and display symptoms of anxiety and stress during social interactions, which often lead them to reinforce bullies' behavior by yielding to their demands.

Children who are both bullies and victims tend to be the most anxious and the least popular. They are emotionally unstable, easily provoked, and frequently provoke others in return (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002). According to Olweus (1995), only a small number of students can be clearly classified as bully-victims.

Bullying occurs in nearly all schools and is more widespread than most parents and teachers believe. Research shows that teachers often underestimate the amount of bullying that happens in their schools. Most children engage in bullying behaviors at some point during their school years (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002).

The causes of bullying are numerous and include individual, family, as well as school-related factors. At the individual level, there may be different motives behind bullying behavior. For some children, bullying may be a careless act or something they do because of boredom. Others may believe that there is nothing wrong with this behavior because they do not know how much harm it causes, or because they believe the victim "deserves" it. For some children, bullying may also be a sign that they are unhappy or anxious at home, or that they themselves have previously been victims of bullying. Moreover, certain characteristics of the victim—such as shyness, poor social skills, and having few friends—may increase their likelihood of being targeted (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002).

In addition, the family plays a significant role in the emergence of bullying behavior. Parents may implicitly or explicitly signal to their children that humiliating others, using force, or degrading them are acceptable behaviors, which can enhance such negative conduct. Victims, on the other hand, often come from families that are overly protective of their children and sensitive. As a result, when these children encounter aggressive or unfair treatment, they struggle to respond appropriately. They do not develop adequate social skills or effective strategies for dealing with such situations (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

The way bullying incidents are handled is critical, as it sends an important message to other students as well as to those directly involved. It is essential to intervene in all incidents, including verbal bullying, and to respond appropriately and promptly. The proper response depends on the nature, duration, intensity, and frequency of the incidents, as well as the bully's intentions and motivations. The response may include, for example: listening carefully to the victim's account; reassuring the victim that appropriate measures will be taken; informing the bully that such behavior is unacceptable; assigning the bully a constructive task; increasing supervision levels; involving parents when necessary; providing classroom support for the victim. Once the incident has been addressed immediately, long-term support should be provided for both bullies and victims. Bullies need to learn that bullying is unfair and wrong, and intervention should be educational rather than punitive. Intervention may include helping bullies develop an understanding of how the victim feels through educational strategies such as problem-solving and conflict resolution (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002). These approaches help them acquire new styles of thinking.

Among these studies is the one conducted by Rigby and Slee (1991), which investigated the prevalence of bullying in Australian schools among a sample of 685 students aged 6 to 16 years. The results of the study showed that one in every ten children had been subjected to peer bullying. Males were found to experience bullying more often than females. Moreover, as age increased, there was a slight but statistically significant decrease in the level of bullying.

Espelage and Holt (2001) conducted a study aimed at investigating the prevalence of bullying and victimization considering gender and grade-level variables. The sample consisted of 422 students from grades six through eight, selected from an elementary school. The results showed that although the differences between grade levels on the bullying scale were not

statistically significant, there was an increase in the percentage of students classified as bullies across grade levels: 10% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 14% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 18% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The number of bullies was lower than the number of victims. It was also found that males bullied their peers significantly more than females. Gender differences were observed on the victimization scale, with males being more frequently victimized than females, while no significant differences were observed among the three grade levels. Results revealed that victims exhibited higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to both bullies and neutral students.

In a study conducted by Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001) on the prevalence of bullying among a sample of 1,312 students aged 8 to 12 in the Greater Athens area, it was observed that 14.7% of children reported being victims of bullying, while 6.3% reported being bullies. The level of bullying among males was significantly higher than that among females. Physical bullying was more prevalent among males, whereas indirect bullying was more common among females. Bullying decreased with age and tended to take a more direct form. Peer pressure was also implicated in bullying, as 33.5% reported being forced to participate in bullying others.

Seals and Young (2003) conducted a study investigating the prevalence of bullying among students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The sample consisted of 454 students from public schools. The results indicated that males engaged in bullying significantly more than females, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students bullied more than 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2004) examined the relationship between conduct disorder and the problems of bullies and victims among a sample of 202 adolescents aged 12 to 15 studying in two middle schools in Cyprus. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant gender differences on the bullying or victimization scales.

Ivarsson et al., (2005) conducted a study exploring bullying behavior, psychological symptoms and suicidal tendencies, among adolescents in high schools. The results indicated that bullying was prevalent, with 18% classified as bullies, 10% as victims, and 9% as bully-victims. Bullies exhibited externalizing symptoms (delinquency and aggression), while bully-victims showed both externalizing and internalizing symptoms, along with high levels of suicidal tendencies. Most members of the bully group were males and had attention problems. Adolescents in the victim group displayed a high proportion of symptoms indicative of severe psychological disorders, and their social functioning was found to be unsatisfactory.

Peskin et al., (2006) conducted a study examining the prevalence of bullying in relation to grade level and gender among a sample of Black and Hispanic students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, belonging to low socioeconomic backgrounds. No gender differences were found regarding the overall levels of bullying and victimization.

The study by Scheithauer et al., (2006) explored the prevalence of bullying among a sample of German students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades. It was found that 12.1% of students were bullies, 11.1% were victims, and 2.3% were bully victims. Males who reported bullying others were significantly more than females, and males classified as bully-victims were also more numerous than females. It was found that males experienced physical bullying significantly more than females. The highest proportion of bullies was found in middle grades, while the highest proportion of victims was among younger students.

### **Problem Statement**

The literature indicates that the results of studies examining bullying and victimization among school students are conflicting. This demonstrates that school bullying differs from one community to another. Accordingly, there is a need to investigate whether differences exist in the levels of bullying and victimization between genders and across grade levels. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the differences between genders and among grade levels in both bullying and victimization. Specifically, the study sought to address the following two research questions:

1. Are there differences among the participants on the bullying scale attributable to gender or grade level?
2. Are there differences among the participants on the victimization scale attributable to gender or grade level?

## **2. METHOD**

### **Participants**

The study population consisted of students from four grade levels, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades, in four public schools in Jordan—two for males and two for females. The students' ages ranged from 12 to 17 years ( $M = 14.49$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ). Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample across the variables of gender and grade level.

**Table 1: Distribution of the sample by gender and grade level**

Class level	Gender		Total
	Males	Females	
7 <sup>th</sup>	85	96	181
8 <sup>th</sup>	74	68	142
9 <sup>th</sup>	68	91	159
10 <sup>th</sup>	71	76	147
Total	298	331	629

### Instruments

#### Bullying and victimization measure

The assessment of bullying behaviours was conducted using two scales developed by Jaradat (2008). The bullying and victimization scales contained the same behaviours on each scale. The scales consist of 10 items each, and students are asked about the frequency of various behaviours, such as being made fun of, being subjected to rumours, hit or pushed, and ignored. Each item is scored on a scale from 0 (never) to 7 (seven or more), resulting in a possible total score of 70. On the bullying scale, students are asked to report how often they engaged in each behavior in the last 30 days. Typical bullying items include: 'I hit or pushed other students' and 'I called other students bad names.' On the victimization scale, students were asked to report how often they experienced each behaviour. Sample items include 'other students hit or pushed me' and 'other students called me bad names.' In this study, the Arabic version of these scales was utilized. Cronbach's alpha for the bullying scale was .80, and the correlations between each item and the overall scale score ranged from .36 to .61. The victimization scale has Cronbach's alpha of .82, and the corrected item-total correlations ranged from .31 to .62. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .86 for the victimization scale and 0.83 for the bullying scale.

### Procedures

The researcher provided the students in the classrooms with a general overview of the study's objectives and significance, emphasizing that their participation was voluntary and that the information they provided would be treated with complete confidentiality. He informed them that he would explain the instructions for each scale, read each item aloud, and that they should respond carefully, following him step by step. The students were first asked to fill in the demographic information regarding their gender and grade level. Then, he read the instructions and items of the bullying scale, and once he confirmed that all students had completed it, he proceeded to the victimization scale.

### Data analysis

A two-way analysis of variance (Two-way ANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences between genders and among grade levels on the bullying and victimization scales.

## 3. RESULTS

To address the first question regarding whether there are differences in bullying behavior attributable to gender or grade level, the means and standard deviations of the participants' scores on the bullying scale were calculated across the variables of gender and grade level, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Scores on the Bullying Scale**

Measure	Gender	Class level				Average	
		7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>		
Bullying	Males	M	1.31	1.09	0.97	0.93	1.08
		SD	1.13	0.83	1.13	0.91	1.02
	Females	M	0.41	0.49	0.34	0.72	0.48
		SD	0.51	0.44	0.38	0.58	0.50
	Sample all	M	0.82	0.80	0.62	0.81	0.76
		SD	0.96	0.73	0.85	0.76	0.84

Mean= M; Standard deviation= SD

Table 2 shows apparent differences between the cell means for gender and grade level. To determine whether these differences are statistically significant at the ( $P < 0.05$ ) level, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of the Two-Way ANOVA for differences between genders and grade levels on the bullying scale**

SV	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
<b>Gender</b>	57.24	1	57.24	92.32	*0.001
<b>Class level</b>	3.46	3	1.15	1.86	0.13

\* $P < 0.01$

Table 3 shows statistically significant differences in bullying attributable to gender ( $F = 92.32$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ). As seen in Table 2, the mean score for males (1.08) is higher than that for females (0.48). Regarding grade level, Table 3 indicates no statistically significant differences attributable to this variable.

To address the second question—whether there are differences in victimization attributable to gender, grade level, or their interaction—the means and standard deviations of participants' scores on the victimization scale were calculated across gender and grade level, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Scores on the Victimization Scale**

Measure	Gender	Class level				Average	
		7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>		
Falling victim	Males	M	1.22	1.07	0.77	0.72	0.96
		SD	1.22	0.85	0.75	0.86	0.97
	Females	M	0.76	0.72	0.34	0.56	0.59
		SD	0.74	0.69	0.34	0.48	0.61
	Sample all	M	0.97	0.90	0.52	0.64	0.76
		SD	1.02	0.79	0.59	0.69	0.82

Mean= M; Standard deviation= SD

Table 4 shows apparent differences between the cell means for gender and grade level. To determine whether these differences are statistically significant at the ( $P < 0.05$ ) level, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted. Table 5 presents the results of this analysis.

**Table 5: Results of the Two-Way ANOVA for differences between genders and grade levels on the victimization scale**

SV	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
<b>Gender</b>	20.16	1	20.16	32.91	*0.001
<b>Class level</b>	19.91	3	6.64	10.83	*0.001

\* $P < 0.01$

Table 5 shows statistically significant differences in victimization attributable to gender ( $F = 32.91$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ). As indicated in Table 4, the mean score for males (0.96) is higher than that for females (0.59). Table 5 also shows statistically significant differences attributable to grade level ( $F = 10.83$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ). Using the Scheffé test for post-hoc comparisons, it was found that students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades are significantly more likely to be victims of bullying than students in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades (see Table 6).

Table 6

Class level	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>
7 <sup>th</sup>			*	*
8 <sup>th</sup>			*	*
9 <sup>th</sup>				
10 <sup>th</sup>				

\*P&lt;0.05

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that the levels of bullying among males were higher than those among females. This may be attributed to the way bullying is perceived. Males. At this early stage of adolescence, tend to view their aggressive behavior as a sign of strength, socially acceptable, positively influencing their reputation, and helping them gain more friends. In contrast, females perceive any aggressive behavior on their part as diminishing their social value. Supporting this interpretation, females are more likely to exhibit such behaviors within the school environment rather than outside it. This pattern is influenced by societal culture and parenting styles (Jaradat, 2012).

These findings are in line with those of Rigby and Slee (1991), Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001), Seals and Young (2003), and Scheithauer et al. (2006), all of which found that bullying levels among males are significantly higher than those among females. However, they differ from the findings of Peskin et al. (2006) and Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2004), which found no gender differences in bullying.

Regarding the differences between genders and grade levels on the victimization scale, the results indicated that levels of victimization among males were higher than those among females. This can be simply explained by the fact that as the number of bullies increases, the number of victims also rises; since there are more male bullies, the number of male victims is consequently higher compared to females.

On the other hand, it was found that the level of victimization among students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades was higher than that among students in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. This may be attributed to the weaker or smaller physical stature of many students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades compared to their peers, making it difficult for them to defend themselves when verbally or physically targeted by others. Consequently, as students advance to higher grades, their ability to confront others increases, leading to a decrease in the number of victims. Students who are bullied need to learn how to assert themselves (Jaradat, 2020) to gain support from others. These findings are consistent with those of Scheithauer et al. (2006), which reported the highest proportions of bullies in middle grades and the highest proportions of victims among younger students.

#### limitations and directions for future research

The present study was limited to students from four grades, 7<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>, in four public schools. The bullying scale was defined by the deliberate negative behaviors that students directed toward their peers over the past thirty days, while the victimization scale was defined by the deliberate negative behaviors that students experienced from their peers during the same period.

To gain a deeper understanding of bullying behavior, it is recommended to conduct studies exploring students' attitudes toward bullying, as well as studies examining the relationship between bullying and academic variables such as procrastination (Abu-Zreik & Jaradat, 2013) and psychological disorders including depression, loneliness, and boredom. Further research is also recommended on the influence of peers on adolescents' bullying behavior, and on exploring the effectiveness of guidance programs developed to equip victims with social skills that enhance self-esteem and enable assertive reactions to bullying situations. Additionally, programs aimed at developing bullies' empathic skills that they often lack, and providing them with the skills necessary to express frustration and anger in proper ways, are also recommended.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the results of the present study, it can be concluded that bullying is more prevalent among males than females in elementary schools. It is therefore essential to develop prevention programs that include comprehensive school-wide intervention. This approach has been shown to be the most effective method for reducing school bullying, as it incorporates several key elements, including raising awareness of bullying issues through the curriculum, developing school-wide anti-

bullying policy, collection of information on school bullying, ensuring adequate supervision of students during breaks and mealtimes, and holding school conferences (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002). Effective prevention programs are developed to send a clear message that bullying will not be accepted in the school and that a safe environment must be available for all students.

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