GENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLYING IN ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract. Bullying in adolescence is a widespread social and psychological phenomenon that has significant consequences for personal development, mental health, and social adjustment. The present article examines bullying through a gender-based perspective, focusing on differences in forms, causes, behavioral patterns, and psychological consequences among boys and girls. The analysis shows that while boys are more likely to engage in direct and physical forms of bullying, girls tend to demonstrate indirect and relational aggression. Understanding gender characteristics of bullying is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention programs in educational settings.

Keywords: Bullying; Cyberbullying; Gender differences; Adolescence; Victimization; Aggression.

The problem of bullying in adolescence remains one of the most relevant issues in modern psychology and education. Despite numerous preventive programs and extensive scientific research, bullying continues to be a widespread phenomenon in educational environments, negatively affecting adolescents' emotional well-being, psychological stability, academic performance, and social development. The persistence of bullying indicates the complexity of this phenomenon and the need for deeper theoretical and applied analysis.

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by intense physical, emotional, and social changes. During this stage, peer relationships become increasingly significant, and social status within the peer group plays a crucial role in self-esteem and identity formation. However, these dynamics may also create conditions for bullying behavior.

Bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. It may be physical, verbal, psychological, or relational in nature. Gender differences in bullying have attracted increasing attention from researchers, as boys and girls differ in socialization patterns, emotional expression, and conflict resolution strategies.

The aim of this article is to analyze gender characteristics of bullying in adolescence, identifying differences in manifestations, motives, and consequences among male and female adolescents. Particular scientific interest is associated with the study of gender characteristics of bullying. Gender differences in aggressive behavior

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are largely determined by socialization processes, cultural expectations, and internalized gender norms. These factors influence not only the forms of bullying but also adolescents' roles within bullying situations, as well as their coping strategies and psychological reactions.

The most common forms of bullying among boys include:

Physical aggression, such as hitting, pushing, kicking, tripping, and damaging or stealing personal belongings. These behaviors typically occur in less supervised school environments, including playgrounds, corridors, locker rooms, and school yards.

Verbal aggression, including threats, insults, derogatory nicknames, and ridicule directed at physical appearance, academic performance, athletic ability, or social status.

Direct intimidation, characterized by explicit threats, coercion, displays of physical strength, and group pressure aimed at enforcing submission.

These overt forms of bullying contribute to the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical structures within peer groups.

Bullying among boys in adolescence most frequently manifests in **direct, overt, and physically expressed forms of aggression**. Compared to girls, boys are more likely to engage in behaviors that openly demonstrate power and dominance, which reflects both biological predispositions and socio-cultural constructions of masculinity. These forms of bullying are often visible and disruptive, yet they are sometimes minimized by adults as normative "boys' behavior," reducing the likelihood of timely intervention.

Socio-Psychological Determinants

Bullying behavior among boys is strongly influenced by traditional masculine norms that emphasize: dominance and control, physical strength as a marker of status, emotional restraint, rejection of vulnerability.

During socialization, boys are often encouraged—implicitly or explicitly—to assert themselves through toughness and competitiveness. As a result, aggression may become a socially acceptable strategy for achieving recognition, authority, and peer approval.

Boys who engage in bullying frequently do so in order to: enhance or protect their social status, establish leadership within peer groups, compensate for personal insecurities, gain approval from peers.

Group dynamics play a crucial role, as bullying can function as a mechanism for reinforcing group cohesion by marginalizing a perceived "weaker" individual.

Boys tend to externalize emotional distress more frequently than girls. Emotions such as fear, shame, and helplessness are often redirected into anger and physical aggression. Limited opportunities to develop emotional literacy and empathy further increase the risk of involvement in bullying, either as perpetrators or as victims.

Research findings indicate that boys are more often involved in direct forms of bullying, such as physical aggression and overt verbal attacks. These forms of behavior are frequently associated with socially encouraged models of masculinity that emphasize dominance, strength, and competitiveness. As a result, aggressive behavior among boys is more visible and often receives greater attention from teachers and school administrators.

School Context and Environmental Factors- The school environment plays a critical role in shaping bullying behavior among boys. Risk factors include: tolerance of physical aggression, excessive emphasis on competition, inconsistent disciplinary practices, lack of psychological support services.

Schools that promote emotional education, respect, cooperation, and clear anti-bullying policies demonstrate significantly lower levels of bullying behavior.

Bullying among boys in adolescence is a socially constructed phenomenon closely linked to masculine norms, peer status hierarchies, and deficits in emotional regulation. Its direct and physical nature makes it highly visible but does not reduce its psychological harm. Effective prevention and intervention strategies must incorporate gender-sensitive approaches that encourage emotional expression, challenge harmful stereotypes of masculinity, and promote non-violent models of social interaction.

Bullying Among Girls

Bullying among girls in adolescence predominantly manifests in indirect, relational, and socially mediated forms of aggression. Unlike boys, whose bullying behaviors are often overt and physical, girls tend to engage in strategies that target interpersonal relationships, social reputation, and group belonging. These behaviors are frequently subtle and covert, making them less visible to adults and more difficult to identify and address.

Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in indirect forms of bullying, including social exclusion, spreading rumors, manipulation of interpersonal relationships, and emotional pressure. Such forms of aggression are less noticeable but can be equally, if not more, harmful to victims' psychological well-being. Indirect bullying often leads to prolonged emotional distress, increased anxiety, and decreased self-esteem.

Forms of Bullying

The most common forms of bullying among girls include:

Relational aggression, such as social exclusion, deliberate isolation, ignoring, and manipulation of friendships. These behaviors aim to damage the victim's social connections and sense of belonging.

Verbal and reputational aggression, including rumor spreading, gossip, humiliation, and character assassination, often focused on appearance, morality, or conformity to social norms.

Cyberbullying, which has become increasingly prevalent among girls. Social media platforms, messaging applications, and online communities are used to disseminate rumors, post humiliating content, or exert social pressure beyond the school environment. These forms of bullying are often embedded within everyday social interactions, allowing aggressive behavior to be disguised as normal peer communication.

Socio-Psychological Determinants

Bullying behavior among girls is closely linked to gender-specific socialization processes that emphasize:

the importance of relationships and social approval,

sensitivity to peer evaluation,

emotional expressiveness,

indirect conflict resolution strategies.

Girls are generally socialized to avoid open confrontation; therefore, aggression is more likely to be expressed through relational and psychological means. Bullying may serve as a strategy to maintain social dominance, regulate group boundaries, or cope with feelings of jealousy, insecurity, or perceived social threats.

Bullying among girls in adolescence is characterized by indirect, relational, and socially embedded forms of aggression that can be difficult to detect but deeply harmful. These behaviors are shaped by gender-specific socialization patterns and peer group dynamics. Effective prevention requires increased awareness of relational and cyberbullying, gender-sensitive intervention strategies, and the cultivation of supportive and inclusive school environments.

Victimization in bullying situations affects both boys and girls; however, gender differences are observed in the ways adolescents experience and respond to bullying. Girls tend to demonstrate internalizing reactions, such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, and social withdrawal. Boys more often exhibit externalizing responses, including oppositional behavior, aggression, or risk-taking actions. These differences should be considered when developing psychological support and intervention strategies.

The increasing prevalence of cyberbullying further complicates the problem. Digital communication platforms create new opportunities for harassment that transcend time and physical space. Although cyberbullying affects adolescents regardless of gender, its manifestations and psychological consequences may vary depending on gender identity and social expectations.

Thus, the study of gender characteristics of bullying in adolescence has significant theoretical and practical value. Understanding gender-specific patterns of bullying contributes to the development of differentiated prevention programs, effective psychological interventions, and the creation of a safer and more supportive educational environment.

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