

# Perceptions of Secondary Level Students toward Causes and Consequences of Bullying

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## Abstract

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*The study aims to investigate the perceived causes and consequences of bullying among secondary-level students. Bullying is defined as the intentional and repeated negative behaviour directed towards individuals who are unable to defend themselves (Olweus, 1994). A qualitative survey approach was employed to gather data, utilising a semi-structured interview schedule. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the collected data. The findings of the study indicate that students perceive various factors as the major causes of bullying, including financial conditions, physical appearance, being different from others, seeking enjoyment from the pain others, displaying aggression, seeking revenge, exerting power, experiencing jealousy, and engaging in frequent use of social networking sites and sharing passwords with others. Additionally, students perceive several consequences resulting from bullying, such as, school absenteeism, dropout rates, academic underachievement, anxiety, stress, depression, decreased self-confidence, aggressive behavior, feelings of loneliness, and even suicidal tendencies. These results shed light on the significant impact of bullying on students' well-being and emphasise the need for interventions to address and prevent bullying in educational settings.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The act of bullying involves the deliberate and frequent harm caused to another individual. This harm can take various forms, such as verbal, physical, psychological, or social attacks (Singh and Singh, 2021). Bullying can occur both in person and online, and it may be overt and noticeable or concealed from others. Perpetrators of bullying can be either an individual or a group that holds more power than the victim.

According to Smith (2016), bullying is characterised by a repeated pattern of aggression directed towards a specific individual, where the target person (the victim) typically has less power than those who engage in the aggression (bullies). It is important to note that bullying not only impacts the bullies themselves, but also affects all students involved in bullying, whether as bullies, victims, or bystanders.

Students who engage in bullying are more likely to become involved in other behavioural issues in their adulthood or at any stage of life. These issues can include domestic violence, criminal behaviour, drug abuse, and participation in dangerous power dynamics (Singh and Singh, 2022). It is important to note that victims of bullying often face more challenges than those who bully others. They may experience physical symptoms such as stomach pain, headaches, sleep disturbances, and develop fears associated with going

to school, dark rooms, or bathrooms. Additionally, they may suffer from psychological problems, including low self-confidence, negative self-perception, feelings of failure, unattractiveness, difficulty concentrating, and loneliness. Victims of bullying may also develop a sense of guilt, blaming themselves for being targeted. The severe consequences of repeated bullying can even lead to suicide. Therefore, it is crucial for everyone to address the issue of bullying, and specific measures should be taken to eradicate this problem from schools. Multiple studies have been conducted to investigate various aspects of bullying in schools, including awareness, nature, prevalence, impact, factors, and causes. Some of these studies include research by Nansel et al. (2001), Sokol (2009), De Moura, Cruz and Quevedo (2011), Ahmed et al. (2012), Jan (2015), Oluwakorede (2017), Marsh (2018), and Galal, Emadeldin, and Mwafy (2019). Garaigordobil and Machimbarrena (2019) focused on the relationship between victimisation and the perpetration of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Nazir (2019) examined the prevalence of bullying and students' perceptions, including related myths. Chan, Cheung, and Wong (2020) discovered that social networking sites and environmental conditions play a role in predicting and shaping bullying behaviour. Pandey and Sonker (2021) investigated

the association between cyberbullying and socio-economic status. Despite the availability of valuable research on bullying prevention and intervention, there remains a gap in understanding how students perceive bullying issues, including its causes and consequences. By gaining insight into students' perceptions, significant steps can be taken towards eradicating bullying. Thus, the current study aims to analyse students' perceptions of the various causes and consequences of bullying.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question was framed: What are the perceived causes and consequences of bullying among secondary-level students?

### OBJECTIVES

**Objective 1:** To explore the perceived causes of bullying among secondary-level students.

**Objective 2:** To explore the perceived consequences of bullying among secondary-level students.

### METHODOLOGY

**Research method:** In the present study, qualitative survey research method has been used.

**Sample:** The present study involved purposively selecting 15 students (8 males and 7 females) from Class IX for interviews. The selection criteria for the participants were determined through the researcher's observations. Over a period of 1–2

months, the researcher spent time at the school for a research project and identified certain students who were deemed to be knowledgeable sources of information and had some level of involvement in bullying. Additionally, students who expressed a keen interest in participating, being part of the study, and sharing their opinions were also included in the sample.

**Tool:** To collect data, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview schedule. The questions in the schedule were formulated based on the operational definition of the variables being studied. After creating an initial draft, the schedule was shared with experts to ensure its reliability and validity. Experts provided feedback, opinions, and ideas regarding the content of the interview schedule. Corrections were made as necessary, taking the recommendations into account. The interview schedule consisted of two sections. The first section included a personal data sheet for the respondents, an explanation of the study's objectives, a statement regarding the confidentiality of the report, and a consent form for voice recording during the interview. The second section comprised a range of questions relevant to the inquiry being conducted.

**Data analysis:** Based on the research requirements, the data obtained from the interviews were compiled and organised in this step. The researcher transcribed the direct responses provided by the participants during

the interviews. Additionally, the researcher's own observations and insights generated during the interviews were also documented in a reflexive manner. In the next stage, the researcher carefully read and reviewed the participants' responses multiple times (iteration) to identify meaningful sentences. These sentences were then written separately as part of the data reduction process.

Subsequently, sentences that sounded similar or indicated similar situations were colour-coded with different colours, and the participant's name was noted alongside each sentence. At this stage, all the sentences with similar colours were grouped together under the respective participant's name. Iteration was used during this process to create codes that could effectively capture the essence conveyed by the set of words.

In the next stage, the researcher engaged in the interpretation of the codes, seeking to derive meaningful insights and understanding from the data.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility of Qualitative Data**— All participants in the member-checking procedure and all the sentences were examined to confirm the reliability and credibility of the data researcher. To check the validity and credibility of the study, the researcher also gives the transcription to another researcher for coding. The researcher discovered that both researchers/coders have similar codes for the data.

## FINDINGS

**Objective 1:** To explore the perceived causes of bullying among secondary-level students.

**Table 1**  
**Perception of Students towards Causes of Bullying**

Causes of Bullying	No. of Responses	Percentage
Financial Condition	12	80
Physical Appearance	15	100
Odd one/anyhow differ from others	8	53.33
Fun/Enjoyment from the pain of others	14	93.33
Violence/Aggression	9	60
Seeking Revenge	5	33.33
Power	11	73.33
Jealousy	13	86.66
Frequent use of social networking sites/ Sharing passwords with others	5	33.33

**Findings:** According to Singh (2022), all students (100 per cent) consider physical appearance as a cause of

bullying. The majority of students believe that financial conditions (80 per cent), for fun (93.33 per cent), showing

power (73.33 per cent), and jealousy (86.66 per cent) are significant factors contributing to bullying. A notable number of students also identified deviation from the normal condition (53.33 per cent), aggressive behaviour (60 per cent), revenge-seeking (33.33 per cent), and the frequent use of social networking sites and sharing passwords (33.33 per cent) as causes of bullying.

## DISCUSSION

**Financial Condition:** The financial condition of students plays a significant role in their social status within the school. Some students believe that it is easier to make friends based on their financial situation, while others express that they do not consider their classmates' financial condition when forming friendships. In the context of bullying, there are no fixed criteria or specific targeting based solely on being poor or financially weak. The occurrence of bullying depends on the dynamics of the situation, where a group of students with similar financial conditions may engage in bullying towards other students, regardless of their wealth or poverty. For instance, students may experience bullying for not possessing a particular brand of phone, bike, watch, or clothing, or conversely, they may be targeted for having specific branded products. As a girl shares her experience—"other students don't share their lunch with me and comment you people are rich and will get sick if you eat

poor people's lunch like us, they don't even go outside with me telling you rich people will get sunburn. Sometimes they even say check this on your phone, please our phones don't work properly".

Another boy said "No one ever directly made fun of me for being poor, but sometimes it seems that they are beating me up. Just like someone says hey you don't even have a mobile, so what do you know what is going on in the world today, then everyone laughs out loud".

**Physical Appearance:** According to all the participants, physical appearance emerges as a significant factor in instances of bullying. Each participant shared their individual views and personal experiences regarding their physique. The nature of bullying varies from person to person, and similarly, the causes of bullying differ for each individual. One participant may have experienced bullying due to being overweight, while another may have faced bullying for being underweight. Similarly, one individual may have been targeted for being short in height, while another may have been bullied for being exceptionally tall. Skin colour also becomes a basis for bullying, where one person may face discrimination for having a dark complexion while another for having fair skin. Acne on the face, shape of nose shape, lips, wearing glasses, and even hairstyle are all potential aspects that students use to bully others. The diverse range of physical attributes targeted for

bullying illustrates how students can be singled out and mistreated based on their appearance. It highlights the need for addressing body shaming and promoting inclusivity and acceptance among students, regardless of their physical features. One girl said, “Earlier, I used to come to school by tying two braids with ribbon, and everyone in school used to make fun of me. Tired of this, I had a haircut”.

bullying, regardless of one’s academic standing. This phenomenon is not limited to academic achievements but extends to all aspects of school life. It applies to various aspects such as gender expression, dressing style, food habits, gestures, and the decision to follow or deviate from the masses. Even choices related to wearing or not wearing makeup can become a basis for bullying. The need to conform to

**Table 2**

Categories	Sub-categories	Example
Physical Appearance	Body shape	Slim— <i>shukhandi, sukhadi, titihari</i> Overweight— <i>motu-mutton, hulk, hathi, golu</i> Short height— <i>batha, bauna, chhotu</i> Long height— <i>lambu dada, baans, seedhi.</i>
	Facial structure	<i>Nakchipta, nepali, chinki aankh</i>
	Hairstyle	<i>Behenji, chidiya ka ghonsla, gaai ki poonch, singh (do choti), champu.</i>
	Race (skin color)	<i>Kalu, kali-mai</i>

Another student shared with the researcher that “I love food, so my brother at home and everyone in school call me *motu-mutton*. Apart from this, they call me a fat cartoon character. For example, *motu, elephant, Xian*, and *hulk*. And don’t even let me eat in peace anywhere”.

societal norms and expectations often results in individuals who do not fit the mainstream being targeted for their differences. This form of bullying highlights the importance of fostering a culture of acceptance and embracing diversity within school environments. Students should be encouraged to

**Table 3**

Categories	Sub-categories	Example
Odd one/ anyhow differ from others	High achievers	<i>Padhaku, rattu tota.</i>
	Low achievers	<i>Gadha, ponga pandit.</i>
	Behave like girls/boys	<i>Ladkiyo ki tarah bat karta hai, waise hi rota hai, mard-chhap.</i>

Indeed, the pressure to conform to societal expectations can lead to

celebrate their unique identities and express themselves authentically,

free from the fear of being ridiculed or marginalised by their peers. A girl shares her experience: “When I took admission in the school in my village, all the students used to harass me. They used to call me Miss *Beautifullya*. Because my clothes, jewelry, and hairstyle were different and I used to get ready and go to school. All the girls used to say how much makeup she has applied, she has come to study here by walking on the ramp, and they used to talk behind my back. Wherever they saw me, they made fun of me”.

Another student (boy) shares his experience with the researcher: “My complexion is fair and I do not have a beard and mustache, so in every function of the school, they make me a girl and make me dance, even near my house, people make me Sita in *Ramleela*, all boys call me girl-girl and harass me”.

**Fun/Enjoyment:** Bullying doesn’t always happen with the aim to injure someone; occasionally, kids engage in pleasant activities without realising the potential for bullying or the negative effects of their choice. Because kids spend the majority of their time studying, when they do have free time, they simply want to have fun. This leads to ignorance among students who are unaware of bullying and who do not know the distinctions between bullying, fun, jokes, taunts, and teasing. A boy shares his experience “In our class, if a boy talks to a beautiful girl or both are friends, then all the boys make fun of him”.

Another girl shares her experience “If any boy and girl talk among themselves, then all the boys call that girl sister-in-law and girls call that boy brother-in-law. The girls call only among themselves, but the boys call loudly and shout in the corridor as they come. Look sister-in-law has come”.

Another boy said that “After a whole day of study, this is the only option to have fun. One cannot play a game all day long. We are not small children”.

**Violence/Aggression:** A subset of aggressive behaviour is bullying. Students’ violent behaviour hurts both the aggressive individual’s friends and adversaries in addition to the aggressive person themselves. Aggression leads to impulsive behaviours, which can be harmful to both the aggressor and the target. The majority of bullying in this category is physical, yet aggression is the root of all forms of bullying. For example, an aggressive individual may threaten the bully, inflict harm to others, or require others to perform tasks his way. As a girl said “A boy in our class gets very angry, all the boys and girls are afraid of him because he used to snatch things from others and have their lunch and do not talk to him. He also got punishment many times but he does not improve. He starts beating someone without any reason and makes everyone do his work forcefully”.

Another boy shares an incident with the researcher about the same student— “I was throttled in the bus

and the conductor's uncle came and rescued me. After that, I just changed my bus. Now wherever he meets me, he makes fun of me recalling the incident".

**Seeking Revenge:** Bullying incidents can occasionally occur just out of retaliation. Revenge may be taken simply because we are engaged in an open conflict or for covert reasons, in which case our adversaries are unaware of our objectives. It's also possible that we were harmed by other people's everyday behaviours and that we are now seeking retribution for our feelings. A girl shares an incident with her cousin "Once my cousin who is in another section didn't help his friends in the test, his friends got angry with him and when next day he got up to reply ma'am, they put a compass under him and he got hurt".

As a boy admitted, "We once trapped the class monitor to take revenge because of him if have a test ...and then maam punished him".

**Power:** It's usual in bullying to assert your dominance. Bullies used to put others down and flaunt their dominance. High academic achievement, status, caste, religion, physical attractiveness, seniority, teachers' favour, etc., may all be tied to power. Seniors and older children participate in demonstrating their abilities to their younger siblings or children. And they begin to bully others in order to flaunt their dominance. A girl shares an incident "Our seniors keep the boys of our class intimidated. If someone does not

listen to those people, then everyone starts troubling him together. So what if we are juniors should we be afraid of them?".

A boy said, "This happens to everyone, if your elder brother or sister is good in studies and not you, you are just their servants they will scold you throughout the day and get all their work done by you".

**Jealousy:** Jealousy is a common human emotion that affects everyone. Sometimes this emotion takes over our entire psyche, making it impossible for us to distinguish between good and wrong. We just want to satisfy our ego, which could be motivated by anything, including lack of money, education, a girlfriend or boyfriend, a preference for a certain brand of goods, etc. As a result, we have historically been envious of those who possess the qualities we admire. And because of our envy and fears, we used to bully other people. A boy shares that "A classmate of mine used to harass me just because the girl he liked was my friend and both of us stayed close by, so we used to study together, that too he could not tolerate any more".

Another boy said, "I am the highest scorer in every test and I am the topper in the exam too, so everyone says that you are a rote parrot, you memorise everything and do not do any work at home so you study and top the class".

**Frequent Use of Social Networking Sites/Sharing Passwords with Others:** Everyone uses the internet



these days, which raises the risk of cyberbullying among adolescents because they are utilising it without the required training and safety precautions. Because there are so many social networking sites available and because most individuals use them for friendship and contact rather than taking the necessary security steps, cybercrime results. Students lack knowledge of how to protect their safety and privacy. Additionally, they do it carelessly, sharing their credentials with others. A student shared that “We came to know later that the messages of ‘I love u’ that we had received were sent

by a boy from our class with the ID of his girlfriend”.

Another boy said, “The co-players who are there in the online game give very dirty filthy abuses if anyone does not play well or if he makes a mistake and remove him from the group.”

A girl said that “strange friend requests come on Facebook and WhatsApp and boys used to make lewd comments, so I stopped using Facebook and WhatsApp”.

**Objective 2:** To explore the perceived consequences of bullying among secondary-level students.

**Table 4**  
**Perception of Students toward Consequences of Bullying**

<b>Consequences of bullying</b>	<b>No. of Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
School Absenteeism	10	66.66
Drop out	4	26.66
Low Academic Achievement	11	73.33
Anxiety/Stress/Depression	15	100
Shyness/Low Self-confidence	12	80
Aggressive Behaviour	7	46.66
Loneliness	11	73.33
Suicide	2	13.33

**Findings:** As per Singh (2022), school absenteeism is considered a consequence of bullying by the majority (66.66 per cent) of participants. Some students (26.66 per cent) mentioned dropping out as a result of bullying. Low academic achievements or a lack of interest in education were identified as consequences by a significant number of students (73.33 per cent). All participants (100%)

stated experiencing anxiety, stress, and depression during and after being bullied. A considerable number of students (80 per cent) expressed that bullying leads to shyness, low self-confidence, and a loss of confidence in themselves. Aggressive behaviour was seen as a consequence by 46.66 per cent of participants. Feelings of loneliness were reported by students aslo participants mentioned suicide as a consequence of bullying.

## DISCUSSION

**School Absenteeism:** Due to bullying, pupils begin skipping classes and refusing to go to school because they are afraid that it will happen again and that someone would make fun of them. Students that are bullied are kept in a horrible condition where they begin to feel helpless and alone. A boy said that “Once a teacher called me a skirt since then the whole class calls me to skirt, I do not feel like coming to school but my parents scold me. I do not understand what to do. I try not to go to that teacher’s class.”

**Drop Out:** Bullying not only interferes with childrens’ ability to learn, but also compels them to drop out of school or discontinue their studies. Although the researcher was unable to locate drop outs in the classroom, one girl recounts how she and her classmates bullied a Punjabi girl, who ultimately left the school for good. As she said “We were four friends, we had a junior who was Punjabi. Don’t know her name but we used to call her a Punjabi girl. We used to ask her to do the *Bhangra* in the washroom and force her to do it. Wherever she was seen, we used to call her and make her dance. Then she did not appear for a few days, then we asked her friends and they told us that she does not come now, after that she was never seen in school.”

**Low Academic Achievement:** Students who have been bullied do not want to attend classes that will damage their education or go to school. Sometimes, the grades of excellent student’s decline gradually,

and no one pays attention to what is really going on. Bullying can be the only reason for this. As a student share his condition “I was a topper in my village school, then took admission here in English medium school, because of my weak English, everyone started making fun of me, I used to write and understand English, just used to make a little mistake in speaking, then people used to make fun of me then I stopped answering in class. I don’t feel like studying and now my grades are very bad.”

**Anxiety/Stress/Depression:** The majority of kids admit that they experience anxiety and tension when being bullied; in fact, they remark that they have anxiety anytime they think back on the incident or encounter the bullies. Additionally, they experience shame for being bullied and begin to blame themselves, believing that it is their responsibility that they are being bullied. Some students say that “I shivers in my body.”

Some say, “I feel a tickling sensation in my stomach and feel like going to the toilet.”

Another said, “I got a headache and started sweating.”

Another boy, “I don’t want to talk to anyone now, I know everyone will make fun of me. Now I feel like living alone, neither friend nor foe.”

**Shyness/Low Self-confidence:** Bullying has an impact on kids’ emotions and levels of confidence in addition to their academic achievement. Bullying victims lose their self-confidence and begin to accept everything as fate. As a

result of losing faith in themselves, they begin to hide and struggle to convey their thoughts. Lack of social connection, inaction in class, lack of classmate cooperation, and absence from extracurricular activities. A boy said, "I can't think of my future because of my bad English." A girl says, "I sing very badly and everyone starts to laugh when I sing and my voice gradually becomes like a goat while singing that's why I never sing."

**Aggressive Behaviour:** Bullies often exhibit aggressive and dominant behaviour, which can be indicative of their nature. Their involvement in acts of violence further raises concerns regarding the potential consequences of their behaviour. There is a heightened likelihood that individuals who engage in bullying may eventually transition into criminal activities or contribute to social chaos. As a boy expresses his friend's future planning "You know, ma'am, he says that he will go to jail after doing some petty scandal, then come back and fight elections and become a leader. He is a fan of *Raja Bhaiya*. You must have known *Raja Bhaiya*."

**Loneliness:** Students begin to avoid social gatherings and making acquaintances because they feel that people don't accept them for who they are. They used to isolate themselves because they believed that everyone would mock or despise them for who they are. They progressively developed low self-esteem and sadness due to loneliness. A boy

shares his classroom situations and also how other students react: "I carry eggs in my tiffin, then all the children of the class speak badly of me, hate me, and do not take me in their group. In fact, ma'am also says do not bring such things here. There is a WhatsApp group of the boys in our class, only I am not in that group. No one has added...It's okay now you can't force friendship, right?"

**Suicide:** Bullying has an impact on a student's entire personality, whether it be psychological or physical. Psychological issues include low self-esteem, thinking they're foolish, failing, or ugly, having trouble focusing, and feeling lonely; feel guilty about being bullied; believe that it is their fault that they are being bullied, and the remorse they feel drives them to commit suicide. As a girl shares her experience, "People talk about how ugly I look. I don't want to live, should I die now? God has made what should I do in this?"

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that students perceive various factors as causes of bullying, including financial condition, physical appearance, being different from others, seeking fun or enjoyment, displaying aggression, seeking revenge, exerting power, experiencing jealousy, and the frequent use of social networking sites or sharing passwords. Additionally, the perceived consequences of bullying among students include

school absenteeism, drop-out rates, low academic achievement, feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression, shyness and low self-confidence, aggressive behaviour, feelings of loneliness, and the potential for suicide. These findings highlight the importance of not underestimating the impact of bullying, as it can harm students in multiple ways. It

is crucial for everyone to be aware of the seriousness of bullying and to take proactive measures to sensitise children about its detrimental effects on both the victims and perpetrators. Each school should implement strict anti-bullying policies, ensuring that students and teachers are educated about this issue and equipped to address it effectively.

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