The relationship between Bullying and Student's academic performance

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to understand how young children experience bullying at schools in Kyrgyzstan, and what relationship does such experience have with their academic performance? The research was conducted at Naryn regional boarding school and up to 100 participants aging 13-17(8-9-10 11th graders) have been recruited for this study. Hence, quantitative research investigated the relationship between bullying and a student's academic achievement and the survey was used as a research instrument. The research found a minimal negative reaction to bullying and its effects on their studies by the majority of students. For example, for the statement: "I had a low motivation to learn after experiencing bullying", 35% answered as unsure, 34% disagreed, and 30% of respondents agreed. This indicates that students are evenly split as to whether experiencing bullying lowered their motivation to study.

Keywords: bullying, academic performance, impact of bullying, school safety.

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Introduction

Addressing the problem of bullying at school is essential for many reasons. First, a school is a place where students get an education, communicate, network, acquire valuable skills and develop their potential. Therefore, an education institute's task is to build a safe environment and control the student's safety to improve the education process. Among many dimensions of the school environment, safety remains an important aspect of the learning process. Indeed, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs demonstrates that safety needs are the main element of human life. (S.Mc.Leod, 2020) Safe needs include: security of body, morality, health, and property (S.Mc.Leod, 2020). In this case, students need to be respected by classmates, peers and teachers. However, bullying limits children's right to obtain education, standard of health, protection from assault, and freedom from violence. (United Nations, 2011).

With these safe conditions, students can get higher grades and show academic excellence. They can develop their potential in a safe and supportive environment where everyone has a mutual understanding. In addition, if they feel relatedness to the school environment they can achieve higher results in their study. (Yurtseven, N., et al., 2014) Alas, many students encounter and experience bullying from their peers and teachers at schools in Kyrgyzstan.(UNICEF,2018) There are many types of bullying which students experience at school such as psychological, physical, emotional, sexual, and cyperbullying. For instance, social research on "Dynamics of school bullying in Kyrgyzstan" by UNICEF research confirms that 73% of children suffer from abuse and neglect in families and 83% of children face violence in school in Kyrgyzstan (UNICEF, 2018). This statistic shows that there is an extremely high rate of bullying in Kyrgyzstan.

The main purpose of this study is to understand how young children experience bullying at schools in Kyrgyzstan, and what relationship does such experience have with their academic performance? Consequently, this research will explore: the possible reasons behind bullying at schools, possible consequences of bullying on a student's academic performance, and the teacher's role when bullying becomes a problem in Kyrgyzstan. There are only a few studies on this theme in our country. Thus, this study will expand on the existing research, and explore bullying among young children at schools in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore the main research question for this study is: How do young children experience bullying at schools in Kyrgyzstan? The organizational structure of the study is as follows: literature review, method, findings, discussion, conclusion and reference list.

Literature review

In investigating research on how young children experience bullying in Kyrgyzstan, it's essential to define the meaning of the term "bullying". According to Harper, the term "bully" first originated in 1530. In this first definition, bullying involves two participants such as a bully and a victim. Bullies use their physical ability (hitting, kicking) and words (rumors, assaulting) to abuse others to reach authority and power. (Bandura,1959). Consequently, Norwegian scientist Dan Olweous at the University of Bergen, Norway had conducted research on bullying and introduced this issue worldwide. He had provided the following three definitions: a) bullying is a hostile feeling or deliberately doing harm for others; b) this happens frequently, c) imbalance of power. (Alanson et al., 2015)

There is a straightforward relationship between bullying and student's academic performance in the educational sector. Because bullying is one of the leading factors which affects a student's academic performance. Nadine (2014) found that bullied students have feelings of fear around coming to school because they feel that they are unsafe; therefore they are unable to concentrate, which reflects negatively on a student's ability to academically succeed (Block, 2014).)

Another study was done by Juvonen et al. (2011) about the bullying experience and compromised academic performance. In their investigation, they found out a direct relationship between peer victimization and compromised academic performance. For instance, bullying is related to academic disengagement and low grades of students over 3 years. (Juvonen et al., 2011) Hence, school bullying links to poor academic achievement. For example, children who have experienced bullying have little opportunity to interact with peers which affects achieving lower grades. They suggest that negative peer interaction is one of the children's non-engagements in the learning process. (Swearer et al., 2010). Eisenberg and Neumark-Sztainer (2003) found out that peer harassment, i.e. bullying, is negatively related to connection to school and academic achievement. Similarly to the previous statement, Lillis (2011) pointed out that students who have low academic performance are students who have experienced bullying.(Lillis,2011). In addition, many studies show that bullying reduces a student's achievement. Consequently, bully victims may achieve lower grades and they are less likely to anticipate getting a higher education. For example, The 2006 UN World Report on Violence against children notes that verbal abuse, bullying, and sexual violence in schools are commonly reported as reasons for lack of motivation, absenteeism, and drop out. (United Nations,2006)

 Espelage et al. (2013) reviewed the literature on peer victimization and academic performance and engagement among children and adolescents. They have found out that student's achievement is related to peer victimization. For example, children blame themselves for the bullying, and it leads to negative feelings. Consequently, they receive lower grades. Result of this review suggests that positive peer relationship in the classroom leads better academic achievement and success (Espelage, et al., 2013).

There are many types of bullying that students experience at school such as psychological, physical, emotional, sexual, and cyperbullying. For instance, social research on "Dynamics of school bullying in Kyrgyzstan'' by UNICEF research confirms that 73% of children suffer from abuse and neglect in families and 83% of children face violence in school in Kyrgyzstan (UNICEF, 2018). This statistic shows that there is an extremely high rate of bullying in Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, bullying limits children's right to obtain an education, the standard of health, protection from assault, and freedom from violence. (United Nations, 2006).

Students' academic achievement plays a significant role in the education process. For instance, educating the young generation with the best education can help the country to grow economically and socially. This young generation with a strong educational background will be responsible for the future of the country (Ali et.al, 2009). But students in our country demonstrate lower academic achievements compared to other countries. The quality of education is still a problem when the majority of students have demonstrated knowledge and skills below the standards. For example, Kyrgyzstan took 65th place out of 65 countries from the PISA examination in 2018 (OECD, 2018). According to the UNICEF report low functional literacy leads to high levels of migration, unemployment, and vulnerability if young, including a propensity for criminal behavior and violent extremisms. (UNICEF, 2016).This problem is one that deserves consideration, and will in turn lead educators and administrators to take appropriate measures. Overall, protecting students from bullying should be the main goal of public health.

Methodology

This research implemented quantitative method with a survey to find the relationship between bullying and students academic performance. Quantitative research is an approach that highlights statistics and numbers to collect the data (Daniel, 2016). This methodology helped to collect statistical data, measure variables and calculate percentages. Ahmad et al.,(2019) indicates that quantitative research helps to explain phenomena through numerical data. (Ahmad et al., 2019). In addition, data was collected regarding the ways in which students experience bullying, their perceptions of these experiences, and how they appeal when they face bullying. The goal of this method was to measure the relationship between two variables: school bullying and academic performance.

First, I went to the school to talk with the school principal and discuss the research proposal and goals. We set up an adequate time which is suitable for both teachers and students. Second, I went to school on scheduled time and explained in detail about the study with the students and obtained consent forms before the survey. Students had to ask their parents to sign up for parental consent forms. Then, homeroom teachers of the respondents also signed the teacher's consent form. Also, students read carefully the assent form and agreed to participate in this survey. For example, the survey was conducted in a separate classroom for every pupil as the topic is quite sensitive and he/she might prefer to keep it a secret from his/her peers about participation in the survey. Every student had 20 minutes to complete the survey. The Kyrgyz language used to interact and collect information from participants. Because their language of study is Kyrgyz.

The data collecting instrument was a survey. Students asked to complete the survey which consists of 24 multiple-choice questions. The 23 questions are close-ended, multiple-choice, likert scale questions and only one question is open-ended. Last question asked students is there anything else they would like to share about bullying in their school. This question allowed respondents to share their thoughts about bullying in their school. Hence, the research study used random sampling to recruit the participants at Naryn regional boarding school. Random sampling gives an equal opportunity to respondents to enroll in a survey.

This research was conducted at Naryn regional boarding school, located in Naryn. There more than 200 students study in this school which also serves as a residential school where children live and study there. Most students come from remote regions of Naryn oblast. The targeted population is students from Naryn regional boarding school. Up to 100 participants aging 13-17(8-9-10-11th graders) have recruited for this study. There are overall 6 classes from 8 to 11th grade. Overall, 46.5% male and 54.5% female students took part in the survey.

It was an anonymous survey and respondents' comfort, dignity, and privacy were protected. Participants were treated with respect and they didn't write any information about themselves in a survey. Respondents took the survey in separate rooms because bullying is a sensitive question. After collecting the data, data kept on a password-protected computer, locked in my office. To ensure that the participants are not to be harmed, the respondents were informed about the purposes and procedures of the research proposal.

Respondents answered the questions using a paper-based survey. After collecting 100 surveys, I transcribed all the data to Google Form and created an Excel Spreadsheet. Then, I created figures, tables, graphs, charts to analyze percentages and measure the results using data from Excel Spreadsheet. I used descriptive analysis that assisted to find out correlation between the variables using tables and charts. Further discussions, insights, results will be provided in next chapters.

Findings

The results in Figure 1 show that 40% of respondents were unsure of the following statement 'School bullying creates a negative environment in the school", while 33% agreed and 26% disagreed. The mean score for this question is 1, 74, which implies that most students are unsure about the problem. For the statement: "I had a low motivation to learn after experiencing bullying", 35% answered as unsure, 34% disagreed, and 30% of respondents agreed. This indicates that students are evenly split as to whether experiencing bullying lowered their motivation to study. Similarly, for the statement "Bullying negatively affected my academic performance", 38% disagreed, 36% unsure and 26% is agreed. Lastly, in response to the statement "I started to skip classes after experiencing bullying", 49% disagreed, 27% answered as unsure and 23% agreed. In other words, the results show that the majority of students started to skip classes after experiencing bullying. Overall, the results of Figure 1 indicate minimal negative reaction to bullying and its effects on their studies by the majority of students.

Figure 1
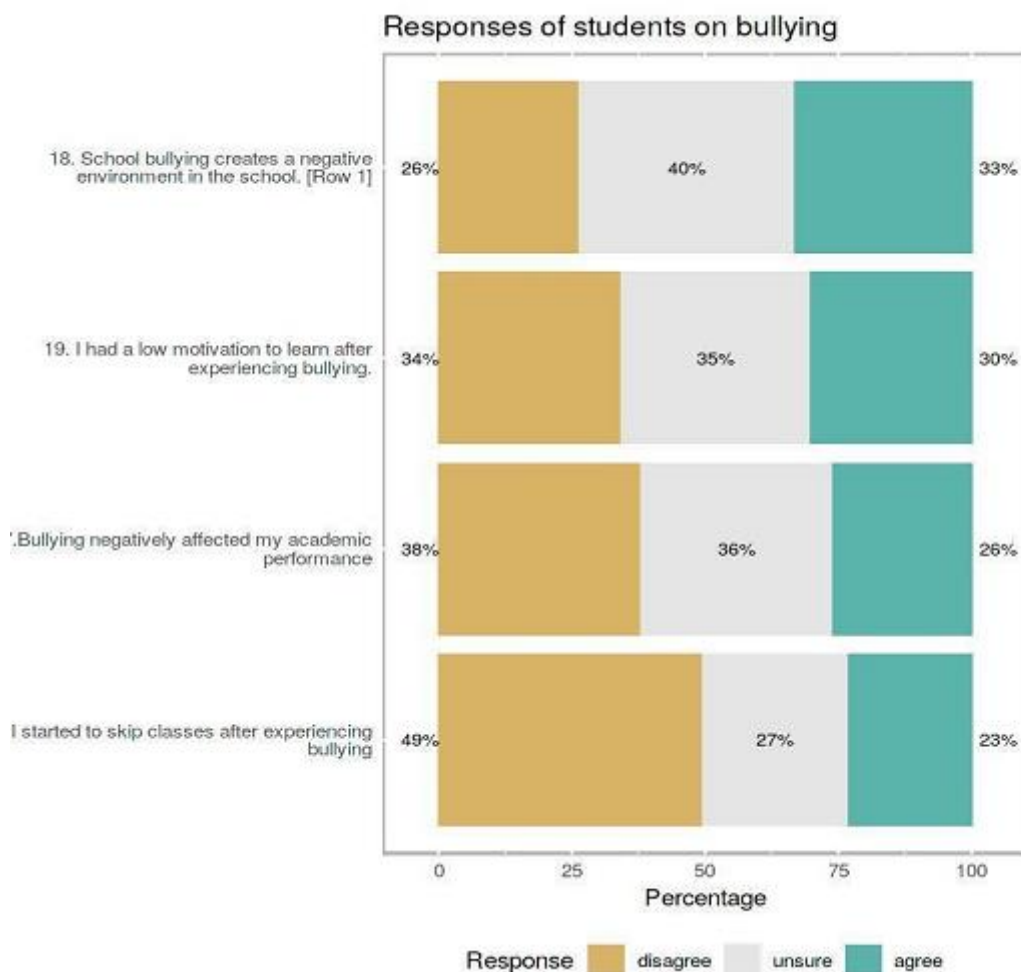

Responses of students on bullying

Figure 2 shows the results of the student's experience of bullying. We see that the shape of distribution of responses for question 10 is unimodal, with peaks of answers on response: ``It hasn't happened to me", which means that most students haven't experienced verbal bullying. For questions 11, 12, 13, 15 the highest answer is "it hasn't' happened to me" which implies most students haven't experienced physical bullying. In general, the results of the unimodal show that student's haven't experienced bullying at school

Figure 2

Distrubution of female students respones on bully

17. Bullying negatively affected my academic performance

18. School bullying creates a negative environment in the school. [Row 1]

19. I had a low motivation to learn after experiencing bullying.

20. I started to skip classes after experiencing bullying

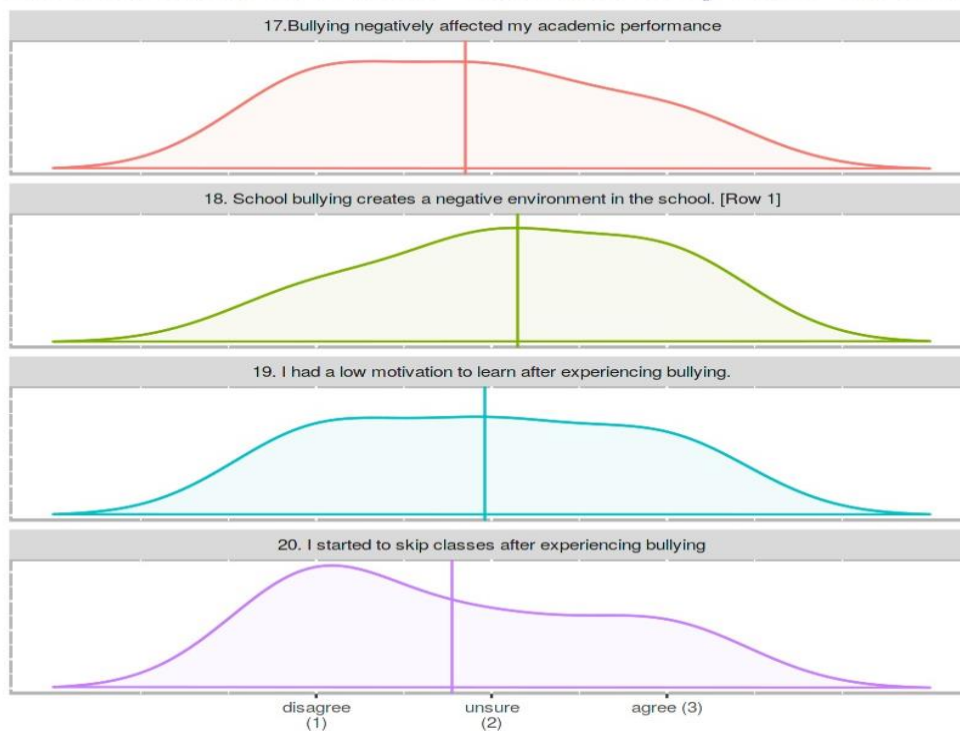disagree (1)   unsure (2)   agree (3)

Figure 3 describes the student's response about the support system. The survey asked students whom they will appeal if they face bullying at school. 25% answered that they will appeal to a homeroom teacher, 28% to social teachers, 16% for school administration, 26% for parents, 4% won't tell anyone and 1% for peers and classmates. We see that average point 23, 5, which implies that students will appeal to a homeroom teacher when they face bullying at school. They feel support from their homeroom teacher.

Figure 3

21. Whom will you appeal to if you face bullying at school?
100 responses
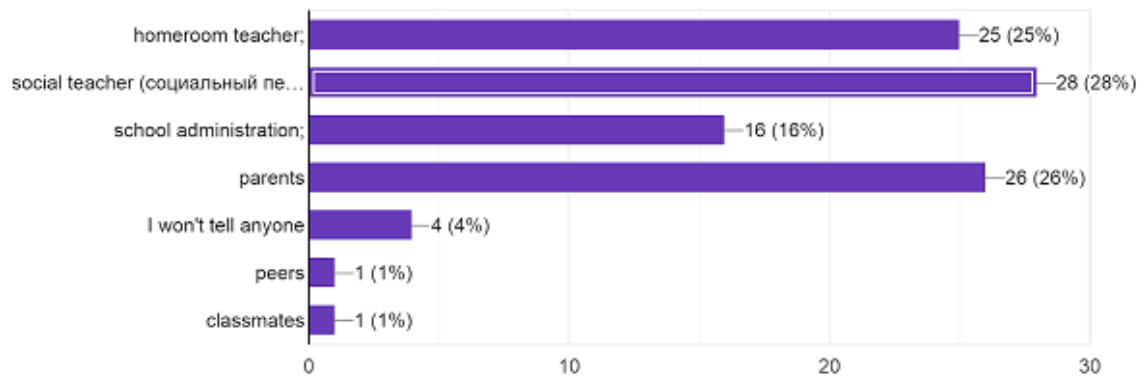
Discussions

This section discusses the result of the finding section and links to the literature that has been studied. There were three main research questions which we wanted to answer in our research paper. The first research question is the following: "How do young children experience bullying at school?". This result of the finding is significant and unexpected. Our findings show that 80% of students haven't experienced bullying at school. However, some students replied that they have experienced cyperbullying, physical bullying, relational and verbal bullying at school. Overall, we can say there are a small number of students who have experienced bullying at school.

Then, for the second question "What are the consequences of bullying on a student's academic performance?" We found out minimal negative reactions to bullying and its effects on their studies were reported by most of the students surveyed. This finding is also significant and unexpected. In contrast, prior research reported a direct relationship between a student's academic performance and bullying. Our findings contradict the claims of Nadine (2014) that students who have experienced bullying feel unsafe and have a fear of coming to school which limits their ability to concentrate. Also, they lack the social skills to stand up for themselves. Also, Juvonen, J., Yuan W., & Espinoza, G. (2011) found out the relationship between bullying experience and compromised academic performance. In their investigation, they found a direct relationship between peer victimization and compromised academic performance. For instance, bullying is related to academic disengagement and low grades of students over 3 years. (Juvonen, J., Yueyan W., & Espinoza, G. 2011). Overall, our finding shows the minimal effects of bullying on a student's academic performance.

Lastly, for this question "Whom do you appeal when bullying becomes a problem?" We found out that students will appeal to their homeroom teacher if they face bullying. This finding confirms what prior research has found. . Marshal (2012) indicated that educating teachers on prevention of bullying is the most effective strategy to reduce school bullying (Marshall, 2012). Therefore, we can say that there is a strong relationship between teachers' and students' interactions when we consider solutions to the problem of school bullying.

There were several limitations while conducting the survey. The first one is a restricted amount of research questions. In my further studying, I would like to find out more about peer relationships and school bullying. The second limitation was the research instrument. I have asked students to complete the close-ended questions or multiple choice questions. In my further research, I would like to use different data collection tools such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussion with teachers. My target population consisted of school students aged 13-18. However, I would like to add teachers and social teachers to my target group. Overall, in my next studies I will consider the limitations and will try to use different data collection tools.

Conclusion

This research explored the relationship between bullying and student's academic performance in a Naryn regional boarding school. Also, the research discussed the children's experience of bullying, possible consequences of bullying on their academic performance and importance of school safety and teacher's role when bullying becomes a problem. Based on the quantitative analysis, research found a minimal relationship between bullying and a student's academic performance. For example, the majority of students indicated that they haven't experienced bullying at school and bullying has a minimal relationship to their academic performance. However, some students answered that they have experienced bullying and that bullying influenced their academic performance. Overall, bullying exists at school and it is important to address the issue. The Quantitative method helped me to answer the research questions and gain data about bullying and student's academic performance. I had four main research questions and a bullying survey helped to answer these questions.

To better understand the problem of bullying, I would like to conduct in-depth interviews and focus group discussion in my further studies. I would also like to collect data from a teacher perspective too. Because, in my survey I've included students aged 13-18. I believe that interviewing teachers will help to find more information about bullying. In addition, educating teachers on prevention of bullying and creating a safe environment will help to reduce the problem.

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