



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2026

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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BULLYING'S MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS

-ALMAS WAFI KHAN

• INTRODUCTION:

Bullying is a grave issue that affects people everywhere in the world. Bullying can happen to anyone at any time, whether they are in school, college, at work or in their community. Now it is even happening on the internet. Bullying is not something that happens when we are kids or teenagers. It can happen to anyone. Bullying is not a joke or a small fight between people.

Bullying is when someone is being mean to another person on purpose, over and over again, because they want to have power over them¹. They want to scare them or make them feel bad about themselves.

Bullying can really hurt people. It is not just the kind of hurt that you can see. Bullying affects people's relationships, how they feel about themselves, their health and their ability to be happy. The bad effects of bullying can last a long time, and they can be very deep. Bullying is a problem, and it is not something that we should ignore. Bullying is something that can happen to anyone. It is something that we should all be concerned about because bullying affects people, and people are what matter.

Mental health is a critical component of overall health. It has an impact on how people think, feel, and act. It also affects how people build relationships and deal with stress. When someone is bullied a lot, they start to feel like they're not safe, and they do not like themselves. They become scared of being confident, anxious instead of peaceful and alone instead of part of a group.

Lots of studies have shown that bullying can cause people to feel anxious or depressed. It can also cause people to hurt themselves, use substances or think about killing themselves². The

¹ Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do* 9–10 (Blackwell Publishers 1993).

² Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School: Basic Facts and Effects of a School Based Intervention Program*, 35 J. Child Psychol. & Psychiatry 1171, 1175–80 (1994).

bad effects of bullying can last for a time even after the bullying stops. It can affect people when they grow up, what jobs they choose, and who they are friends with.

Nowadays, bullying is a bigger problem because of the internet. People can be mean to others all day and all night on media, messaging apps and online groups. So parents, teachers, people who make laws, bosses and everyone else must understand how bullying affects health. Stopping bullying is not about following rules; it is about protecting people's feelings and mental health. Mental health is important and bullying can hurt health, so we need to stop bullying to protect mental health.

Bullying is when someone keeps on being mean to another person on purpose. This person can't defend themselves because they think the other person is more powerful.

• **UNDERSTANDING BULLYING**

There are three things that make bullying different from a normal fight:

1. The person being mean does it on purpose to hurt the person.
2. They keep on being mean over and over again.
3. The person being bullied doesn't have the power, as the mean person³.

• **FORMS OF BULLYING**

1. Physical Bullying

Physical bullying is when someone hits, kicks, pushes, slaps, trips, damages things that belong to you or threatens to hurt you. These actions can leave scars. After the physical injuries healed, the emotional pain lingers for a long time.

2. Verbal Bullying

When someone uses hurtful words, it's a form of verbal bullying. It can include mocking, making fun of the body, racist and sexist comments, threats, mean jokes and constant criticism. Verbal abuse often leads to a loss of confidence.

3. Social or Relational Bullying

³ Olweus, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*, supra note 1, at 9–15

When someone's reputation is hurt, it leads to social bullying. This can include spreading rumours, leaving someone out, on-purpose humiliating them in public, messing with their friendships, and encouraging others to stay away from them.

4. Cyberbullying

With technology, bullying can happen in new ways. Cyberbullying happens on media, messaging apps, online games, emails and websites where people can hide their identity⁴. Because things online can spread fast and stay online forever, cyberbullying can cause a lot of pain.

Unlike bullying, cyberbullying follows you everywhere. Even your home, which used to feel safe, might not feel safe anymore if you're being harassed on your phone and computer.

• THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF BULLYING

Bullying affects every part of mental health. The emotional pain that victims of bullying feel is not temporary sadness. It can really change the way they think about themselves and the world around them.

a) Anxiety and Constant Fear

One of the psychological effects of bullying is anxiety⁵. Victims of bullying start to worry about the time they will be attacked, insulted or humiliated. Places like classrooms, workplaces, buses or social gatherings become scary for them.

Some common symptoms of anxiety include:

- 1) Worrying
- 2) Panic attacks
- 3) Racing heartbeat
- 4) Sweating
- 5) Difficulty concentrating
- 6) Restlessness
- 7) Sleep disturbances
- 8) Fear of meeting people

⁴ World Health Organisation, What Works to Prevent Online Violence Against Children? 5–9 (2022).

⁵ Olweus, *supra* note 2, at 1178–80.

Over time, anxiety can become a long-term problem interfering with education, work and relationships.

b) Depression

When bullying happens all the time, it often leads to depression⁶. Victims of bullying may start to believe the things that are said to them. They feel sad all the time they lose motivation. They start to lose hope for the future.

Some symptoms of depression include:

- 1) Persistent sadness
- 2) Loss of interest in hobbies
- 3) Fatigue
- 4) Lack of motivation
- 5) Concentration
- 6) Feelings of worthlessness
- 7) Changes in appetite
- 8) Sleep disorders

Depression caused by bullying can last for a time even after the bullying has stopped, and it can affect both personal and professional life.

c) Loss of Self-Esteem

Bullying destroys the foundation of self-esteem, which is built on experiences, encouragement and acceptance. Victims of bullying often start to believe things like:

- "I am not good enough."
- "Nobody likes me."
- "Everything is my fault."

These beliefs can stay with them for a time, even into adulthood and can limit their career ambitions, social interactions and personal happiness.

⁶ Id. at 1180–82

d) Emotional Trauma

Many victims of bullying experience trauma, similar to what people experience after other stressful events. Emotional trauma affects the brains' ability to regulate emotions making people more vulnerable to stress.

Victims of bullying may experience:

- 1) Crying
- 2) Emotional numbness
- 3) Irritability
- 4) Mood swings
- 5) Difficulty trusting others
- 6) Constant fear of rejection

Trauma can affect decision-making and emotional regulation for years.

e) Social Isolation

Bullying often forces victims to be alone. Some people avoid school, college, work or social gatherings just to escape humiliation.

Being isolated has consequences:

- Loss of friendships
- Poor communication skills
- Increased loneliness
- Reduced confidence
- Risk of depression

Ironically, withdrawing from others can make people more vulnerable because having social support is one of the strongest ways to protect against mental illness. Bullying is a problem that affects mental health in many ways, including anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem, emotional trauma and social isolation. Bullying can have long-term effects on victims of bullying. It is important to address the issue of bullying to prevent these problems.

• Long-Term Mental Health Consequences

Contrary to what people think, that kids just get over being bullied research shows that bullying has effects.

Grown-ups who were bullied as kids are more likely to have:

- 1) Anxiety that they can't control
- 2) Depression that makes them really sad
- 3) Fear of being around people
- 4) Panic attacks that come out of nowhere
- 5) self-esteem
- 6) Trouble with relationships
- 7) Stress at work
- 8) Less success in their careers

Many people still remember the pain years later, especially when someone criticises them or rejects them.

- **Bullying and Suicidal Behaviour**

One of the things about bullying is that it can make people think about killing themselves. When victims feel alone, trapped, and without support, they might think their suffering will never end.

Some warning signs are:

- 1) Talking about death
- 2) Giving away their stuff
- 3) Stopping interactions
- 4) Feeling hopeless
- 5) Hurting themselves
- 6) Sudden mood swings

Bullying is a big factor that can lead someone to attempt suicide, although it might not be the only reason. If bullying is dealt with the right way and every report is taken seriously, bullying can be prevented.

- **Cyberbullying: A Modern Threat to Mental Health**

Due to the presence of the Internet, Bullying today is now even in the digital world.

Cyberbullying can include:

- 1) Posting pictures
- 2) Sharing info
- 3) Creating fake social media accounts
- 4) Making threats
- 5) Leaving mean comments
- 6) Excluding people from groups

Its impact is often bigger because

- 1) It can happen at any time.
- 2) On the internet, the mean content spreads fast
- 3) The bullying on the internet is done by people on screen from their houses, hence it's difficult to find out who is doing it.
- 4) Victims can't easily get away from it.

As online harassment can happen anytime, anywhere, most youngsters feel unsafe in the very place they used to have safety, i.e. their home

- **The Impact on Academic and Professional Life**

Bullying can affect a student's academic life as well. The problems that occur for people bullied are:

- 1) Concentration
- 2) Declining grades
- 3) Classroom participation reduced
- 4) Increased absenteeism
- 5) Dropping out of school in cases

These problems can still affect their work life after school. They may feel afraid to speak in public, they become less confident, they avoid the skills related to leadership and have trouble trusting others.

- **The Role of Family and Friends**

Family and Friends are the ones who are a safe space for bullied people. They are the people who can create a huge difference for them by reducing their pain.

Parents can do so by:

- a) Without blaming their own child or getting angry, they should listen to them
- b) Believing what their child tells them.
- c) Encouraging their child to talk about what is happening.
- d) Getting help if needed.
- e) Working with the school or employer to fix the problem.

Friends are also very important. One friend who is supportive can make someone feel less alone and more able to cope. Having a friend who cares can help someone feel stronger. Friends can help by being able to listen and support their friend.

- **The Responsibility of Educational Institutions**

Schools and colleges must make sure every student feels safe and respected. Here are some effective ways to stop bullying:

- a) Clear rules against bullying
- b) Campaigns to make students aware of bullying
- c) Teaching students about health
- d) Systems where students can report bullying
- e) Services where students can get help from counsellors
- f) Training teachers to handle bullying
- g) Programs where students support each other

Students should know that if they report bullying, it shows they are brave, not weak

- **Mental Health Support and Recovery**

Recovery from bullying is something that can really happen when people get the help they need at the time.

Support people can provide includes:

- i. Counselling
- ii. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which is also known as CBT
- iii. Support groups
- iv. Family therapy
- v. Stress-management techniques
- vi. Building friendships
- vii. Participating in sports, arts or volunteer work

Healing is not about forgetting; it is about learning to feel good about yourself and rebuilding your self-worth and becoming stronger. Recovery from bullying is about finding ways to regain confidence, rebuild your self-worth and develop resilience so you can move forward from the bullying experience.

- **Building a Culture of Kindness**

Preventing bullying is not about punishing people. We need to do more to make sure everyone is kind to each other. We have to teach people to care about others and respect them.

Parents should teach their kids to be kind and understand how other people feel from a young age. Schools should make sure everyone gets along and likes each other. Schools should have kids from different backgrounds so they can learn from each other.

Social media sites should not let people be mean to each other online.

Governments should make laws to stop bullying, and the community should help people who are being bullied of just doing nothing.

If we see someone being bullied, we should say something. Bullying gets worse when we do not do anything. If we stop it right away, we can help the person who is being bullied and prevent them from getting really hurt inside. We all have to do our part to stop bullying. Bullying is very bad. We have to stop it. We have to make sure everyone is safe and happy.

- **Conclusion**

Bullying is not something that happens when we are kids or something that we have to deal with when we are growing up. Bullying is a problem that hurts people very much and can affect them for a long time. It does not matter if it happens in person or on the internet; bullying can make people feel very bad and can hurt their feelings for a long time. It can affect how people feel about themselves, their relationships with others, and how they do in school. How happy they are. Feeling anxious, depressed or having thoughts of suicide is not a sign that someone is weak; it is what can happen when someone is treated very badly for a long time.

We all need to work to stop bullying. Families need to make sure their kids feel safe and loved; schools need to make sure kids can learn without being scared; communities need to say no to being mean to others; and governments need to make rules to protect people who are being

bullied. Importantly, we need to know that being kind to others, including them and supporting them, can help stop the bad effects of bullying.

The best way to know whether we are a society is not by how we treat strong people, but by how we treat people who need our help. If we can stop bullying by being kind, teaching people about it, and taking action, then we can help people feel safe, confident and happy.

Bullying is a problem, and we need to deal with bullying to help everyone live with dignity, confidence and hope. We need to keep talking about bullying and how to stop bullying so we can create a world where everyone can live without fear of bullying.