



The Silent Epidemic: Understanding the History of Sexual Violence and Bullying

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Abstract: Violence is not a new thing in human history. Violence has been present throughout, from tribal conflicts to wars. While the term "bullying" is more recent, the behavior of bullying (aggression by the more powerful against the less powerful) has existed for millennia. Bullying has three aspects such

as harm, repetition, and intention. Bullying was in society. In 1862, Time magazine wrote about how bullying and cyberbullying are being added to the medium of bullying. Historically, corporal punishment was widely accepted and practiced in homes and schools across Nepal as a legitimate form of discipline. In Nepal, it has been in a decreasing trend.

Keywords: Corporal punishment, harm, intent.

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**Introduction**

While both terms describe aggressive behaviors intended to cause harm, they possess distinct characteristics. Violence, in its broadest sense, encompasses "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation". This definition highlights the destructive potential across various domains (1).

Bullying, a more specific form of aggression, is typically defined by three core components: an imbalance of power, repetition, and intent to harm. Olweus, a pioneer in bullying research, characterized it as occurring "when a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons" where the "person is having difficulty defending himself or herself". Unlike isolated acts of violence, bullying involves a systematic pattern of behavior where a perpetrator, often perceived as more powerful, targets a less powerful individual, leading to distress, fear, and a diminished sense of safety. The forms of bullying can vary widely, including physical, verbal, social/relational, and, more recently, cyberbullying, which leverages digital platforms for harassment (2). Understanding the historical presence and evolving definitions of violence and bullying is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. These behaviors, deeply rooted in human interaction, pose ongoing threats to public health and social cohesion, necessitating continued research and targeted efforts to foster environments of safety and respect (1,2).

Historical overview of violence and bullying

Violence, in its broadest sense, has been present throughout human history, from tribal conflicts to wars. While the term "bullying" is more recent, the behavior of bullying (aggression by the more powerful against the less powerful) has existed for millennia (2). The word "bully" itself emerged in the 1530s, initially meaning "sweetheart" (from Dutch 'boel' for lover or brother). Its meaning deteriorated through the 17th century to "harasser of the weak," suggesting a shift in perception and use of the term. While not systematically researched, instances of bullying were depicted in literature during the Victorian era. Thomas Hughes' 1857 novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* famously introduced the social nature of bullying in schools. The first "official" report and definition of bullying appeared in *The Times* in 1862 after a soldier's death due to systematic bullying. The first significant academic article specifically addressing bullying among young people was written by Burk in 1897, titled "Teasing and Bullying" in *The Pedagogical Seminary*. This work described bullying, attempted to delineate its causes and cures, and called for further research (3,4).

After a long gap in research, Norwegian Psychologist Dan Olweus is widely credited with pioneering the first major systematic research on school bullying in the 1970s. His work



brought significant awareness to the issue and is foundational to modern bullying research. Olweus defined bullying as aggressive, intentional acts carried out repeatedly over time by one or more individuals against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves, emphasizing repetition, intentionality, and an imbalance of power (2,6,7). International agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized violence, including bullying, as a leading global public health problem in 1996.(1)

The Digital Age: Cyberbullying (Early 2000s and Beyond)

With the advent of the internet and digital communication technologies (chat rooms, instant messaging, social media), a new form of bullying emerged: cyberbullying. This involves the use of electronic communication to bully another. UNESCO highlights that over 30% of the world's students have been victims of bullying, with devastating consequences on academic achievement, school dropout rates, and physical and mental health. UNESCO, WHO, ICRC, DOBA Nepal, PRG Foundation, CARE Nepal, CBM Global, Childaid Network and many others are actively involved in these efforts (5,6).

Historical overview of violence and bullying in Nepal

Violence and bullying in Nepal, particularly within educational settings, have a deeply rooted history influenced by societal norms, traditional disciplinary practices, and periods of conflict. Historically, corporal punishment was widely accepted and practiced in homes and schools across Nepal as a legitimate form of discipline (8). Traditional beliefs often normalized physical chastisement, with children expected to obey elders and teachers without question. This cultural acceptance meant that many behaviors that would now be classified as physical bullying or child abuse were simply considered part of the upbringing process. The Muluki Ain (Civil Code) of 1964 (2020 BS), while containing some provisions related to child protection, also included clauses that allowed guardians and teachers to inflict minor harm on children for educational or disciplinary purposes, further legitimizing physical punishment (9).

Emergence of "Bullying" as a Recognized Issue (21st Century):

The concept of "bullying" as a distinct and harmful peer-on-peer behavior, separate from general discipline or conflict, gained more recognition in Nepal in the 21st century, aligning with global trends. While comprehensive research was limited, early studies and anecdotal evidence began to highlight the prevalence of various forms of bullying in schools. These studies often found that bullying was a common problem, affecting a significant portion of students (10). In response to growing awareness and international conventions on child rights (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Nepal ratified), there have been legal and policy efforts to prohibit violence against children, including corporal punishment and bullying. The Education Rules 2002 (amended in 2011) added a code of conduct for teachers



explicitly prohibiting physical or mental torture of students (8,12). The Constitution of Nepal (2015) also emphasizes protecting children from harmful practices, and the Children's Act 2018 further prohibits all forms of physical or mental punishment and undignified behavior (8,12). Recent studies indicate a high prevalence of bullying in Nepalese schools. For example, a UNICEF report in 2018 highlighted that over 80% of Nepali children aged 1-14 experience violent discipline, and more than 50% of students aged 13-15 reported being bullied in the month before a 2015 survey (11). A 2020 UNICEF Nepal report further indicated that "40% of school-going children had experienced some form of violence at school" post-COVID-19. Other studies have found the overall prevalence of bullying among Nepalese school adolescents to be as high as 51%, with verbal bullying often being the most common form (13,14). With the increased penetration of the internet and social media, cyberbullying has emerged as a growing concern in Nepal, particularly among adolescents. Organizations like UNESCO and WHO have globally advocated for safe learning environments and anti-bullying campaigns, and several local and international NGOs in Nepal are also working to address child protection issues, including bullying (15).

Conclusion

The historical overview of violence and bullying reveals a complex and enduring aspect of human society, far from a modern phenomenon. While the terminology and public perception have evolved, aggressive behaviors aimed at dominating or harming others have consistently manifested across cultures, ages, and contexts. Crucially, this historical perspective highlights that violence and bullying are not merely individual aberrations but are often deeply embedded in societal structures, norms, and even cultural rites of passage. Understanding the deep historical roots and the evolving manifestations of violence and bullying is essential. It underscores that effective interventions must not only address individual behaviors but also challenge the societal conditions and norms that have historically allowed these harmful practices to persist. The ongoing battle against violence and bullying is a testament to the continuous effort required to foster more inclusive, respectful, and safe environments for all.

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