

Kareem M Jaradat, 2017

Volume 3 Issue 3, pp. 440-451

Date of Publication: 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2017.33.440451>

This paper can be cited as: Kareem M Jaradat, A. (2017). Gender Differences in Bullying and Victimization among Early Adolescents in Jordan. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(3), 440-451.

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## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BULLYING AND VICTIMIZATION AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENTS IN JORDAN**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated gender differences in bullying and victimization among Jordanian early adolescents. The sample consisted of 330 students (162 males, 168 females) in the seventh and eighth grades. These students were randomly selected from six public schools. Two scales were used, one for bullying and the other for victimization, each of which composed of ten items. Results of independent samples t-tests indicated that males had significantly higher scores than females on each of the two scales. Furthermore, chi-square tests showed that males were more involved in bullying than females across bullying groups. There were also significant differences in terms of the locations of bullying. For boys, bullying most often occurs on the way home from school; while for girls, bullying often occurs in the classrooms. It was found that "hitting or pushing other students" is the most common form of bullying used by adolescent male bullies, and that "calling other students with bad names" is the most common form of bullying used by adolescent female bullies.*

### **Keywords**

Bullying, Victimization, Bullies, Victims, Gender Differences, Adolescents

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## **1. Introduction**

School bullying is one of the problems that have long term negative consequences on all students at school, especially those involved in it. A lot of research has been conducted to deepen understanding of behaviors indicative of bullying, and help create better intervention strategies for coping with them.

Researchers paid much attention to defining bullying in order to determine the dimensions of this dangerous phenomenon. The literature shows that Olweus definition of bullying is widely accepted. According to him, bullying is when someone is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons (Olweus, 1993). This definition has three components. The first component is that bullying involves repetitive aggressive behavior; the second is that the behavior is negative and intentional; the third is that the aggressive behavior directed by a person towards a less powerful person (Marano, 1995).

Olweus (1993) explained three types of bullying: Physical, verbal and social. Physical bullying refers to hurting the victim physically by pushing, hitting and destroying personal belongings. Verbal bullying is when a person uses words to humiliate other person or to hurt their feelings by teasing, calling names, insulting or threatening. Regarding social bullying, it relates to affecting others to exclude the victim, so that he/she becomes socially isolated, this can be done by social exclusion. It is important to note that these types of bullying can be either direct or indirect. Direct bullying takes the form of an open attack against the victim, just like physical and verbal bullying. Thus, this type of bullying includes, but not limited to pushing, hitting, mocking and threatening. On the other hand, indirect bullying takes other forms such as rumor spreading, social isolation, asking others not to be friends with someone, and avoid speaking to someone (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Lumsden, 2002; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006).

Research indicates that there are three groups of adolescents involved in behaviors indicative of bullying: Bullies, victims, and bully-victims, who are bullies in some social interactions and victims in others (Furlong, Sharkey, Felix, Tanigawa, & Greif-Green, 2010). Children who bully others lack empathy with their victims, they never admit that their victims are weaker; they insist that the victim provokes them, and they misread the behaviors of their peers and assume bad intentions. It was found that their popularity is moderate in the middle school and tends to decrease when they move to higher grade levels, but it doesn't reach to the popularity level of the victims (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997).

Victims of bullying are children and adolescents who are anxious, insecure, passive and submissive. In addition, they are often physically weak, and can't defend themselves. They often do behaviors that disturb and frustrate others. Students who are bullied often suffer from problems in school competence, social competence and find it difficult to negotiate with parents and teachers. Thus, they think that problems can be avoided by submission (Mynard & Joseph, 1997; Jordan & Austin, 2012).

Bully-victims are those who bully others, and at the same time they are bullied. They are characterized by being highly anxious and aggressive. They often provoke bullies, this leads to fights between bullies and bully-victims. It's believed that they are vulnerable to develop emotional, social and behavioral problems. They often demonstrate attention problems and aggression, and have low self-esteem and difficulties in problem solving. Additionally, their physical health is worse, compared with their peers. They perceive themselves as being less intelligent, less popular, and more miserable than bullies. Also, they have less friends and are socially unacceptable. It is noteworthy that a small proportion of students can be described as bully-victims (Olweus, 1995; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Atkinson & Hornby, 2002; Jordan & Austin, 2012).

## **2. Literature Review**

It is currently largely accepted that bullying most likely occurs at almost all schools. Many children and adolescents get involved in bullying as bullies or victims at some time during their years of study at the school (Dong, Cao, Cheng, Cui, & Li, 2013; Wei, Chang, & Chen, 2016; Liu, Chen, Hu, Guo, & Xiao, 2017; García & De Paúl Ochotorena, 2017). However, gender differences in bullying and victimization seem to be different from one country to another and from one sample to another. Some studies found that boys scored higher than girls in bullying and/or victimization. For instance, Espelage and Holt (2001) investigated the prevalence rates of bullying by gender and grade level in an American sample of children and early adolescents. They found no significant differences between grade levels, however there were significant differences by gender. Males had higher scores than females on both bullying and victimization scales.

In a study by Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001), who examined differences in prevalence rates of bullying among Greek children of ages between 8 and 12 years, they found that 14.7% of

the participants were victims, 6.3% were bullies, prevalence of bullying was among males higher than females, physical bullying was more prevalent among males, and indirect bullying was more prevalent among females. Another study by Seals and Young (2003) conducted on an American sample of seventh and eighth graders, they found that males had higher scores on the bullying scale than females, and that seventh graders scored higher on this scale than eighth graders.

Also, a study by Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann and Jugert (2006) explored differences in bullying among a sample of German students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades. Results of their study indicated that 12.1% of the samples were bullies, 11.1% were victims, 2.3% were bully-victims. It was also found that males who reported that they bullied other students were significantly more than females, and the males who were classified as bully-victims were more than females. Regarding the forms of bullying, males were physically victimized more than females. Narayanan and Betts (2014) investigated bullying in Indian adolescents aged between 14 and 20 years old. It was found that male adolescents engaged in bullying behaviors and experienced victimization more frequently than female adolescents.

In contrast, other studies found no gender differences in bullying and victimization. For example, a study by Peskin, Tortolero and Markham (2006) examined bullying in American students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Results of their study found that the percentage of victims (12%) was significantly higher than the percentage of bullies (7%), and there were no significant differences in the general levels of bullying and victimization between males and females. Likewise, Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2004) conducted a study on a sample of adolescents aged 12-15, attending high schools in Cyprus. They found no significant gender differences on bullying or on victimization. Moreover, a study by Kljakovic, Hunt and Jose (2015) found no gender differences in the overall rates of bullying and victimization among a sample of adolescents in New Zealand.

### **3. Research Objectives**

Thus, previous studies provided conflicting results concerning differences in bullying and victimization between males and females. In an attempt to shed some more light on this issue, the present study sought to explore gender differences in bullying and victimization among a sample of Jordanian early adolescents. Five research questions were addressed:

1. Is there a significant difference in scores on the bullying scale between male and female adolescents?
2. Is there a significant difference in scores on the victimization scale between male and female adolescents?
3. Are there significant differences in prevalence rates of bullying and victimization between male and female adolescents?
4. What are the most common forms of bullying used by male bullies and female bullies?
5. What are the common locations for bullying for male and female adolescents?

## **4. Method**

### **4.1 Participants**

Data was collected from 330 early adolescents (162 males, 168 females), who were selected by using cluster sampling technique from six public schools, three for males and three for females, in the northern part of Jordan. The sample consisted of 181 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 149 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Students ranged from 12 to 15 years of age ( $M=13.50$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ).

### **4.2 Measures**

In this study, two scales were developed to measure self-reported bullying and self-reported victimization.

#### **4.2.1 Bullying Scale**

This scale consists of 10 items. Each item covers a different form of bullying such as rumor spreading, threatening, teasing, and ignoring. The rating varied from 0 (never) to 7 (seven or more times). The total possible score on the scale is 70. Participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they did each behavior in the last 30 days. Sample items: "I called other students bad names", "I hit or pushed other students". The scale was tested in a pilot sample of 60 adolescents. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was .80, and the corrected item-total correlations ranged from .36 to .61.

#### **4.2.2 Victimization Scale**

This scale consists of 10 items ask students about the frequency of various forms of behavior such as being subjected to rumors, made fun of, hit or pushed and ignored. Items are rated on a 0-7 scale, yielding a total possible score of 70. Participants are asked to indicate how often each behavior happened to them in the last 30 days. Sample items: "other students called

me bad names", "other students hit or pushed me". The scale was tested in the same pilot sample previously mentioned. The internal consistency of the scale was .82, and the corrected item-total correlations ranged from .31 to .62.

Regarding the locations of bullying, participants were asked to circle the location in which they see most often the bullying behaviors occur. There were five locations, these were:

1. Playground, 2. School corridors, 3. Classroom, 4. Way to school, 5. Way to home

#### **4.3 Procedure**

The ministry of education in Jordan approved the study before data collection started. Students were informed that the survey was confidential, anonymous, and voluntary at the time they were required for consent. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire during class time. Only students present on the day of the administration participated. The survey took about 10 minutes to complete.

### **5. Statistical Analysis**

In the present study, two-independent samples t-tests were used to examine differences in scores on each of the bullying scale and victimization scale by grade level and gender, cluster analysis was conducted to identify the types of bullying groups in the sample, and chi-square analysis was used to assess the differences in prevalence rates of bullying and victimization between male and female adolescents.

### **6. Results**

Initially, two-independent samples t-tests were used to explore whether there are significant differences in scores on each of the bullying and victimization scales by grade level. "There was no significant difference in bullying scores between seventh graders ( $M=8.28$ ,  $SD=10.01$ ) and eighth graders ( $M=7.87$ ,  $SD=7.26$ );  $t(323)=0.42$ ,  $p=0.672$ ". Likewise, "no significant difference was found in victimization scores between seventh graders ( $M=10.04$ ,  $SD=10.73$ ) and eighth graders ( $M=8.83$ ,  $SD=7.86$ );  $t(323)=1.18$ ,  $p=0.238$ ". Therefore, all subsequent analyses were conducted to investigate differences in scores on the two scales by gender.

Results revealed that "there was a significant difference in bullying scores between males and females, with males scoring higher ( $M=11.98$ ,  $SD=10.34$ ) than females ( $M=4.35$ ,  $SD=4.80$ );

$t(225)=-8.54, p<0.001$ ". Also, "there was a significant difference in victimization scores between males and females, with males scoring higher ( $M=11.74, SD=11.10$ ) than females ( $M=7.33, SD=7.16$ );  $t(273)=-4.27, p<.001$ ".

Cluster analysis was used to identify the types of bullying groups in the study sample. Mean scores on the Bullying and Victimization Scales were subjected to a k-means cluster analysis. Based on the theoretical work describing groups of bullying, a four-cluster solution was used. The first group ( $n = 222$ ) consisted of those students with scores on the bullying and victimization scales below the scale means, indicating low mean scores of bullying and victimization in the last 30 days (uninvolved). The second group ( $n = 65$ ) had the highest scores on the Bullying Scale with small mean scores on the Victimization Scale (Bullies). The third group ( $n = 39$ ) had the highest scores on the Victimization Scale with small mean scores on the Bullying Scale (Victims). The fourth group ( $n = 4$ ) had the highest scores on the Bullying Scale and on the Victimization Scale (Bully-Victims).

Gender differences among the bullying groups were assessed using a Chi-square analysis. The distribution of group membership differed significantly by gender, with 49.4% of the males classified in the uninvolved group, 32.7% in the bully group, 15.4% in the victim group, and 2.5% in the bully-victim group; whereas 84.5% of females were in the uninvolved group, 7.1% in the bully group, 8.3% in the victim group, and 0.0% in the bully-victim group. (See Table 1.1).

**Table 1: Distribution of Group Membership by Gender**

\* = $p < .001$

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Uninvolved (<math>n = 222</math>)</b>	<b>Bullies (<math>n = 65</math>)</b>	<b>Victims (<math>n = 39</math>)</b>	<b>Bully-Victims (<math>n = 4</math>)</b>	<b><math>X^2</math></b>	<b><math>\phi</math></b>
Gender					50.19*	0.39
Males	80 (49.4%)	53 (32.7%)	25 (15.4%)	4 (2.5%)		
Females	142 (84.5%)	12 (7.1%)	14 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)		

With regard to the common forms of bullying used by bullies in the present sample, it was found that for female bullies "calling other students with bad names" was the most common form, it was used four times and more in the last thirty days by 41.6% of them, followed by "ignoring other students" used by 33.3%. For male bullies, "hitting or pushing other students" was the most common form, it was used by 52.9% of them, followed by "calling other students with bad names" used by 35.9%.

On the other hand, there were significant differences between males and females in the locations of bullying. Data was analyzed using chi-square test and adjusted residuals. As shown in Table 1.2 below, 46.9% of the boys and 20.8% of the girls reported that bullying behaviors occur mostly in the way to home, 24.1% of the boys and 38.7% of the girls reported that bullying behaviors occur in the classroom, and 3.7% of the boys and 10.1% of the girls reported that bullying behaviors occur in the school corridors. These differences were significant ( $X^2=28.94$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

**Table 2: Differences in the Locations of Bullying by Gender**

gender	Males (n=162)	Females (n=168)		
location	N (%)	N (%)	$X^2$	$\phi$
Playground	33 (20.4%)	45 (26.8%)	28.94*	0.30
School corridors	6 (3.7%)	17 (10.1%)		
Classroom	39 (24.1%)	65 (38.7%)		
Way to School	8 (4.9%)	6 (3.6%)		
Way to Home	76 (46.9%)	35 (20.8%)		

\*= $p<0.001$

## 7. Discussion

Results showed that the levels and prevalence rates of bullying and victimization were among males higher than among females. This can be explained by the way in which each gender perceives bullying in the Jordanian culture. Many male adolescents may view their aggressive behavior as an indication of their power and as socially acceptable. These students are motivated to tease their peers. In contrast, most female adolescents avoid being involved in bullying, because they consider any aggressive behavior on their part as it may negatively affect



their reputation. These results are consistent with those of Espelage and Holt (2001), Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001), Seals and Young (2003), Scheithauer et al. (2006), and Narayanan and Betts (2014); who found that bullying and victimization rates among males are higher than rates among females. However, the results are not in line with those of Peskin et al. (2006), Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2004), and Kljakovic et al. (2015), who found that males and females did not differ significantly on bullying or victimization.

With respect to the forms of bullying, results revealed that the most common form of bullying among male bullies was hitting or pushing other students, while among female bullies, it was calling bad names. Thus, prevention and intervention programs designed to deal with bullying behaviors have to give special interest to these two forms of bullying. For instance, counselors can bring awareness to the risks and negative consequences of using such forms of bullying, whether for the victims or for other students at school; furthermore, counselors can teach victims how to act in case of being subjected to these forms of bullying. These results are partially consistent with those obtained by Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001), and Seals and Young (2003), who found that calling names is the most frequent bullying behavior among children and adolescents at schools.

Regarding the locations in which bullying often occurs, it was found that males preferred bullying their peers on the way home from school, while females, by contrast, preferred doing bullying behavior in classroom, meaning that bullying often occurs among males outside the school, whereas among females inside the school. A possible explanation to this finding is that males tend to display their power in front of their peers, who are bystanders, and this may be more possible outside the school, where there is no surveillance from the school personnel. That is, they feel more free. On the other hand, females desire to show others polite behaviors, whether those people are inside or outside the school environment, so that these people make positive impressions about them, therefore females feel more free in the classroom, where they can do all aggressive behaviors including bullying ones. What is important is that choosing such locations indicates that bullying behavior is hidden and occurs away from the eyes of adults. Additionally, victims often don't tell anyone that they are bullied, because they are not confident that others will take it seriously or they fear retaliation (Athanasiaides & Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, 2010).

Limitations of this study include its interest only in traditional bullying. Additionally, the sample was selected from students in the seventh and eighth grades at six public schools. Future investigations can compare gender differences in both traditional and cyber bullying among samples of students, who could be chosen from more grade levels and more schools. Also, it is necessary to conduct studies that investigate gender differences in bullying and victimization in different countries in order to highlight the biological and cultural factors behind bullying behaviors.

## **8. Conclusion**

Prevention and intervention programs should focus on the surveillance of students in specific places and times. When students who bully their peers know that they are observed by adults, they will not have enough nerve to do that. Also, victims should be encouraged to talk to adults (e.g., parents, teachers), when they are subjected to any form of bullying.

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