



A STUDY ON BULLYING AND EMOTIONAL EATING AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

¹Ertiqa Altaf, Master's in Arts, Psychology, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, India

ertiqa.altaf@gmail.com

²Dr Seema Singh, Associate Professor, Amity Institute of Applied Science, Noida, India

ssingh1@amity.edu

Abstract

Bullying and emotional eating are frequently linked because victims of bullying sometimes use food as a coping method to deal with upsetting feelings. Consuming food in reaction to emotional stimuli rather than hunger is known as emotional eating and it can act as a transient diversion or escape from the psychological repercussions of bullying. The present study was aimed to study the relationship between bullying and emotional eating among young adults. A total sample of 70 bullied young adults were collected in age 21-25 years of age. Standardized scales were used to study bullying and emotional eating among young adults. The results found out no significant relationship between bullying and the subdimensions of emotional eating (anger, anxiety, and depression). The results suggests that while bullying experiences may not directly influence emotional eating tendencies among young adults, the interconnectedness of emotional eating subdimensions underscores the complex nature of emotional well-being. Such

insights are crucial for developing effective interventions aimed at supporting the mental health and well-being of individuals affected by bullying experiences.

Keywords: Bullying, Emotional Eating, Young Adults

Introduction

Young adult bullying is a widespread problem with significant psychological and social repercussions. It includes a variety of hostile behaviours, frequently carried out by peers or others in positions of authority, including physical intimidation, verbal abuse, and cyberbullying. Bullying can have terrible aftereffects, including increased stress, anxiety, depression, and social disengagement. It affects victims' immediate well-being in addition to undermining their relationships with others, academic standing, and sense of self. In order to combat bullying, parents, schools, and society as a whole must work together to develop empathy, advance inclusivity, and establish secure environments that allow all young adults to flourish. Bullying victims are at increased risk of suicidality (Brunstein et al., 2010); poor school achievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010); behaviour and emotional problems (Reijntjes et al., 2010); psychotic symptoms (Schreier et al., 2009); physical health problems (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009).

Examining the connection between emotional eating and bullying in young people offers important insights into the behavioural and psychological processes involved. This study clarifies the ways in which bullying experiences might affect people's coping mechanisms, including their propensity for emotional eating. Comprehending these dynamics facilitates the creation of focused therapies intended to encourage more positive coping strategies and lessen the detrimental effects of bullying on mental health. Through the integration of bullying and emotional eating into a single framework, this study advances our knowledge of the difficulties

encountered by young adults and provides guidance for developing resilience and overall wellbeing in this demographic.

Bullying

According to Smith and Brain (2000) bullying is defined as “aggressive behavior normally characterized by repetition and imbalance of power. It may be considered as a normative in many group settings, but socially unacceptable within the ethos of a democratic society.” Rigby (2007) asserts that bullying is intolerable because it is cruel and repeated oppression by the powerful over the powerless, without any justification at all. It is gratuitous violence, physical or psychological.”

Olweus (1996) states that being bullied refers to when an individual is “exposed, repeatedly and over time” to abuse or harassment by one or more other students. Bullying can range from physical (hitting, kicking, spitting etc.); verbal (taunting, name calling, make threats); psychological (spreading rumors, intimidation, exclusion from a peer group) (Cohn & Canter, 2003). Shellard (2002) suggests that verbal abuse, harassment, social isolation, and harsh comments about physical appearance. Additionally, its stated by the researcher that bullying also effects the one who witnesses it and is likely to show increased anxiety, anger, post-traumatic stress, alcohol use and decreased grades.

Emotional Eating

According to Frayn and Knauper (2017), emotional eating is defined as “the tendency to overeat in response to negative emotions and has shown to be associated with weight outcomes, both in respect to weight gain over time and difficulties with weight loss and weight loss maintenance.” Van Strien et al. (2007) defined emotional eating as “the tendency to overeat in response to negative emotions, such as anxiety or irritability.” Ekman (1992) states that few

emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, joy tend to last longer and are more diffuse, thus, effecting eating responses and ingestion of an individual (Frijda, 1993). Further, also effects motivation to eat (Macht & Simons, 2000); amount ingested (Greeno & Wing, 1994); food choices (Gibson, 2006).

Macht (2008) gave a five-way model of how emotions affect eating; a) emotional control of food choice; b) emotional suppression of food intake; c) impairment of cognitive eating controls; d) eating to regulate emotions; e) emotionally congruent modulation of eating.

Emotional eating is characterized by failure to differentiate between physiologic hunger sensations from the desire to use food as a coping strategy for negative emotions (Bruch, 1964). Guenser and Him (2021) asserted that individuals eat more than usual if they have higher anxiety, overstressed; or feel emotions such as sadness and anger. Additionally, individuals even tend to feel pressure.

A study was conducted by Enfrem (2023) to explore the association between bullying participation (victims, bullies, and bully victims) and the risk for eating disorders. A sample of total 491 students aged 10-18 years was collected. The results found out that the risk for eating disorders was higher in victim profile, in both genders. Additionally, boys were also found to be higher in aggression. Van Strien et al. (2012) found that “low” emotional eaters ate less during the sad film, while “high” emotional eaters ate more.

Rationale of the Study

Examining the relationship between emotional eating and bullying in young adults is crucial to understanding the intricate relationships between mental and physical health. Bullying often causes intense mental distress, which makes people turn to food as a coping strategy. Emotional eating patterns like these can be harmful to one's physical and psychological health. Researchers can identify underlying mechanisms and risk factors by examining the connection

between emotional eating patterns that follow bullying encounters. Comprehending these dynamics facilitates the creation of focused interventions intended to promote more positive coping mechanisms and lessen the detrimental effects of bullying on people's lives.

Furthermore, this research acts as a spark for increased public awareness and the development of networks of support for young adults who are struggling with bullying-related problems. By illuminating the complex relationship between emotional eating and bullying, preventative measures can be put into place, and individuals who are impacted can receive specialized help. In the end, this study advances evidence-based tactics for fostering young adults' resilience and well-being, opening the door for a more understanding and encouraging atmosphere for people going through these difficulties.

Research Gap

There is still a significant knowledge vacuum about the complex mechanisms and moderating variables underlying the association between emotional eating and bullying in young people, despite a wealth of studies on the subject. While several research have looked at the relationship between emotional eating and bullying victimization, few have examined the relationship's possible reciprocity or taken into account other types of bullying, like cyberbullying.

Past studies have shown that bullied victims have had a change in dietary habits. For instance the bullied victims report skipping breakfast (Sampasa & Willmore, 2015; Garcia et al., 2015). Furthermore, not much study has been done on how personal traits like social support or self-worth affect the relationship between bullying and emotional eating. Developing thorough interventions and support plans suited to the particular requirements of young adults requires addressing these gaps.

Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between bullying and emotional eating among young adults.

Hypothesis

There will be a significant positive relation between Bullying and Emotional Eating among young adults.

Sample

A total sample of 70 bullied young adults in the age 21-25 years were collected from NCR, Delhi.

Measures

The following scales were used to measure bullying and emotional eating among young adults. The measures used were reliable and valid.

- **Bullying:** The scale as developed by Schafer et al (2004) is used to measure an individual's experience of either being bullied or having bullied someone. The scale consists of 44 items with a Likert response ranging from "sometimes," "quite often" or "extremely serious."
- **Emotional Eating:** The scale as developed by Arnow et al. (1995) is used to assess one's emotional eating tendencies. The scale consists of 25 items which includes three sub dimensions: anger, anxiety, and depression. The scale consists of 5 pointer Likert Scale, response ranging from "no desire to eat," "a small desire to eat," "a moderate desire to eat," "a strong urge to eat," "an overwhelming urge to eat."

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Offline, face to face mode. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardizes psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Anger/Frustration	70	10.1	8.57
Anxiety	70	8.61	6.65
Depression	70	8.30	5.11
Bullying	70	30.8	10.8

Table 2

Correlation between Emotional Eating and Bullying

	Anger/Frustration		Anxiety		Depression		Bullying	
Anger/Frustration	—							
Anxiety	0.910	***	—					
Depression	0.786	***	0.833	***	—			
Bullying	0.165		0.133		0.048	—		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion of Results

The results found out no significant relationship between bullying and the subdimensions of emotional eating (anger, anxiety, and depression). However, the results found out significant relationship among the subdimensions of emotional eating. Anxiety was significantly positively correlated with anger ($r=0.910$, $p < .001$). This suggests that individuals experiencing higher levels of anxiety also tend to experience higher levels of anger when experiencing the urge to eat emotionally. This implies that anxiety and anger be closely linked in the context of emotional eating tendencies, with one potentially exacerbating the other.

Depression was significantly positively correlated with anger ($r=0.786$, $p < .001$) and anxiety ($r=0.833$, $p < .001$). Past studies have noted that bullying pose a risk for eating disorders (Lie et al., 2021) and the most extensively studied eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorders (APA, 2014). Pearson et al. (2017) has asserted that bullying has long lasting effects on the bully; both physical and mental health can be affected. Additionally, these issues can also exhibit symptoms later in life. Previous research by Bennett et al. (2013), found gender differences in emotional eating behaviors. It was found that emotional eating was preceded by stress for females and by boredom and anxiety for males. Researchers also concluded that coping with stress through eating was a significant barrier to healthy eating across genders. Costarelli and Patsai (2012) found in their studies that emotional eating significantly correlated with stress at exam periods, however, not in controlled period. Slane et al. (2011) found in their study that binge eating behaviors was positively related to aggression and depression.

Conclusion

The present study was aimed to study the relationship between bullying and emotional eating among young adults. A total sample of 70 bullied young adults were collected in age 21-25

years of age. Standardized scales were used to study bullying and emotional eating among young adults. The results found absence of a significant relationship between bullying and emotional eating in the study suggests that they may not be directly linked in this context. Further, research is warranted to explore potential underlying mechanisms and to better understand the complex interplay between bullying and emotional eating behaviors. To aid those impacted by bullying, intervention programs that emphasize healthy coping mechanism and prevention techniques must be developed. Furthermore, enhancing young adults' resilience and lessening the determinantal effects of bullying can be achieved through raising awareness of emotional well-being and expanding access to mental health support services. By putting these recommendations into practice, we can foster a more encouraging atmosphere that enables people to effectively control their emotions and develop healthy habits in the face of hardships.

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