Chapter 6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“These classes were a lot of fun. I learnt how to be assertive, how to be an active listener and how to disagree in a nice way” – Student feedback

Bullying is a pervasive problem across the world and as predicted by most theorists and developmental specialists, tends to peak during the most crucial years in a child’s lifespan – middle school. This is that time in life when an individual’s personality tends to become more concrete and set, as a result of the experimentation and exploration that forms one’s younger years. During middle school, students tend to be more set in their outlook, nature and relationships. Various researchers have studied the complexities involved during this stage and have stressed the need to strengthen children’s self-awareness and their social skills. It is crucial that timely intervention be imparted to children when they are in this stage of life as failure to do so could result in both academic and emotional distress.

This research aimed at understanding the nature and extent of bullying during the current time period in the urban metropolitan city of Bangalore. Prior to designing and implementing suitable interventions, it was important to first gauge the level of awareness and the attitude that students these days hold about bullying in their schools. At the same time, an understanding of some of the demographic or social factors associated with incidence and prevalence of bullying was required. Hence in Phase 1 of the study, an exploration was carried out in ten Bangalore based schools, five of whom were co-ed and five were all-boys schools only. The study was interested in understanding the effect of demographic factors such as type of school, number of years a student has been in the present school, academic success, order of birth and type of family, on the incidence of bullying and students attitude towards it.

**Findings obtained from phase 1 of the study reveal that:**

- Male students studying in all-boys schools have a higher tendency of being bullied both directly and indirectly, than male students in co-ed schools. Most boys reported being hit/kicked by a group of 2-3 students in areas such as the playground, outside school and in the classroom when the teacher was not around. Students also reported being bullied by others in a more indirect way. Name-calling was the highest reported indirect form of bullying amongst boys. This was followed by ‘laughed at me’ and ‘told a lie about me’. Male students therefore engage in high amounts of physical and verbal bullying.

- Boys in same sex schools appear to be more accepting of bullying and feel it is okay to be mean/aggressive towards their fellow students. There is, hence, a possibility that the presence of girls tends to buffer the social environment in co-ed educational institutions, thereby reducing the likelihood of boys bullying each other physically and verbally.

- Students that have been in school for a shorter period of time are likely to admit to being victimized. The need to fit-in to one’s environment can make a child vulnerable, submissive, and an easy target for bullying.
Interestingly, the more the number of years a student spends in school, the lesser the tendency to engage in friendly/helpful behavior. Familiarity with one’s surroundings decreases the pressure of fitting-in, and engaging in friendly interactions. Physical bullying at this point becomes a means of showing masculinity and power among peers.

Male students who are academically bright enjoy popularity in their school social environment. These boys perform well in their studies and use their intellect to buffer against maladjustment. It seems that academic success leads to greater self-esteem and self-reliance, which is key for self-development, and helps students enjoy better interactions with their peers.

Academically successful male students are more likely to find bullying/aggression as being negative behavior. Bright students therefore think it is not okay to be mean and aggressive with their peers. Students that are more accepting of bullying, tend to perform poorly in their academics. Peer pressure and stress can result in students feeling frustrated and scared. When peer and family support is absent, students turn to bullying as a means to release stressful emotions.

Middle born male students show a higher tendency of being bullied physically/directly. Developmental theorists have proposed that middle born children tend to experience loneliness and are often overlooked by both parents and siblings. These children therefore do not avail the necessary emotional support by their caregivers and tend to have low self-esteem. ‘Only’ children on the other hand show a lower tendency to being physically bullied at school. There is a possibility that ‘Only’ children develop self-confidence, have better self-esteem and perform well in school. They may be popular and hence less targeted and bullied by other students.

Type of family appears to have no effect on both the experience and attitude of students towards bullying. Irrespective of whether a student belonged to a single-parent, nuclear or joint family, no significant links were found to bullying at school.

As was hypothesized in the study, it was found that male students in all-boys schools tend to get bullied both physically and verbally. They also appear to be much more accepting of bullying and feel it is rather okay to be mean/aggressive with a fellow student. In order to contain the psychological and emotional damage that victims of bullying may be subject to in all-boys schools and with the objective of reducing the spectre of bullying in India, a social emotional skill training package called the Second Step Violence Prevention Program was administered to students in the 6th grade of the school chosen for intervention. The SSVPP is a psycho-educational-social-emotional skills training program that aids in enhancing student awareness of bullying as a negative behavior. It is aimed at bringing about a change in student attitude and fosters more friendly and pro-social behavior among students. This program has proved its effectiveness in not only reducing bully-victim incidents, but also preventing the development of new incidents. Post administration of the intervention package in the intervention school, data was once again collected from male students in both the intervention and control schools. This was done with the aim of objectively evaluating the effectiveness of the SSVPP in reducing bullying, increasing student awareness and changing student attitude towards bullying. The study expected that male students in the intervention school would demonstrate a
positive change in their attitude, awareness and incidence of bullying, in comparison to boys in the control school, who would demonstrate no significant change.

Findings obtained for Intervention students from phase 2 of the study reveal that:

- Social skills’ training was found to be effective in helping students who underwent the training to communicate assertively when in a situation where they experienced bullying. Lesson 5 of the SSVPP focused primarily on helping students understand the differences between passive, assertive, and aggressive communication styles as well as identify and apply the physical and verbal characteristics of assertive communication. Training provided in this domain of social skills appears to have aided students in assertively handling situations of bullying and aggression. Students reported finding it ‘not hard’ to calmly ask students to stop, when they were pushed around (63%), ganged up on (50%), teased (47%), told lies about (56%) and when mean notes about them were passed in class (45%).

- Post intervention, students appear to have understood the importance of teacher support in reducing bullying in their school. Most students reported that adults in their school were responsive about concerns regarding bullying. Students felt that adults in their school were aware of the extent of bullying in the school premises, were approachable if a student wished to share an experience of bullying and were responsive to such shared experiences of bullying in school. These boys reported that they felt that it was okay to tell an adult if they were being bullied (36%), most of them reported that they would inform their teacher when they experienced bullying (n=36). Students felt that most teachers were aware of the occurrence of bullying on the school premises (31%), most of them actively stopped kids from being bullied (43%). Installation of cameras and placing of special ‘spies’ were recommendations made by students when asked as to how their school could make them feel safe. In spite of some students losing hope and claiming that school could not make them feel safe, most students were hopeful and requested for provision of more teachers who both helped and trusted them.

- There was a reduction in the bully victim incidence in the intervention school in comparison to the control school. Students that received the social emotional training seemed to have both benefitted from the knowledge provided to them and applied the same to their everyday behavior at school. On the feedback forms that were provided to students upon curriculum completion, students stated that they enjoyed almost all the lessons and that they were happy and grateful that the program had equipped them with the necessary life skills – “I learnt to help each other, actively listen, listen to each other’s ideas and to show empathy”; “I have learnt that we should be assertive and polite. We should not bully or tease anyone”; “I liked the group activities – helped me understand better and learn with my friends”; “I liked the communication styles lesson – by being assertive, we can learn to speak kindly and politely”; “I have learnt that when I get angry, I must Stop – Pause and Think Twice before I shout”; “I enjoyed learning about moods and parts of brain like the amygdala (feeling centre) and the cortex (thinking centre)”; “I can now make an action plan. I liked this activity because it gave us an idea on how to solve our problems and have a good future”; “I was very happy that you have given me a chance to learn these skills in my life.”
Students seem unable to perform bystander responsibilities post intervention. Even though a chapter focused on ‘Bystander Power’ was taught to these students during the intervention, students appear to have not benefitted from this knowledge and may have not applied the skill taught into their everyday behavior. This finding could also be a result of increased awareness of bullying as a negative behavior. There is a possibility that students were initially unaware of bullying and its implications and post intervention are consciously or unconsciously aware of it and therefore feel a little more apprehensive of intervening in a bullying situation.

In spite of receiving no social emotional training, control students engaged in higher amounts of pro social and friendly behavior in comparison to their peers in the intervention schools. Comparatively, even both prior and post intervention, students in the control schools engaged in high amounts of prosocial behavior in comparison to the intervention group students. The intervention program, therefore, does not seem to have a significant effect on increasing prosocial behavior as assessed by the questionnaire.

Students in the control group continued to report finding their teachers unresponsive towards bullying. Male students reported that adults in their school were not aware of the extent of bullying in the school premises; were not approachable if a student wished to share an experience of bullying; and were not responsive to such shared experiences of bullying in school. Though students felt that it was okay to tell an adult if they were being bullied (28%), most of them stated that if bullied, they would not ask an adult at school for help (35%).

When in a situation of bullying, students in the control group continued to report not being able to perform bystander responsibilities. Most students reported that they would not inform an adult if they saw someone being bullied by a group of students at school (6%) and being hit or pushed around (17%). Most students refused to stop
other students from passing mean notes about another kid (15%), telling lies about another kid (18%), and teasing another kid (12%).

The above mentioned findings have important implications. Though it is promising to know that control students engage in friendly and helpful behavior, they continue to report being unable to perform bystander responsibilities when in a bullying situation. Bystanders play an important role in curbing and diffusing aggressive acts between peers. Hence, acquisition and application of this skill is crucial in the attempt to reduce bully victim incidence. Further, control students may feel encouraged to expect fewer negative consequences (e.g., adult sanctions or peer disapprovals) for bullying and may feel fewer inhibitions against it as the school year progresses. It is therefore highly important that appropriate and timely intervention be administered. Ignorance on the part of the school authorities may worsen the scenario as students also lack the necessary training and know-how required to help them deal with situations in which they experience bullying. Provision of social skills training in these schools is thus both necessary and vital for the social and emotional growth of students.

The role of teachers and other adults at school in modeling and enacting appropriate responses is vital in anti-bullying work. Given that in a school context, teachers are the individuals most likely to handle a bullying incident, they play an important role in creating a positive and pro social atmosphere. Their response to a bullying event is crucial and warrants the need for immediate, consistent and appropriate consequences. School authorities must provide their teaching staff with knowledge and skill based training in order to equip them to better handle situations of aggression between students.

In phase 3 of this study, the goal was to reexamine the effectiveness of the SSVPP, six months after the post intervention assessment was conducted. The study was keen to find out if the benefits that resulted from the social emotional training continue to prevail after a lapse of time. During the follow up, it was anticipated that boys in the intervention school would continue to demonstrate a significant difference in their attitude, awareness and incidence of bullying, in comparison to boys in the control school.

Findings obtained from phase 3 of the study reveal that:

- In comparison to control students, at follow up, male students that had undergone training continue to experience an improvement in their awareness and attitude towards bullying. Boys reported feeling more capable of showing assertive behavior and more able to perform bystander responsibilities. Students reported feeling that adults in their school were responsive, approachable and aware of bullying on the premises. Teachers corroborated this finding by stating in an interview that though students were initially scared, they were now a lot free in their social interactions with their teachers. The intervention seems to have increased student awareness of bullying as a negative behavior, as most students started to feel that it was not okay to be mean or aggressive towards their fellow school mates. A reduction was also found in the number of bully victim incidences reported. Teachers claimed to find an improvement in student behavior, especially when they were not present in class.
Boys in the control group, on the other hand, continued to feel less capable of being assertive in their communication and fulfilling bystander responsibilities. They reported feeling less supported by their teachers and their attitudes conveyed a deeper acceptance of bullying. An increment was observed in the number of bully victim incidences reported.

Comparatively, it was found that post follow up, boys in control schools continued to report engaging in high amounts of friendly/helpful. The intervention program, therefore, does not seem to have a significant effect on increasing prosocial behavior as assessed by the questionnaire. Teachers reported that some students had experienced puberty and taken on a more serious approach towards school and their self-image. Other teachers credited the efforts put in by the school administration for acknowledging positive behavior amongst students. Parental involvement too seems to be a motivator for student behavior. Teachers reported parental fear as the stimulator for students being more caring, helpful and willing to share. Overall, it was promising for the study to find that teachers in the control schools seem to be aware of their role as a positive support and a lot more active in combating bullying amongst their students.

**SUMMARY**

The current study aimed at exploring the factors that affect the incidence and attitude of middle school sixth standard students towards school bullying. It also investigated the efficacy of social skills training program, the SSVPP, in reducing the bully-victim incidence and increasing awareness of bullying as a negative behavior.

Findings obtained in the current study reveal that the social skills program was successful in reducing student bullying and victimization instances. Students were able to learn and apply their assertiveness skills while in a bullying scenario. They were also able to carry out bystander responsibilities in a bullying situation and felt that adults were aware, approachable and responsive towards shared experiences of bullying. Students that received the intervention, however, showed a decline in the amount of friendly behavior experienced by them.

Students in the control school reported high incidences of bullying and victimization over time. Surprisingly, they also engaged in more friendly behavior, showed lower acceptance of bullying were able to perform bystander responsibilities in situations of bullying.

Demographic variables such as order of birth, academic performance, type of school (all boys v/s co-ed) and number of years in the present school were found to influence both the incidence of bullying and student attitude towards it.

The findings obtained from the present study have important implications. It provides valuable information to school counselors, parents, teachers, school principals, as well as policy makers for understanding the construct of bullying and could help them gain further insight into planning appropriate preventive strategies for dealing with bullying.

In this study, it was found that verbal (name-calling) and physical bullying (being hit/kicked by others) were the most prevalent forms of bullying among boys. We also found that both direct and indirect bullying was more prevalent among male students. Further, it was found that students, especially boys seem more accepting of bullying.
and feel it is okay to be mean/aggressive towards their peers. School authorities can hence run awareness programs in all-boys schools, at regular intervals to educate male students about the harmful effects of bullying and inform them about various effective coping strategies that they as students can avail of to help them deal with daily stressors.

- The SSVPP program, utilized in this study, was productive in decreasing the amount of bullying, both direct and indirect; victimization levels; and the amount of negative incidents experienced by a student. It was also successful in helping students learn how to communicate assertively, which in turn, helped them handle situations of bullying and aggression. Students that receive social emotional training appeared to have benefitted from the knowledge provided to them and applied the same to their everyday behavior in school. School authorities can therefore conduct workshops or run social skill training programs such as the SSVPP periodically and provide students with problem solving training, social skills training, and interpersonal skills training. School counselors could be hired and they could deliver or conduct these training programs/workshops on a more consistent basis so that children can be taught better ways of interacting with their peers.

- On receiving skill training, students reported being able to perform bystander responsibilities when in a bullying situation. As bystanders play an important role in curbing and diffusing aggressive acts between peers, in-depth training must continue to be provided to students.

- Educational institutions can increase surveillance and supervision around areas such as the playground, in the classroom especially when the teacher is not around and maybe a few blocks outside school – as these were areas where bullying was reported to be the highest.

- Supervision and support can also be provided to new students who are in the first few years of school - as they seem to be the target of most bullying. ‘Buddy’ / Support programs can be put in place for new students and teachers can help them adjust and settle in to the new school environment.

- School counselors can keep a look out for students who engage in maladaptive behavior and help them emotionally. Counselors can provide support and help students develop effective coping strategies and problem solving techniques.

- Peer pressure and the stress experienced by student’s results in them feeling frustrated and scared. These emotions need to be released. When peer, emotional and family support is absent, students turn to bullying as a means of releasing these stressful emotions. Therefore, we recommend that peer support groups, teacher supervision/support, and, counseling services be provided to students at school.

- With regards to teacher support, our findings showed that most students felt that adults in their school were aware of the extent of bullying in the school premises, were approachable if a student wished to share an experience of bullying, and were responsive to such shared experiences of bullying. Most students feel that it was helpful to inform their teachers and most of them felt that active measures were undertaken. School authorities, must therefore continue to take measures to first of all ensure that students in their school feel safe and secure. Secondly, teachers need to have a good rapport with their students and share open communication with them.

Training programs can be organized to help teachers and other school authorities equip themselves with up to date knowledge regarding the signs and symptoms of bullying as well as effective strategies for dealing with bullying situations. Teachers can also strive to model positive problem solving skills, be consistent and fair, invite open discussion, and help their students develop empathy for differences. School
principals can also intervene and strive to gather information about bullying in their schools early, support students who are at risk, establish school and classroom rules.

- Our findings reveal that middle born children tend to get bullied physically. Theory has shown that middle born children experience loneliness and are often overlooked by parents and siblings. As a result, these children do not avail the necessary emotional support by their caregivers and tend to have low self-esteem. Parents could therefore be more aware and attuned to their child’s experiences both in and outside school. Consistent communication with their wards, spending of quality time and regular contact with school authorities, can ensure timely action and hopefully avoidance of issues related to bullying. Parents should strive to model positive problem solving skills, provide a supportive, warm, and consistent home environment, foster positive attitudes and beliefs, and provide adequate adult supervision.

- Consequently, all parties in the school (teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and school counselors) should cooperate to be able to cope and prevent bullying in the schools.

Limitations of the study:

- As the current study only caters to those students that fit the inclusion criteria, findings obtained cannot be applied to students who are above or below the age range and those who speak Kannada.
- There may be discrepancies between children’s responses and their observed behaviors. It may be that social desirability influences questionnaire responses. Children are aware that adults expect them to support each other; however, it may be difficult to follow through with this intention on the school playground. Another possibility is that children would like to protect victims, but are discouraged from intervening by peer processes that tend to maintain the status quo.
- There may be differences in teacher and student perspective of bullying.
- Bullying may take a long time to eliminate or reduce. As such, researchers need to continually evaluate program effectiveness. The current study evaluated the effect of the intervention program at only two time periods - post the intervention and 6 months later.

Recommendations for future research:

Several recommendations for future research can be made from the findings of the present study.

- This study can be replicated with children from other grades and SES levels.
- In the current study, as the sample size of bully and bully-victim was small, predictors of involvement in bully and bully-victim groups were not investigated. Therefore, further studies are needed to investigate the factors that predict students’ participation in bullying.
- The variables in this study were related to school, family and personality factors. Since the variables in family and school factor were few, future studies that investigate other variables related to those factors and other factors such as community and neighborhood are also needed.
- The concept of bullying is commonly seen as a controversial and moral issue. Therefore, through using different assessment techniques, the perceptions of parents, teachers, students, school counselors, and other school personals about bullying should be investigated to determine the prevalence of bullying and students involvement in bullying.
An extensive study can be carried out with the whole school community – students from each grade, teaching faculty, staff and parents. Each component, be it the student, the school staff or the parent, can be assessed and provided with detailed information and skill training. Community and neighborhoods can also be assessed as factors so that their contributions can be identified. Such a study will not only give us an in-depth understanding of the bullying scenario in India today, but will also equip all parties with the adequate know-how and skill sets to deal with bullying.

The same study could be replicated with bigger sample size students from different SES levels. This will enrich the findings as well as aid in generalizing.

Further, contrary to the current study’s expectations, it was found that though post skill training, a significant improvement was observed in student behavior and attitude in general towards bullying, students appear to be less motivated and inclined to engage in friendly and helpful behavior. Future studies could explore as to why this occurred and how or what can be done to help students be more friendly in their interactions with their peers.

People in India need to gain more awareness about bullying and warm up to it. Studies should therefore employ techniques that are not only reliable but also manage to make the individual being assessed feel less judged and more comfortable.

Lastly, the perceptions of parents, teachers, students, school counselors, and other school personals about bullying should be investigated on a regular basis to help determine the prevalence of bullying and students involvement in bullying.

Teachers themselves need to model respectful behavior to students, in how they themselves act as well as in their treatment of their students. They need to show students that bad behavior and rule breaking results in consequences that they will need to face. More importantly, schools need to do away with the many of their own practices that foster violence. For example, using corporal punishment merely teaches children the negative values of degradation, force and humiliation; and must therefore be stopped. Intimidation by authorities and teachers also needs to be avoided in school situations. Discipline is best carried out in ways that do not humiliate students publicly. Students can be referred for counseling or spoken to individually by their teacher.

Adults need to supervise students at school and they need to be visible in high risk areas in the school. These adults need to take an active interest and make sure safety is a concern that is consistently addressed. Any acts of aggression and violence need to be dealt with. Rule breaking and ‘minor’ violations should not be ignored. Students need to understand that violent or aggressive behavior will not be tolerated at school, and where violations of the law take place these should be reported to the police.

Wherever possible the support of parents and guardians must be sought to make sure that they know what their children are up to at school and call them in when necessary and discuss their children’s performance and behavior. Students should be involved in problem-solving and violence prevention and encouraged to share ideas and their concerns. In some countries learners sign pledges an policies against violence, this can highlight each person’s responsibility in reducing violence.
In the light of the seriousness of the long- and short-term effects of bullying for the bullies, the victims, the bystanders, educators, parents and the community at large, role players should strive to remove this evil from our schools. A comprehensive anti-bullying program that includes all those involved is required to ensure that learners can learn in a safe and bully-free environment. It should, however, be noted that even more important than programmatic solutions is the necessity for education to be grounded in sound legal, moral, religious and educational values. A prerequisite in the fight against bullying is an acknowledgement by adults and children alike, that bullying is not a normal part of growing up – it is inhuman and degrading.

If schools are able to alter peer norms and behavior, increase student skills, and sustain adult prevention efforts, the positive effects of their work may gather momentum and strengthen over time.