



GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BULLYING VICTIMIZATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17062181>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
29 May, 2025	09 July, 2025	09 August, 2025	29 August, 2025

ABSTRACT

Bullying victimization continues to be a major concern in higher education, with significant academic stress psychological impact for students. This study explores gender differences in bullying victimization among university students, with an emphasis on the frequency, kinds, and psychological consequences of bullying. The study included 300 private university students (50% male, 50% female) aged 18 to 25 (M = 22.41, SD = 2.81). The Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (Khan & Khurshid, 2023) was used to evaluate victimization experiences. The results show significant gender disparities in bullying victimization, with males rating higher than females. These findings underline the need of gender-sensitive strategies in addressing bullying in higher education and creating safer university settings.

Keywords. *Bullying victimization, gender differences, university students, young-adults*

INTRODUCTION

University life is an essential phase of development where people gain vital life skills, cope with their newfound independence, and adapt to ongoing changes in their social, intellectual, and personal lives (Majoka et al., 2022). During this time, one frequently cultivates a unique identity, forms deep connections, and gets ready for future obligations while adhering to social and cultural conventions (Peel & Ward, 2022). According to Berger et al. (2024), the majority of students begin their university careers in their early adult years, which span the ages of 18 to 29 and mark the passage from childhood to adulthood with a spectrum of biological, psychological, cognitive, and social changes. As people grow up and become adulthood, their workloads and responsibilities rise. These include their education (from school and college to university), employment, marriage, and family obligations (Higley, 2019). According to the 1950 theory of psychosocial development by Erick

Erikson, the battle in adulthood is "intimacy versus isolation." At this point, cultivating close and personal ties with other people is the main priority.

University students in our culture encounter several challenges, including social challenges like peer pressure, a lack of social support, and acclimating to an independent lifestyle, as well as academic demands like rigorous homework, strict deadlines, and competitive grading. These factors significantly affect their mental health, which usually leads to mental health problems such stress, anxiety, and depression (Khan et al., 2025; Irfan, 2021; Jibeen, 2015). According to numerous university counseling centers, the necessity for students to get counseling services for a range of developmental and mental health issues has so grown over time (Negash et al., 2021). Therefore, bullying victimization, a severe problem in academic institutions, exacerbates these problems, leading to elevated stress, low self-

esteem, and academic disengagement among university students. Victims often experience social anxiety, difficulties forming relationships with peers, and feelings of loneliness, underscoring the vital role that counseling services play in providing support and interventions (Arseneault, 2017).

According to Moore et al. (2017), bullying victimization is most typically described as experiencing unfavorable behaviors from one or more persons on a regular basis over an extended period of time, with an imbalance of power between the victim and the perpetrator or perpetrators. According to recent studies, bullying is becoming a bigger problem in Pakistan and other nations, especially among young people and university students (Javed et al., 2023). Bullying impacts people differently and can take many various forms, such as relational, physical, verbal, and cyberbullying (Khalf, 2020). Hostile actions such as beating, pushing, or ruining someone else's property are examples of physical bullying (Casper, 2020). Verbal bullying can lead to emotional discomfort and includes name-calling, taunting, threats, and insults (Hamidsyukrie et al., 2022). The use of social media, including sending inappropriate photographs and videos, is closely tied to cyberbullying, which is on the rise globally and occurs when people post damaging content, abuse others on social media, or send inappropriate messages (Dawood & Mitsu, 2022).

Furthermore, women are often the targets of cyberbullying, which exacerbates their stress and anxiety, according to gender differences in cyberbullying (Foody et al., 2019). Accordingly, bullying of any kind can have a significant impact on college students and young adults, leading to increased mental and emotional well-being, low self-esteem, and increased isolation (Stephen & Soni, 2023). Bullying is still a widespread issue that impacts individuals of all ages, with cultural and national variations. It is most prevalent in children, teenagers, and college students, and it manifests differently in each gender. According to many reports, girls are more likely to encounter relational or verbal bullying, such as exclusion and rumor-spreading, whereas boys are more

likely to experience physical bullying, such as shoving or striking (Parveen et al., 2023).

According to another study, girls are more likely to face relational and cyberbullying, usually through social media, whereas men are more likely to experience physical bullying (Gomes et al., 2022). Additionally, although cyberbullying affects both boys and girls, some research indicates that because methods of bullying used online and through electronic media are relational, girls may be more vulnerable to online harassment (Campbell & Bouman, 2018). Research indicates that bullying occurs often both offline and online, with the prevalence of cyberbullying rising as internet access increases. According to Siddiqui and Schultze-Krumbholz (2023), social bullying, which includes gossip and exclusion, is common in university settings and can have a detrimental effect on mental health, leading to feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. Additionally, according to a Pakistani survey, cyberbullying and online harassment are becoming more common among adults and youth, with effects that last past university (Metin & Erbiçer, 2023).

Additionally, bullying negatively impacts students' academic performance and mental health, making it difficult for them to concentrate and perform well in class (Nadeem & Usman, 2022). In addition to academic failure, it can create anxiety and sadness and severely damage students' self-esteem. Bullied college students are more likely to experience emotional distress, which may result in long-term mental health issues (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Furthermore, collectivist countries like Pakistan are particularly prone to parental over-protection, a parenting style in which parents restrict personal freedom and exercise excessive control.

University students in Pakistan are increasingly exposed to social and emotional problems that affect their mental health and academic experiences as a result of the country's changing sociolect-demographic conditions (Lin et al., 2022). The cultural complexity of bullying at Pakistani universities is not sufficiently reflected by the scales already in use from other nations. This emphasizes the need for a culturally appropriate evaluation instrument that takes these particular dynamics into account (Ashfaq et

al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2017). Additionally, there is a dearth of local research on bullying victimization in university settings because most of the prior research has focused on stressors or aggression rather than the factors that lead to bullying, bullying victimization, or the students themselves (Gardella et al., 2019). With an emphasis on the academic, psychological, social, and familial aspects of bullying, this study fills the contextual gap in bullying research for Pakistani university students. It looks at the connections between gender differences and bullying victimization. Developing a valid and reliable indigenous scale (BVSU) to measure bullying victimization among college students is the main goal of this study.

Significant of the Study

This study has important ramifications for comprehending how bullying victimization varies by gender among university students. It gives educators, psychologists, and legislators important information to create focused solutions by highlighting the ways that bullying affects men and women differently. The results highlight the need for gender-sensitive policies and support networks and add to the expanding corpus of research on bullying in higher education. Furthermore, in order to create a safer and more welcoming learning environment, universities can use the findings to guide the development of awareness campaigns, preventative measures, and mental health services catered to the unique requirements of male and female students.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated for the study:

It is hypothesized that males would have more bullying victimization as compared to females in university students.

Method

Research Design

The present study uses a cross-sectional and comparative study was used to evaluate bullying victimization gender differences among university students.

Participants

The study included 300 university students (50% males and 50% females) aged 18 to 25 ($M = 22.41$, $SD = 2.81$), drawn from several departments at a public institution in Pakistan. The sample included undergraduate (BA/BS) and graduate (MA/MS) academic backgrounds.

The inclusion criteria for this study required that participants be undergraduate or postgraduate university students aged 18 to 25. This criterion ensured that the sample reflected young individuals going through university life, when bullying victimization may be common. Individuals undergoing medication or treatment for anxiety were excluded from the study due to potential confounding effects on their psychological reactions. Participants with physical disabilities were also omitted in order to keep the focus on bullying victimization without being influenced by extra vulnerabilities that could affect their experiences differently.

Measure

Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (Khan & Khurshid, 2023).

The Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (Khan & Khurshid, 2023) was utilized in the current study. This culturally focused measure was constructed to capture the distinctive experiences and contextual characteristics associated with bullying in Pakistani higher education institution settings, utilizing a four-point rating scale (0= Never, 1= Often, 2= Mostly, and 3= Always) with 32 items in Urdu. The scale comprises three subscales or factors: dominance and control (F1), mocking (F2), and hostility (F3). The study demonstrated great internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$), good split-half reliability ($r = .86$).

Procedure

Following approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and department, the researcher addressed private universities in Lahore to discuss the study's objectives with university officials and secure their permission. After obtaining institutional approval, university authorities were promised that the obtained data would be secure and anonymous. The researcher introduced herself to the participants and discussed the

study's objective and goals. Participants who agreed to participate got the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU). Participants were ensured confidentiality and autonomy throughout. Each participant took approximately 20-25 minutes. After completing the protocol, participants were debriefed on the study's objectives and given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

Result

The study intended to examine differences in gender in bullying victimization among university students. The study attempted to determine whether male and female students encounter distinct patterns, types, or intensities of bullying

in academic contexts. Understanding these gender differences is critical for establishing tailored therapies and support systems that meet each group's specific requirements. This study also adds to the existing research on bullying by emphasizing the role of gender in victimization experiences among young people in university settings.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

This section includes the Mean, Standard Deviations, Frequencies and Percentages of Continuous and Categorical Variables of the sample (N=300).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Age of Participants (N = 300)

Variables	M	SD
Age	22.41	2.18

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of age. It indicates that the majority of the study's participants were around the age of 22, with a standard deviation of 2.18.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of the Demographic Variables of the Participants (N = 300)

Variables	Male	Female	Total
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Gender	151 (51)	149 (50)	300 (100)
Age			
18 -22	79 (51)	72 (47)	154 (51)
23-25	75 (51)	74 (51)	146 (49)
Academic Program			
Undergraduate	104 (51)	100 (49)	204 (68)



Graduate	47 (49)	49 (48)	96 (32)
Academic Year			
BS-1	27 (54)	23 (46)	50 (17)
BS-11	25 (50)	25 (50)	50 (17)
BS-111	26 (52)	24 (48)	50 (17)
BS-1V	25 (50)	25 (50)	50 (17)
MS-1	24 (48)	26 (52)	50 (17)
MS-2	24 (48)	26 (52)	50 (17)
Family System			
Nuclear	103 (49)	107 (51)	210 (70)
Joint	48 (53)	42 (47)	90 (30)
Birth Order			
First	56 (55)	45 (45)	101 (34)
Middle	69 (48)	74 (52)	143 (47)
Last	26 (46)	30 (54)	56 (19)
Living Status			
Day Scholar	109 (45)	131 (56)	240 (80)
Hostelite	42 (70)	18 (30)	60 (20)
Father's Education			
Illiterate	6 (67)	3 (33)	9 (3)
Under matric	15 (38)	25 (62)	40 (13)
Matriculation	27 (46)	32 (54)	59 (20)
Undergraduate	80 (54)	68 (46)	148 (49)



Graduate	23 (52)	21 (48)	44 (14)
Mother's Education			
Illiterate	18 (62)	11 (48)	29 (10)
Under matric	32 (44)	41 (56)	73 (24)
Matriculation	25 (42)	34 (58)	59 (19)
Intermediate	50 (54)	42 (46)	92 (30)
Undergraduate	26 (57)	20 (43)	46 (15)
Graduate	0 (0)	1 (100)	1 (0.3)

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, f= Frequency

Table 3
 Mean Differences of Gender on EMBU-M, EMBU-F, SF, BVSU, LOA (N = 300)

Variables	Gender								Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Male		Female		<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			LL	UL	
Dominance & Control	7.44	7.99	5.56	6.39	2.30	.02*	-.84	.68	-
Mocking	4.13	4.12	2.74	4.03	2.87	.01**	-1.38	.13	-
Aggression	3.06	4.17	2.19	3.43	.	.05*	-2.77	.66	-
Total Bullying Victimization	14.62	14.46	10.50	12.36	2.66	.008**	1.07	7.18	0.31

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limits, UL= Upper Limit ***p*<.01

The independent samples t-test found significant gender differences in bullying victimization. Males scored substantially higher on Dominance &

Control than females, indicating that males experienced more dominance and control-related bullying victimization. Similarly, males scored

substantially higher on Mocking than females, indicating that they were more frequently teased and ridiculed. In addition, a significant difference was seen in Aggression, with males reporting higher levels of aggression-related bullying victimization. Furthermore, the total Bullying Victimization score was substantially greater among males than females, indicating that males are more likely to be bullied than females. These findings show the importance of gender-sensitive anti-bullying initiatives in universities that address both direct and indirect bullying experiences among students.

Discussion

The current study aimed to assess gender differences in bullying victimization for university students and young adults. The major goal of this study was to use a culturally relevant bullying victimization scale for university students to measure bullying victimization and gender differences. Therefore, the goal of the current study was to study the experience, manifestation, and expression of emotional neglect in university students from Pakistani collectivistic societies, taking into account the negative impacts of bullying victimization among university students as well as cross-cultural variances. In the current study, the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU), a 4-point rating scale of 32 items, was used which has three factors: dominance and control, mocking, and aggression.

The dominance and control subscale highlights bullies' goal for social dominance, which frequently involves targeting weak groups in order to maintain superiority (Jonkmann et al., 2009; Pratto and Stewart, 2011). Bullying is commonly employed to humiliate individuals and assert positions in collectivist cultures like Pakistan (Javed et al., 2023; Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023). Mocking, defined as ridiculing or imitating others, gives bullies more social power in group settings (Haugh, 2010; Robson, 2022; Mushtaq, 2020). Aggression implies hostility, is linked to developmental stages and mental health, and may result from insecurity or a desire to appear dominating (Liu et al., 2012; Russo, 2021).

The study also found substantial differences between genders in bullying victimization, with males ($M = 14.62$, $SD = 14.46$) reporting higher

levels of victimization than female university students. It showed that male university students were more likely to be bullied than female students in Pakistani culture. This suggests that male students may face more frequent or severe bullying, underlining the need for targeted programs to address and prevent bullying among male university students.

The findings of this study focused on how bullying victimization presents itself among university students in Pakistan's cultural environment, resulting in a better understanding of bullying in collectivistic societies and for management and safety for both genders. By addressing these concerns, we can help minimize bullying and protect students from the negative repercussions. We can also conduct workshops for parents to assist them realize how ignoring their child's emotional needs can have harmful consequences and motivate them to provide better care for their children. Moreover, the results emphasize the need of include gender as an important consideration when establishing interventions and strategies to combat bullying in universities. It also reveals that university students and grownups and adults can also face bullying. Additionally, cultural expectations, gender norms, and social dynamics may all have an impact on how both male and females experience and report bullying. Addressing these gender-specific trends is critical to providing safer and more diverse educational settings for all students.

Implications

The study describes how bullying victimization varies between cultures, providing a more in-depth understanding of these experiences among university students and young adults. The culturally sensitive scale can aid in the creation of targeted interventions and preventative strategies that address bullying behaviors unique to a particular cultural setting. Furthermore, the scale provides a consistent and valid tool for assessing bullying victimization in culturally appropriate settings, thereby addressing a vacuum in current research methodologies. Furthermore, the study's findings can be used to shape policies and instructional programs that emphasize culturally relevant approaches to bullying prevention in university settings. Furthermore, the magnitude and scope of

the study may pave the way for future research into cultural differences in bullying practices, boosting cross-cultural comparisons and widening global understanding of the issue.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study stresses the need to address cultural manifestations and the prevalence of bullying among university students and young people and gender differences in bullying victimization in university students and young adults in Pakistan. The study's establishment of a culturally sensitive scale provides a reliable tool for assessing and comprehending the unique experiences of bullying in a variety of cultural contexts. Furthermore, the findings show that gender has a significant relationship bullying victimization, emphasizing that family dynamics must be considered while tackling this issue. These findings underscore the importance of designing customized interventions and policies that take into account cultural nuances and familial effects, resulting in a more inclusive and effective approach to reducing bullying in universities. This work serves as a foundation for future research and activities to combat bullying on a worldwide scale.

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