Bullying and victimization in schools in India

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SUMMARY

This dissertation focuses on the overall study of bullying behaviors, as well as scrutinizes the nuances of these behaviors among school-going youth in India. Previous studies from India on bullying yielded a wide variety of partly conflicting findings. Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a systematic review of past literature from India, while the next three chapters report results from our empirical studies on the relations between bullying, victimization, their predictors and consequences.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a systematic review of literature from India on the topic of bullying and victimization among school-going adolescents. We comprehensively synthesize and discuss 37 published empirical researches including articles, book chapters, and dissertations to systematically collate past literature in this field of research. We examine the psychometric properties of the instruments adopted in the included studies from India, as well as methodological characteristics including design and data collection, sample size and sampling procedures of the included studies, and characteristics of bullying behavior distinctive to the Indian context. Results show that bullying is widely spread, with available prevalence estimates varying largely across India. Additionally, some risk-factors like gender, and consequences of bullying behaviors like low self-esteem, associated with bullying and victimization are comparable to western literature and have also been commonly reported in global literature. However, certain other factors, like caste and religion, and their association with bullying behaviors are typical to the Indian culture and context. Chapter 2 concludes that many studies on bullying from India should be interpreted cautiously because of methodological shortcomings with sampling, instrumentation, research designs, and presentation of the findings. Future research would benefit from attempts to avoid such methodological shortcomings.

The 3rd chapter of this dissertation examines individual characteristics that make, and differentiate between, bullies, victims, and bully-victims, focusing particularly on dimensions of psychopathy, namely callous-unemotional (CU) traits, narcissism, and impulsivity, and their unique contribution in predicting individual bullying behaviors. Earlier studies found that dimensions of Psychopathy have a significant contribution in predicting bullying behaviors among adolescents. However, these studies primarily used self-reports to measure bullying behaviors, and also frequently reported cross-sectional associations, thereby constraining the examination of directionality of relations between bullying and possible antecedents and consequences. Chapter 3 thus examines the associations between Psychopathy and bullying in a longitudinal capacity, using self- as well as peer-reports. Findings from this chapter show that all sub-dimensions of psychopathy, i.e., CU traits, narcissism, and impulsivity, contribute somewhat to the prediction of bullying in order to form a significant combined overall effect. Using multinomial logistic regression analyses, we conclude that psychopathy dimensions taken together provide a better fit in predicting bullying behavior beyond socio-demographics, than the independent psychopathic subscale scores of narcissism, CU traits, and impulsivity. These separate aspects are not significant predictors of bullying and victimization in India. Additionally, chapter 3 illustrates the cultural interference of factors like caste and religion in the study of bullying in India, where we found that for caste, the "non-general" caste category significantly predicted victims, whereas for religion, the "non-Hindu" category predicts victim groups. This chapter further highlights the need and advantage of using a multi-informant approach in the study of bullying and victimization.

In chapter 4 of this dissertation, we take a look at complex associations between bullying victimization behaviors and the Body Mass Index (BMI) of an individual, investigating the structure and context of the relationship between the two constructs in a longitudinal framework. A transactional model was tested by conducting structural

equation modeling analyses with bullying victimization and BMI as the two constructs analyzed in a reciprocal capacity. Key results from this chapter indicate that for self-reported victimization, there was no concurrent or over time association between BMI and victimization for boys or girls. For peer-reported victimization, we observed concurrent associations between BMI and victimization for boys and girls, and a prospective relation where higher BMI corresponded to less victimization over time for boys. However, the one longitudinal association could be nuanced as a chance observation, concluding that this chapter yielded mainly, and almost exclusively, concurrent relations between BMI and victimization among adolescents in India. This chapter emphasizes that given the rigorous longitudinal design, with both self- and peer reports of bully victimization as well as objective measures of BMI, results from western countries may not generalize to India. This calls for new research focusing on cross-validation studies to examine context-specific variables and cultural factors, appearance ideals, and eating habits in India as compared to western countries, in addition to victimization experiences at school.

Chapter 5 of this thesis is about bullying behaviors among youth as a function of their classroom context and composition, specifically eliciting the role of socio-economic status, minority status of an individual with regards to the classroom SES context, and self-perceptions of students sharing this context. Using a moderated-mediation model of analysis, this chapter examines the associations between SES and victimization longitudinally, highlighting change in these associations over time. Furthermore, we examine if the relationship between contextual SES and victimization is mediated by perception of majority or minority SES status of the individual. Results from this chapter show that at baseline classroom level SES plays a significant role in predicting victimization behavior in schools cross-sectionally, but it also does longitudinally, over time. Additionally, this role of the classroom level moderator is mediated through perceptions of self, where individuals who perceive themselves as a

minority experience more victimization than students who belong to a minority but do not perceive themselves as such. However, it was found that in the long run, being part of a minority, and perceiving self as such, leads to decreased victimization. This finding points to the working of normative beliefs, values, and context of the Indian society, warranting future research.

In sum, this dissertation clarifies that bullying behaviors vary in the Indian context, contingent upon several individual and contextual factors. We present several significant contributions to advance our understanding in the field of bullying and victimization, such as the associations between psychopathic traits, cultural variables like caste and religion as well as socio-economic status, and self-perceptions of individuals, with bullying behaviors in India. We advise future researchers to employ designs that allow for the examination of directionality of associations between bullying and its correlates, and build on this thesis through extended replications in India. We further emphasize the need and benefit of using multi-informant approaches in this field of study. We caution future researchers that findings from western studies may not be generalizable to the Indian context, and thus, designing effective interventions for bullying behaviors in schools will require further examination of context-specific variables and cultural factors among school-going adolescents in India.