

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND BULLYING BEHAVIOR AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY FROM PAKISTAN

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To find out the relationship between mindfulness and bullying behaviour among school children in Pakistan.

**Methodology:** This cross sectional research was conducted in three private sector schools of Multan from March to August 2015. Two hundred gender-matched students, aged between 8 to 11 years were enrolled for the study. The assessments included Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure and Bullying-Behaviour Scale. Apart from the descriptive statistics, the relationship between mindfulness and bullying behaviours was analyzed using Pearson correlation. Gender differences was computed through independent t-test and ANOVA was performed to find out the effect of birth order on mindfulness and bullying behaviours.

**Results:** The mean age of the sample was  $9.49 \pm 1.26$  years. There were 41 (20.5%) single children, 53 (26.5%) first, 76 (38%) middle and 30 (15%) last children. Results showed that mindfulness and bullying behavior negatively correlated with each other ( $r = -.625$ ). Significant differences in mindfulness and bullying behaviour among male and female children were found. Male students experienced more bullying as compared to female students and they also showed more mindfulness than female students ( $p < 0.05$ ). The difference for mindfulness and bullying behaviour scores of four groups of children with different birth orders (single, first, middle and last child) using ANOVA, showed significant effect of birth order ( $p < 0.000$  &  $0.000$  for mindfulness and bullying behaviour, respectively)

**Conclusion:** There is a negative correlation between mindfulness and bullying behaviour and single children show high bullying behaviour.

**Key Words:** Mindfulness, Bullying behavior, Mental health, Birth order

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## INTRODUCTION

Bullying as a subset of aggressive behaviour includes one person making threats to another person without actually being physically aggressive<sup>1</sup>. Three characteristics of bullying behaviour have been identified. First, these behaviours are intended to harm or disturb; second, they are repeated over the time; and third characteristic relates to an imbalance of physical or mental power<sup>2-3</sup>.

Bullying can negatively affect children's psychological and physical health<sup>4</sup>. Three common types of bullying have been described. The first type is physical bullying that includes physical contact between a person who bully and the other who is bullied e.g., hitting, kicking, slapping, scratching, etc. Second, the verbal bullying, which refers to direct or indirect verbal hostility or

aggression towards the victim e.g., name-calling, teasing, insulting, threatening, etc. Third, the social bullying, which is a type of indirect aggression at the victim e.g., leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, etc<sup>5</sup>.

In contrast to bullying behaviour, which is characterized by impulsivity and a lack of empathy, mindfulness increases empathy and consideration for others. Students who engage in bullying behaviour often target classmates who are dissimilar. Since a non-judgmental attitude is the core principle of mindfulness, it seems to build skills that are lacking in students who engage in bullying behaviour. A growing body of literature suggests the positive effects of mindfulness on children. Research has also reported significant negative correlation between mindfulness and bullying behaviour<sup>6-9</sup>.

Recent research has revealed that boys are more involved in bullying behaviour as compared to girls<sup>8-12</sup>. An Italian study of 4386 students indicated that both the bullies and their victims were all males<sup>13</sup>. Studies have also confirmed that while boys bully more than girls, significant differences were found in the style of bullying and victimization across the world<sup>14-15</sup>.

Bullying is considered to be a serious issue in the schools, affecting many children and most of these suffer from many psychological disturbances by bullying behaviour. It has been noticed that the rate of bullying at schools in Pakistan is increasing. Although many researchers have worked on bullying in western countries, but to the best of our knowledge, no other study has been reported in Pakistan involving the focused age group of this study. The only available literature is from an older age group and is a 2009 Global School-Based Health Survey report for Pakistan, conducted by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization and Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, United States<sup>16, 17</sup>. Therefore, it was considered important to carry out this study in Multan, Pakistan to assess the relationship between mindfulness and bullying behaviours among school children.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted from March to August 2015. We enrolled 200 children (100 boys and 100 girls) from three private schools of Multan with an age range of 8-11 years. A random sampling technique was used and every 5th student was enrolled in the study. These children were studying between grade four to grade seven. Two Instruments were used in the research.

Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) is a ten-item, five-point Likert scale. It was developed to assess the level of mindfulness in children and adolescents. It asks the child to rate how true each item is for them from 1 (Never True) to 5 (Always True) and reports with an internal consistency of 0.80. Lower score indicates low mindful behaviour and higher score indicates high mindful behaviour<sup>18</sup>.

Bullying Behaviour Scale was developed in 1996 by Austin & Joseph to assess bullying behaviour at schools. This scale comprises of six items. First 3 items indicate to being the culprit of negative physical activities (hit and pushed, singled out, harassed) and other three indicating to being the culprit of negative verbal activities (e.g., teased, appalling names, snickered at). Every item is scored from 1 to 4. The scale is scored by figuring the mean score (6 items sum divided to 6). High mean score demonstrates a high level of bullying<sup>19</sup>.

Data was collected through survey questionnaires by the researchers. Permission from the respective schools and their teachers was sought. Parental permission form

from the parents of the participants was obtained before administration of the questionnaires. Participants were free to leave the study at any stage if they chose to. They were informed that their names and responses will be kept confidential. After that, both the questionnaires were completed along with the demographic sheet.

Analysis was carried out using SPSS version 20. To summarise the data, descriptive statistics were computed. To assess the relationship between variables, Pearson correlation coefficient was used. Independent sample t-test was used to examine the effect of gender. One-way ANOVA was computed to examine the birth order differences in mindfulness and bullying behaviour.

## RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was  $9.49 \pm 1.26$  years. The mean age of boys was  $9.38 \pm 1.06$  years and the mean age of girls was  $9.60 \pm 1.43$  years. There were 41 (20.5%) single children, 53 (26.5) first, 76 (38%) middle and 30 (15%) last children in the sample. The mean value for Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure was .87 and for Bullying Behaviour Scale was .85, respectively. Table 1 depicts that mindfulness has a significant negative relationship with bullying behaviour. Children with a high level of mindfulness will experience less bullying behaviour.

Findings indicate that boys show significantly more mindfulness and bullying behaviour than girls ( $t = 2.391$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Further analyses to explore the difference for mindfulness and bullying behaviour scores of four groups of children (Single, First, Middle and Last Child), using ANOVA, showed significant effect ( $F = 15.148$  &  $p = 0.000$  for mindfulness and  $F = 10.814$  &  $p = 0.000$  for bullying behaviour, respectively). Post hoc test for group comparison, using the least significance difference, was computed to see the mean differences among four groups of birth order. The results suggested that mindfulness was low in a single child. Overall taken together, the findings depicted that significant difference exist in the mean score of bullying behaviour among four groups of birth order. It also suggested that single child has significantly higher level of bullying behaviour. The details are shown in table 2.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to find the relationship between mindfulness and bullying behaviour among school going children. Findings of the study that inverse relationship between increased mindfulness and being bullied is in favour of previous findings and confirm that mindfulness has a negative association with bullying behaviours among school children<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, the finding of our study that mindfulness levels are higher in boys

**Table 1: Correlation between mindfulness and bullying behaviour (n=200)**

Scales	Mindfulness	Bullying Behaviour
Mindfulness	1	
Bullying Behaviour	-.625**	1

\*\*p &lt;0.01

**Table 2: Multiple Comparisons for four groups of birth order on the Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure and Bullying Behaviour Scale**

Variables	Birth order (i)	Birth order (j)	Mean Difference	SE	p
Mindfulness (F = 15.148)	Single Child (n=41)	First Child	-14.217	2.215	.000**
		Middle Child	-10.089*	2.064	.000**
		Last Child	-12.874*	2.559	.000**
	First Child (n=53)	Middle Child	4.128*	1.906	.032*
		Last Child	1.343	2.433	.582
	Middle Child (n=76)	Last Child	-2.785	2.296	.227
Last Child (n=30)	-	-	-	-	
Bullying Behaviour (F = 10.814)	Single Child (n=41)	First Child	5.747*	1.035	.000**
		Middle Child	4.187*	.964	.000**
		Last Child	3.901*	1.195	.001*
	First Child (n=53)	Middle Child	-1.561	.890	.081
		Last Child	-1.847	1.136	.106
	Middle Child (n=76)	Last Child	-.286	1.073	.790
Last Child (n=30)	-	-	-	-	

\*p &lt;0.05, \*\*p &lt;0.01

than girls have also been reported previously<sup>20</sup>. The finding that boys experienced more bullying than girls is also in line with a number of previous studies where it was reported that boys are more involved in bullying behaviours as compared to girls<sup>12,13,15,18-20</sup>.

Birth order is an important aspect that is mostly ignored during the study of child behaviour. Adler took the view that the personality of the child is largely characterized by its time in the family place, because their parents incline to handle child uniquely depending on their birth order<sup>21</sup>. Birth order is linked to the behaviour, interest, attitude and personality traits of the child<sup>22</sup>. We found that single child faced more bullying behaviour than first, middle and last child. Similarly, the level of mindfulness was low in single child as compared to first, middle and last child. This is hard to explain and requires further research. However, it is known that single children are naturally introvert and they are not interested to communicate with outside world, which may be a reason as to why they have low level of mindfulness<sup>23</sup>.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study from Pakistan, exploring the relationship between mind-

fulness and bullying behaviour in children of this age group. It is too early to presume whether the results of this study can apply to the adult population, in Pakistani context, or not. However, this is an area that requires further exploration. The immediate next step should be to evaluate the use of mindfulness in Pakistani schools to see whether it helps reduce bullying.

### LIMITATION

We had a smaller sample size due to limited resources. There is a need to improve methodology and to expand variables of interest, to have a better understanding of bullying. There is also a need to develop and evaluate mindfulness interventions for children in Pakistan. Qualitative method of research can be useful to explore the needs, in this area.

### CONCLUSION

Significant negative relationship between mindfulness and bullying behaviour was found. The study revealed that boys show more mindfulness than girls. Findings also showed that mindfulness was low in single children and they experienced more bullying behaviour as compared to first, middle or last children.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

MA conceived designed and did data collection and statistical analysis. MI finalized the statistical analysis and manuscript writing. FN did review and final approval of manuscript. All authors contributed significantly to the submitted manuscript.