

Causes of School Bullying Based on Theoretical Approaches and Socio-Environmental Factors: A Detailed Analysis

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Abstract

School bullying is a complex and multifaceted behavior shaped by an interplay of individual psychological traits, biological predispositions, social learning processes, and broader environmental influences. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of school bullying through various theoretical lenses, including psychoanalytic, behavioral, neurological, social learning, social, and feminist perspectives. Additionally, the role of family, peers, school environment, and societal culture is explored to understand how these layers contribute to bullying behavior. This holistic approach is essential for designing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Keywords: School Bullying, Behavior, Social Learning.

Introduction

School bullying remains one of the most pressing challenges facing educational institutions worldwide. It is characterized by repeated aggressive behaviors intended to cause harm or discomfort to peers who are perceived as vulnerable or different. The consequences of bullying extend beyond immediate physical or emotional pain, often leading to long-term psychological trauma, decreased academic performance, social isolation, and even suicidal ideation for victims. Perpetrators of bullying are also at risk of adverse outcomes, such as engagement in antisocial behaviors and difficulties in forming healthy relationships.

Despite extensive research, the root causes of school bullying are complex and multifaceted, defying simple explanations. Bullying behavior emerges from a dynamic interplay between individual predispositions and external influences, encompassing biological, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. Understanding these underlying causes requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates insights from various theoretical frameworks.

Psychoanalytic theory, for example, explores the unconscious drives that may fuel aggressive behaviors, while behavioral and social learning theories emphasize the role of environmental modeling and reinforcement. Neurological and biological re-

search offers perspectives on innate factors such as brain function and hormonal influences that can predispose children to aggression. Moreover, socio-environmental contexts—including family dynamics, peer relationships, school climate, and broader societal norms—play a critical role in shaping how bullying manifests and is maintained.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the causes of school bullying by synthesizing these diverse theoretical approaches alongside socio-environmental factors. By examining the complex interrelations among these elements, this study seeks to illuminate the multifactorial nature of bullying and inform more effective, holistic prevention and intervention strategies within educational settings.

Theoretical Perspectives on Bullying Psychoanalytic Theories

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, bullying is seen as an outlet for innate aggressive instincts rooted in unconscious drives. Freud's concept of Thanatos (the death drive) suggests that humans harbor aggressive impulses that need to be expressed. In children, when these impulses are not adequately managed or channeled through socially acceptable means, they may manifest as bullying. Additionally, unresolved internal conflicts or frustrations within the child can cause projection onto peers,

with bullying serving as a defense mechanism to release psychological tension or regain control.

However, psychoanalytic explanations alone are limited because they do not account for learned behavior or environmental context, which are crucial in shaping aggression.

Behavioral and Social Learning Theories

Behavioral theories propose that aggression, including bullying, is learned through conditioning and reinforcement. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) significantly advances this perspective by emphasizing observational learning—children imitate behaviors they see modeled by parents, peers, or media figures, especially when those behaviors appear rewarded.

For example, a child who witnesses aggressive conflict resolution at home or in the media may learn to adopt bullying as a means to gain power or attention. Reinforcement through peer approval or lack of punishment further entrenches these behaviors. This theory highlights the critical role of social context and modeling, suggesting that interventions should focus on modifying environmental cues and reinforcing prosocial behaviors.

Neurological and Biological Theories

Neurological research identifies biological factors that influence aggression. Elevated testosterone and other hormonal imbalances have been correlated with increased aggression, potentially explaining higher bullying rates among males. Moreover, impairments or developmental issues in brain regions responsible for impulse control and emotional regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex, can predispose individuals to aggressive outbursts.

Neurotransmitter imbalances, including low serotonin levels, have also been linked to impulsive and aggressive behavior. These biological components interact dynamically with environmental stimuli—children with neurological vulnerabilities placed in stressful or unsupportive environments may be more prone to bullying.

Socio-Environmental Factors Influencing Bullying **Family Environment**

The family environment is foundational in shaping children's social and emotional development. Dysfunctional families characterized by neglect, abuse, inconsistent discipline, or authoritarian parenting can foster aggressive tendencies. For instance, children exposed to domestic violence may internalize aggression as a normative way to interact.

Parental absence or divorce can also lead to emotional insecurity, prompting children to assert power through bullying. Conversely, warm, communicative, and supportive parenting has been shown to buffer against aggressive behaviors, promoting empathy and conflict resolution skills.

Peer Influence and School Climate

Peer relationships are a critical context where bullying occurs.

Children lacking social competence or secure attachments may bully to gain status, acceptance, or control. Peer norms that tolerate or encourage aggression exacerbate bullying prevalence. Schools with poor supervision, unclear anti-bullying policies, or hostile climates often see higher rates of bullying. Inclusive, supportive environments that promote respect and diversity can mitigate bullying behaviors by fostering empathy and discouraging social exclusion.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Context

Socioeconomic stressors such as poverty, community violence, and social exclusion indirectly contribute to bullying by increasing family and individual stress levels. Limited resources may reduce parental availability and monitoring, while cultural norms that tolerate violence or rigid gender roles further perpetuate bullying.

Feminist theory provides critical insight into how gendered power imbalances shape bullying behaviors, especially in forms like sexual harassment or gender-based violence. Societal acceptance of male dominance and female subordination legitimizes aggressive control tactics, making bullying not just an individual issue but a reflection of broader societal inequalities.

Integrative Discussion

Bullying emerges from a dynamic interaction of multiple factors rather than a single cause. Biological predispositions, such as hormonal or neurological vulnerabilities, may increase risk but do not determine behavior in isolation. Social learning processes, particularly within family and peer groups, provide models for aggression and influence reinforcement patterns.

Socio-environmental stressors and cultural contexts shape the expression of bullying, with factors such as socioeconomic hardship and gender norms playing critical roles. Interventions must therefore be multifaceted—addressing individual psychological and biological needs, improving family functioning, promoting positive peer interactions, and challenging harmful societal norms.

Expanded Conclusions

The phenomenon of school bullying is deeply rooted in a complex constellation of individual, relational, and structural factors. The integration of psychoanalytic, behavioral, neurological, social learning, and feminist theories demonstrates that bullying cannot be attributed to a singular cause but rather to an intricate network of biological predispositions, learned behaviors, and socio-environmental conditions.

Biological and neurological components provide important insights into innate vulnerabilities and impulse control difficulties that can predispose children toward aggressive behaviors. However, these predispositions are heavily moderated by environmental experiences, particularly within the family and peer contexts, where modeling, reinforcement, and social norms operate.

Moreover, socio-economic factors and cultural dynamics, espe-

cially gender norms highlighted by feminist theory, illuminate the broader societal contributions to bullying. These include systemic inequalities, cultural acceptance of violence, and the marginalization of certain groups, all of which exacerbate bullying prevalence and severity.

Ultimately, bullying is a social symptom reflecting broader relational and societal dysfunctions. Addressing it demands comprehensive strategies that combine individual psychological support, family-based interventions, school policy reforms, and cultural change initiatives. Schools should foster inclusive environments that encourage empathy, emotional literacy, and positive peer relations while actively confronting gender stereotypes and social inequalities.

Future research should continue to explore the interactive effects of biological and environmental factors longitudinally to develop tailored intervention programs. Policy makers must prioritize anti-bullying frameworks that are evidence-based and culturally

sensitive, incorporating voices from children, families, educators, and communities.

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