

## Peer Influence & Bullying: Effects on Students' Emotional Well-being

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### Abstract

Students frequently experience bullying and peer influence for various reasons, which can have a great impact on their emotional well-being. The aim of the study is to analyse the quality of emotional well-being among Higher Secondary Students, which may vary depending on how much a student feels of being under peer influence and being a bully/victim. The Sample of this study is  $n = 102$  Higher Secondary Students who are pursuing 11th and 12th grade in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Data was gathered by simple random sampling. The tools used in the study are the Peer Influence Scale (Laurence Steinberg, 2006), Bully/Victims Scale (Susan Harter, 1985), and the Emotional Regulation Scale (James J. Gross et al., 2003). Pearson product-moment correlation was used to assess the relationship between the variables. One-way ANOVA was used to examine the relationship between each main variable and the Demographic variables considered for the study.

**Keywords:** Peer influence, Bullying, victims of bullying, and Emotional well-being.

### Introduction

Tripathy (2018) highlighted that peer influence shapes adolescent behaviour, as students tend to adapt to their peer group's beliefs and actions. This influence can be positive, promoting healthy habits and better academics, or negative, leading to issues like substance use, anxiety, bullying, and poor well-being. Bullying is defined as an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly over an extended period of time against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves (Olweus, 1999; Whitney & Smith, 1993; cited in Slonje & Smith, 2008, p.1). Peer victimization is characterized by repeated intentional harm where the victim has less power than the aggressor (Graham, 2006). It can be overt (verbal or physical) or indirect, such as spreading rumours or social exclusion (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Such bullying can lead to lasting emotional distress, affecting students' social life, academics, and overall well-being.

Emotional well-being refers to a mentally healthy state marked by positive traits like adaptability and a balanced personality (Shek, 1992). It involves self-awareness, identity, life purpose, and choosing supportive peers, all of which shape students' overall emotional development.

### Review of the literature

**Ghatol (2017)** reviewed academic stress among secondary school students and concluded that a supportive, stimulating environment is essential for their academic success.

**Boruah et al. (2016)** conducted a systematic review on peer pressure, highlighting that positive peer influence can promote healthy social and emotional development in adolescents, while also acknowledging its negative aspects.

**Giletta et al. (2021)** conducted a meta-analysis showing that peer influence is consistent across various behaviors and attitudes in childhood and adolescence.

**Hamilton et al. (2021)** conducted the study on How has the Pandemic Affected Students' Social – Emotional Well-being? A Review of the Evidence to date. The results showed that the pandemic had a broad impact on students' mental health, but its effects on their social and emotional development are less well known.

**Shaw et al. (2013)** did the research on The Forms of Bullying Scale (FBS): Validity and Reliability estimates for a measure of bullying victimization and perpetration in adolescence. These metrics allow for the evaluation of the impact or harm caused by various forms of bullying as reported by the targeted individual.

**Mishna et al. (2012)** examined the Risk factors for involvement in cyberbullying: Victims, bullies, and bully-victims. They used a Multinomial Logistic Regression to look at the relationship between our independent variables (gender, age, technology use, parental involvement, and safety) and the categories representing cyberbullying. The bully-victims category was found to be prevalent in the current study's results.

**Berkowitz et al. (2013)** did the research on Student and teacher responses to violence in school: The divergent views of bullies, victims, and bully victims. The results showed that although neither

students nor teachers intentionally speed up violent episodes, they were unwilling to act responsibly to put an end to the violence.

### Hypothesis

1. There would be a significant relationship between peer influence and Emotional well-being among Higher Secondary Students.
2. There would be a significant relationship between bullying and Emotional well-being among Higher Secondary Students.
3. There would be a significant relationship between peer influence and Bullying among Higher Secondary Students.

### Methods

This study was designed to assess how peer influence and bullying affect the Emotional well-being of students. The method used in the study is Quantitative research. The data was collected from the Higher Secondary Students ( $n = 102$ ) who are pursuing 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade by simple random sampling.

**Demographics:** All the students completed a brief demographic survey, assessing their gender, type of personality, number of siblings, whether they engage in sibling rivalries, to whom they disclose their worries, their trustworthy person, and their parenting style.

### Inclusion Criteria

- The Higher Secondary Students who are currently pursuing 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade can participate in this study.
- The students should be from Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- Around 20 students from 1) Don Bosco Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Chennai, 2) Periyar Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Chennai, 3) Smt. Durgadevi Choudhary Vivekananda Vidyalaya, Chennai, 4) Jaigopal Garodia Vivekananda Vidyalaya, Chennai, 5) KRM Public School, Chennai, were selected to participate in this study.

### Exclusion Criteria

- Students who are pursuing grades other than 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade cannot participate in this study.
- The students outside Chennai cannot participate in this study.
- College students cannot participate in this study.

## Tools Used in this Study

### 1. Peer Influence Scale (Steinberg, 2006)

The Peer Influence (Steinberg, 2006) measure was created for this study to assess adolescents' autonomous behaviour in interactions with their peer group. Participants are first presented with two opposing scenarios and then asked to select and rank the scenario that most closely matches their behaviour (e.g., "sort of true" or "really true"). Participants are given ten sequences that each explore a different aspect of potential influence.

### 2. Bully/Victims Scale (Harter, 1985)

Bully/victims scale (Harter, 1985) is a six-item Peer-Victimisation Scale and the six-item Bullying-Behaviour Scale. And those two are kept separate. Each item is scored from 1 (really true for me) to 4 (really true for me). Higher scores indicate greater experience of victimisation and greater bullying behaviour.

### 3. Emotional Regulation Scale (Gross et al., 2003)

Emotional Regulation Scale (Gross et al., 2003) is a 10-item test that assesses respondents' propensity to use either (1) Expressive Suppression or (2) Cognitive Reappraisal to control their emotions. And those two are also kept separate. On a seven-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), respondents mark their responses to each question.

## Statistical Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to assess the relationship between the variables. One-way ANOVA was used to relationship between each main variable and the Demographic variables considered for the study.

## Table:

**Table 1 shows the Correlation between the variables - Peer Influence, Bullying, and Emotional Well-being:**

	Cognitive Reappraisal	Expressive Suppression	Peer Influence	Bully Behaviour	Peer Victimization
Cognitive Reappraisal	1				
Expressive Suppression	-.913**	1			

Peer Influence	.870**	.935**	1		
Bully Behaviour	.086	-.075	.090	1	
Peer Victimization	-.819**	.861**	-.892**	-.081	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

## Findings

Table 1 shows the correlation between the variables

1. There is a significant negative relationship between the cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being and Expressive suppression of emotional well-being, with a correlation of  $-.913$ . This indicates that cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being is high, then Expressive suppression of emotional well-being would be low. Individuals who use cognitive reappraisal view situations more positively, reducing the need to suppress their emotions; for example, seeing failure as a learning opportunity helps them express feelings instead of hiding them.
2. There is a significant negative relationship between the Peer victimization of bullying and cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being, with the correlation of  $-.819$ . This indicates that Peer victimization of bullying increases, then the cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being would be affected. Students who face frequent bullying often find it difficult to positively reinterpret their experiences. For instance, repeated teasing may lead them to internalize negativity rather than view it as others' behavior, reducing their ability to use cognitive reappraisal.
3. There is a significant positive relationship between the Peer victimization of bullying and Expressive suppression of emotional well-being, with a correlation of  $.861$ . This indicates that Expressive suppression of emotional well-being increases, and then Peer victimization of bullying also increases. Students who are frequently bullied often choose to hide or suppress their emotions instead of expressing them, due to fear of further teasing or judgment. This suppression can make them appear more vulnerable, which may increase continued bullying.
4. There is a significant positive relationship between peer influence and cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being, with the correlation of **.870**. This indicates that when the positive Peer influence increases, cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being also increases. Supportive peers often help individuals see situations more positively, encouraging them to rethink challenges in a healthier way.

5. There is a significant negative relationship between the Peer Influence and Expressive suppression of Emotional Wellbeing, with the correlation of **-.935**. This indicates that when the positive peer influence is low, then their expressive suppression of emotions becomes high. When students lack positive and encouraging peer support, they often feel unsafe expressing their emotions and tend to suppress them.
  
6. There is a significant negative relationship between the Peer influence and Peer victimization of bullying, with the correlation of **-.892**. This indicates that when the positive Peer influence is high, Peer victimization of bullying decreases. Students who are surrounded by supportive and positive peers who offer protection, inclusion, and encouragement are less likely to be bullied.

**Table 2 shows the Correlation between the variable Emotional Well-being and the Demographic variables considered for the study:**

Demographic Variables	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Gender	Male	45	33.56	6.225	9.360	.003
	Female	57	37.02	5.201	6.978	.010
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Type of personality	Extrovert	43	35.67	4.907	.044 .185	.957 .832
	Introvert	28	35.46	7.110		
	Ambivert	31	35.26	6.170		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
No. of Siblings	1	59	35.37	6.283	.173 .477	.915 .699
	2	19	35.00	6.412		
	More than 2	9	36.56	5.077		
	None	15	35.93	4.367		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Sibling rivalries	Yes	34	33.94	6.536	.449 .618	.504 .434
	No	68	36.26	5.449		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Parenting style	Authoritative	23	33.74	7.881	1.158 1.435	.330 .237
	Permissive	53	36.21	5.289		
	Authoritarian	14	34.71	5.075		

	Uninvolved	12	36.58	4.713		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Trustable person.	Parents	31	34.16	6.778	1.381	.256
	Friends	29	35.48	6.104		
	Siblings	42	36.48	4.950	1.096	.338
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		

**Table 2** shows that there is a significant difference between males and females in Cognitive reappraisal of emotional well-being, with a correlation of **9.360** and **.003**, and in Expressive suppression of emotional well-being, with a correlation of **6.978** and **.010**. While the other Demographic variables are not Significant.

**Table 3 shows the Correlation between the variable Peer Influence and the Demographic variables considered for the study**

Demographic Variables	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Gender	Male	45	33.56	6.225	.058	.947
	Female	57	37.02	5.201		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Type of personality	Extrovert	43	35.67	4.907	.136	.873
	Introvert	28	35.46	7.110		
	Ambivert	31	35.27	6.170		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
No. of Siblings	1	59	35.38	6.283	.160	.923
	2	19	35.00	6.412		
	More than 2	9	36.54	5.077		
	None	15	35.91	4.367		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Sibling rivalries	Yes	34	33.94	6.536	.008	.930
	No	68	36.26	5.449		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		

Demographic Variables	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Parenting style	Authoritative	23	33.74	7.881	1.704	.171
	Permissive	53	36.21	5.289		
	Authoritarian	14	34.71	5.075		
	Uninvolved	12	36.58	4.713		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		
Trustable person.	Parents	31	34.16	6.778	138.808	.000
	Friends	29	35.48	6.104		
	Siblings	42	36.48	4.950		
	Total	102	35.49	5.905		

Table 3 shows that there is a significance of students who were negatively influenced by the peer groups has disclosed it to their siblings, as they were their trustworthy person, with a correlation of 138.808 and .000. While the other Demographic variables are not Significant.

Table 4 shows the Correlation between the variable Bully/victims and the Demographic variables considered for the study

Demographic Variables	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Gender	Male	45	2.02	.149	5.057	.437 .027
	Female	57	2.05	.225		
	Total	102	2.04	.195		
Type of personality	Extrovert	43	2.07	.258	1.162 .591	.317 .556
	Introvert	28	2.04	.189		
	Ambivert	31	2.00	.000		
	Total	102	2.04	.195		

Demographic Variables	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
No. of Siblings	1	59	2.14	.345	1.210 .040	.310 .989
	2	19	2.16	.375		
	More than 2	9	2.11	.333		

	None	15	2.13	.352		
	Total	102	2.14	.346		
Sibling rivalries	Yes	34	2.06	.239	1.203 .171	.275 .680
	No	68	2.03	.170		
	Total	102	2.04	.195		
Parenting style	Authoritative	23	2.00	.449	.733 1.365	.535 .258
	Permissive	53	2.06	.295		
	Authoritarian	14	2.07	.363		
	Uninvolved	12	2.04	.289		
	Total	102	2.26	.346		
Trustable person.	Parents	31	2.23	.456	.111 4.291	.954 .059
	Friends	29	2.17	.384		
	Siblings	42	2.05	.216		
	Total	102	2.14	.346		

**Table- 4** shows that there is a significant difference between male and female in Peer victimisation of bullying with the correlation of **5.057** and **0.27**, additionally, students who experienced bullying were more likely to disclose it to their siblings as they were perceived as trusted individuals with a correlation of **4.291** and **.059**. While the other Demographic variables are not Significant.

### Conclusion

The findings showed a significant relationship between the variables considered for this study i.e Peer Influence, Bullying and Emotional well-being.

### Limitations

This study does not establish that traditional bullying directly causes psychological or physical problems, does not address the impact of cyberbullying, and does not examine the influence of factors such as parenting style, number of siblings, sibling rivalry, or personality type.

### Scope for Further Research

Future research can explore how parenting style, siblings, and personality influence these variables, while also distinguishing traditional bullying from cyberbullying and their effects.

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