

**PROMOTING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH: PREVALENCE,
FACTORS, AND STRATEGIES ADDRESSING BULLYING
VICTIMIZATION**

By

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

The study took ethical approval from MEd Research Ethics Committee of BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED), BRAC University. The authorities of the respective study sites will be approached for permission to proceed with the data collection. Each participant will be briefed about the study's objectives before data collection. Informed written/verbal consent will be attained before the data collection.

Abstract

Introduction: Bullying at schools is a common phenomenon around the world, including in Bangladesh, and it affects the academic performance, peer relationships, and mental well-being of both victims and bullies. This study aimed to assess the current prevalence of bullying in government primary schools of Bangladesh and identify the factors associated with it among students.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 154 primary school students by face-to-face interview method using convenience sampling. Two FGDs were also conducted among ten primary school teachers.

Result: The study found that 97.4% of the students were direct bullying victims, 79.87% of the students were indirect bullying victims, and 57.14% of the students were evaluative bullying victims. Almost 46.1% of the students have faced all three types of bullying. The teachers had suggested an integrated approach of teachers, parents, and students to decrease the bullying in the primary school.

Conclusion: To prevent bullying at school, creating a supportive school environment that encourages cooperation among students, teachers, parents, and the community is crucial. Aspects like parental education, socio-economic status, and parent-child relationships should also be considered while addressing this problem.

Keywords: Primary School, Bullying, Bullying Victimization, Teachers, MBVS, Bangladesh.

Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to my beloved father, mother, and my wife for their love and support.

Acknowledgement

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List of Acronyms

BSc	: Bachelor in Science
FGD	: Focus Group Discussion
GSHS	: Global School-Based Student Health Survey
IRB	: Institutional Review Board
KII	: Key Informant Interview
MBVS	: Multi-dimensional Bullying Victimization Scale
RWsA	: Restorative Whole-school Approach
UN	: United Nation
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Glossary

- Bullying:** Bullying can be defined as a subtype of interpersonal aggression that is characterized by an ongoing pattern of violent behavior and a power disparity between the bully and the victim.
- Primary School:** The primary school considered in this study is the school where grade 1 to grade 5 students come to learn.
- Inclusive and safe school:** Every student, irrespective of their socio-economic differences and physical appearance, feel safe and included in the school environment.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Bullying is a major public health and social crisis around the world. It is usually described as the purposeful infliction of physical, mental, or verbal harm to another person. Olweus (2001) defines bullying as a subtype of interpersonal aggression that is characterized by an ongoing pattern of violent behavior and a power disparity between the bully and the victim (Mbah, 2020a). Bullying usually comes in different forms, such as direct physical assaults, teasing, rejection, isolation, spreading rumors and virtual harassment through any of the online platforms.

Bullying negatively affects the academic achievement, peer relationships, and mental health of both the victims and the bullies (Xu et al., 2022). Researchers have found a correlation between depression and being bullied at school. In addition, victims of bullying have demonstrated an increased risk of suicidal attempts and intentions (Yu et al., 2022). Bullying is a multifaceted problem with interconnected causes and effects. Several socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, family environment, parents' educational level, and socioeconomic status, have been cited as determinants of bullying at school (Halabi et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2022). Furthermore, student physical appearance, coping ability, and individual relationship quality were also found to be associated with school bullying (Yu et al., 2022).

The prevalence of bullying in schools varies widely between countries. Although physical and cyberbullying are the most frequent and concerning forms of bullying, social and verbal bullying is the most common form that students experience in school (Mbah, 2020b). According to UNESCO, 32% of school-going teenagers experienced peer bullying, while researchers found that South Asian and West and Central African countries showed relatively

higher rates of bullying at school (Rahman et al., 2020). The prevalence of bullying among Bangladeshi students is alarming, and a recent study found that 24.5% of its participants have experienced bullying at school. (Rahman et al., 2020). As the prevalence of bullying in schools continues to rise, immediate preventative measures are required. Several studies have shown that anti-bullying programs that rely only on student participation fail to effectively reduce bullying (Dake et al., 2003). The comprehensive school-based approach, which includes the spontaneous participation of students, teachers, and parents, has proven effective in reducing bullying in schools (Wong et al., 2011). Parents' knowledge of bullying assists in identifying victimized students. Moreover, parents' and teachers' clear and accurate perception of bullying is also effective in reducing bullying on school premises (Salehi et al., 2016).

1.2 Research Topic

The topic for this research is Bullying in Schools.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Bullying in schools has become a worldwide concern, notably in Bangladesh. (Kumpulainen et al., 2001). Research has found that four in every ten students in Bangladesh has faced bullying in their school environment (Ahmed et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that bullying has acute and chronic psychiatric effects on students. It is directly linked to the student's mental health, leading to self-harm and suicidal thoughts. It also causes low self-esteem, anxiety, poor academic performance and behavioral problems (M. I. Islam et al., 2022). Few studies have been conducted among Bangladeshi students, but none have focused on students in government primary schools. Moreover, no study was aimed to find out possible prevention of bullying at school as well as making school a safer place for the students. Thus, this research aims to determine the prevalence of bullying victimization among students and the factors associated with bullying victimization in government primary schools.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the prevalence of bullying victimization in government primary schools?
2. What socio-demographic factors are associated with bullying victimization among government primary school students?
3. How can primary schools be safer and more inclusive for all students, regardless of their background or socio-economic status, to prevent bullying victimization?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

Bullying is a widespread phenomenon at school premises that occurs worldwide. It also violates the fundamental rights of a student on school premises. So, this study aims to determine the current prevalence of bullying among primary school students in Bangladesh. Further, it is well established that being bullied at school adversely affects students' mental health and academic performance. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend how to improve their learning environment at school by eliminating school bullying. Hence, this study is assisting us to identify the associated factors of bullying as well as the variables that increase the chances of students being bullied in government primary schools. The study also found and suggested new solutions to make the schools more inclusive and safer place for all students.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Bullying has a negative effect on schoolchildren's psychological and social development, yet unspoken in most cases. The prevalence of school bullying is widespread and extensively documented in numerous countries. Very limited studies have been conducted in Bangladesh to assess the prevalence rate of bullying, and no study has been conducted to look into the factors related to being bullied in government primary schools. Therefore, this study generated

relevant knowledge that will assist the responsible authorities in gaining a better knowledge of the current bullying situation in primary schools and the factors that contribute to it. It also helped to take immediate action to prevent bullying and improve school policy and programs.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Bullying and its Types

Many researchers faced challenges in defining bullying ((Espelage & Swearer, 2019)). Nevertheless, most researchers defined bullying as an act of intentional aggression intended to cause a power imbalance between the offender and the victim (Gredler, 2003). It comprises participating in repeated activities, such as physical assault, verbal and non-verbal abuse, or excluding someone from social events, intending to cause harm to defenseless individuals (S. B. Islam, 2019). It is always featured with causing physical, mental, and social harm to the victims (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Bullying in the school environment causes mental trauma and hampers the children's social development, leading to severe consequences such as suicide and aggressive behavior (Mahmood & Islam, 2017).

Bullying is no longer viewed as a natural transition to adulthood but as a significant public health concern that has severe long-term consequences in schools. There are several types of bullying; among them, verbal, physical, psychological, and cyberbullying are the most common forms of bullying (Ahmed et al., 2021). Physical bullying is identified as a situation in which one person repeatedly assaults another. Pushing, shoving, hurling items, kicking, beating, spitting, choking, or punching are some examples of physical bullying (S. B. Islam, 2019). Verbal bullying is described as using a specific name to mock, tease, make racist comments, harass, humiliate or threaten others (Naidoo et al., 2016). Psychological or emotional bullying includes non-verbal or non-physical actions such as rejection, exclusion and isolation or pressuring other students not to talk with the victim(Nansel et al., 2001). Finally, cyberbullying is defined as repetitive damage to the victims by using computers, mobile, telephones and other online platforms (Ahmed et al., 2021).

2.2 Prevalence of Bullying

Bullying is a serious problem all over the world, though the prevalence rate differs by country. A systematic survey reported that about 14% of children in Norway were bullied, about 15% of primary school students from Japan experienced bullying in their schools, and 17% of students in Australia were bullied in their schools (S. B. Islam, 2019).

A recent study conducted among vocational school students in China reported that about 30.4% of students were bullied at their schools (Xu et al., 2022). Another Chinese study conducted among college students showed a relatively lower rate of institutional bullying. The study reported that nearly one out of every ten students was bullied at their institution (Yu et al., 2022).

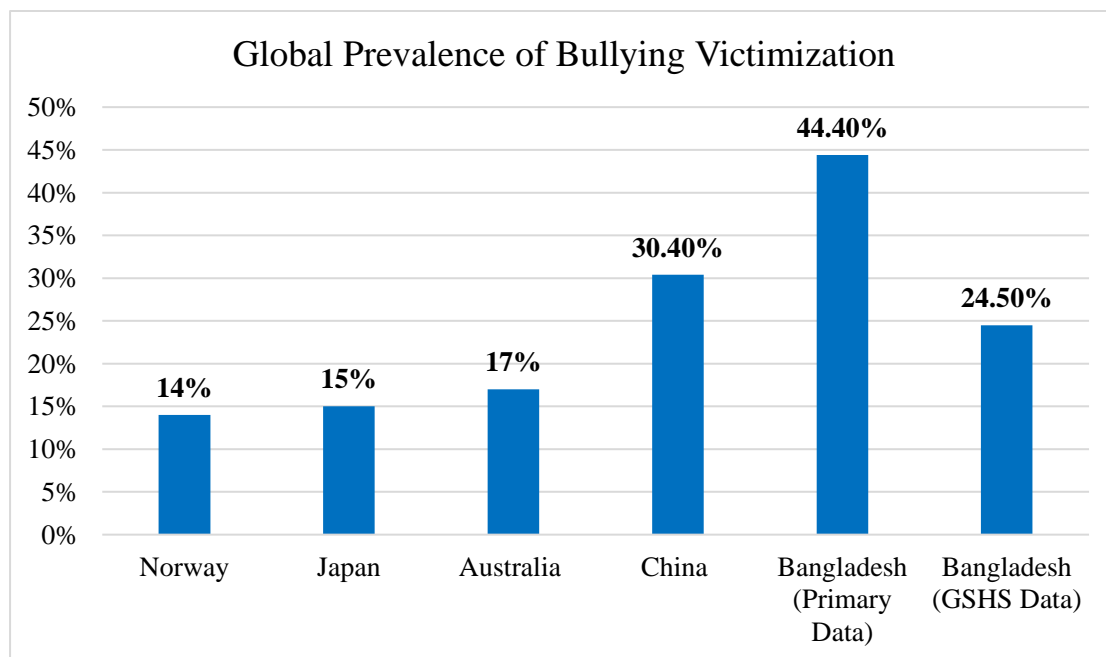


Figure 1: Global prevalence of bullying victimization

Bangladesh is no exception in terms of school bullying. A recent study using the data from the Global School-based student health survey (GSHS) 2014 reported that about 24.5% school-going students in Bangladesh were bullied in their school. The study revealed the

percentage of students who experienced at least one day of bullying in the previous thirty days (Rahman et al., 2020).

Another pilot study conducted among school-going students reported that half of its total study population (44.4%) were the victim of bullying in their school over the last years (n=556). Results indicated that pushing, being mocked, and having rumors spread were the most prevalent form of bullying among the participants. Male public school students had significant bullying victimization rates (Ahmed et al., 2021).

The variation of bullying differs between the countries. The prevalence of bullying was comparatively lower in Norway, Australia and Japan, while the prevalence of bullying in Bangladesh and Japan was much higher. The plausible reason for variation in the prevalence of bullying might the intervention was taken in these countries. Norway started a bullying prevention program in 1983, and they continuously upgraded the intervention to prevent bullying more effectively in their schools (Roland, 2000). Australia was the first country to develop the National Safe School Framework in 2003 to prevent bullying in their schools as well as other aggressive behavior (Cross et al., 2011). Another study found that bullying was comparatively higher in the lower-income countries compared to the higher-income countries (Biswas et al., 2020). On the other hand, the lack of proper policy and framework might be the reason behind Bangladesh's higher prevalence of bullying victimization.

2.3 Factors Associated with Bullying

Bullying is a multifaceted and complex problem that is associated with a variety of factors. According to several published researches, student's socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, family environment, parent's educational level, and socioeconomic status are significantly associated with being bullied at school (Halabi et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have shown a substantial association between gender and school bullying and its different forms. A study in Jordan reported that male students were more susceptible to bullying at school than female students. On the other hand, a study conducted in China found that bullying rates were comparable for male and female students, but the forms of bullying varied by gender (Shaheen et al., 2018).

A study conducted in Greece among students aged between 6 to 17 years showed that bullying victimization was associated with the socioeconomic status of the parents or family. The study also revealed that children and adolescents had a higher chance of being bullied when their parents were from a lower socio-economic background. On the other hand, the higher the parental education is, the lower the chances of bullying victims (Pervanidou et al., 2019).

Another Chinese study reported that parent's relationship with children was also associated with both being bullied and bullying others in the school. The study showed that having friends at school and a good relationship with parents protects students from being bullied at school (Xu et al., 2022).

Moreover, the most prevalent factors associated with bullying victimization were gender, age, family environment, parent's educational level, and socioeconomic status (Halabi et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2022). The gender of the students was the most significant factor in being bullied. Female are getting more bullied compared to the male students in school environments were found in studies in Jordan and China (Shaheen et al., 2018). Additionally, parents' relation to their children (Xu et al., 2022) and parents' socio-economic background (Pervanidou et al., 2019) were also associated with bullying victimization. Besides, having friends at school also played a crucial role in bullying victimization.

2.4 Prevention of bullying at school

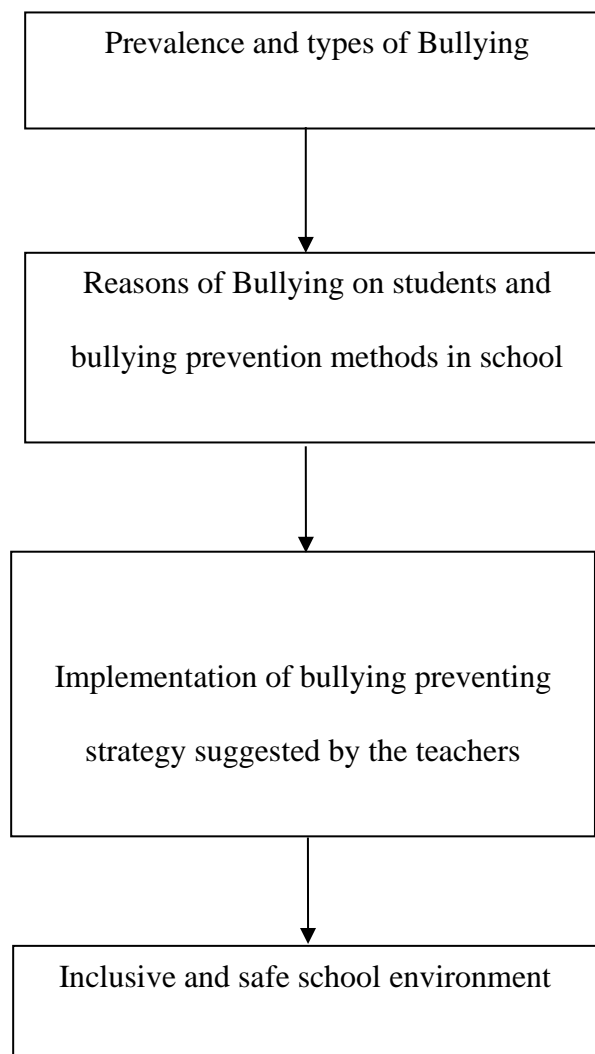
A systemic ecological perspective suggests that bullying dynamics involve not just the children who bully or are bullied but also their peers, teachers, schools, families, and communities (Sawyer et al., 2011). As students spend most of their time at school, it is essential to make schools safe and free of all forms of violence. Researches from several countries indicated that a 'whole school approach', which involves activities at both classroom and school level, are mostly effective in reducing bullying at school (Dake et al., 2003). Moreover, parents' and teachers' clear and accurate perception of bullying is also found to be effective in reducing bullying on school premises (Salehi et al., 2016).

In Hong Kong, a quasi-experimental study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a Restorative Whole-school Approach (RWsA) in reducing school bullying. The group that received RWsA treatment demonstrated a significant decrease in bullying, higher self-esteem, and more empathic attitudes than the group that received partial RWsA treatment (Wong et al., 2011).

The Norwegian Bullying Prevention Program has been recognized as the world's most effective school-based anti-bullying initiative. Multiple studies have determined that this program can reduce school bullying by up to fifty percent. This program's core activities include raising parental awareness of the issue, holding an anti-bullying conference day, providing lunchtime supervision, establishing a bully prevention committee, drafting anti-bullying classroom rules, holding serious conversations with bullies and victim, and involving their parents (Dake et al., 2003).

2.3 Conceptual framework

The study found out the prevalence of bullying victimization and its type with the MBVS. The prevalence of bullying provides a clear picture of the school environment for the primary students. After that, two FGDs were conducted among the teachers to find out the qualitative prevalence of bullying in their classroom and teacher's perception of factors associated with bullying victimization. The reasons and visible impact of bullying were also found out from the FGDs. Nevertheless, the recommendation was taken from the teachers to prevent bullying in the school. Hence, an inclusive and bullying-free school environment will be created after implementing the recommendation received from the teachers.



Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study aimed to find out the quantitative prevalence of bullying victimization as well as the qualitative prevalence, factors, reasons for bullying, and prevention methods to create an inclusive and safe school environment for primary school students. Thus, the research approach of this study is a mono-strand mixed-method study (Creswell, 1999). The study determined the prevalence and factors associated with bullying victimization among the primary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh, through quantitative approach. The prevalence is a measurable variable and has one single truth: whether bullying victims or not. Besides, a large number of participants were required to assess the prevalence and factors affecting bullying victimization. On the other side, the solution to make the school a more safe and inclusive space for the students is a reality that needs to be interpreted. Therefore, a qualitative approach will be used to find out the solution to make it safer and more inclusive for all students, regardless of their background or socio-economic status, to prevent bullying victimization (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative studies assist us in interpreting and understanding the relationships between variables used in quantitative studies (Roques et al., 2020). Thus, a mono-strand mixed-method approach will be appropriate for this study.

3.2 Research Site

The research question is expected to find out the prevalence and risk factors of bullying victimization among government primary schools. Thus, the research site for this study was two government primary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The government primary schools are situated in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The research site was a suburban area, and the structure of the government primary schools is similar to the other government primary schools in Dhaka,

Bangladesh. The schools had 610 and 2100 students and 12 and 22 teachers, respectively. The students are studying between grade one and grade five. Their families are mostly from a lower socio-economic background.

3.3 Research Participants

The research participants of the study were students from grade three to grade five and the teachers of grades three to five. The students from grades one and two were excluded from this study to avoid the extent of variation in the responses. The schools are selected by convenience sampling based on the author's access (Sedgwick, 2013). The expected sample size was divided into schools and grades proportionately. This study selected the study respondent using a convenience sampling method. The sample size for this study was 148 students. Two FGDs were conducted among two schools. Each FGD had five teachers, and a total of ten teachers were reached through FGDs.

$$= \frac{z^2 \times p(1 - p)}{d^2}$$
$$= \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.44(1-0.44)}{0.1^2} = 148.18$$

Where,

n = sample size

z = confidence interval = 95% = 1.96

A recent study conducted on Bangladeshi private school students found that the prevalence of bullying victimization was 44.4% (Ahmed et al., 2021). So, prevalence, P = 44.4% = 0.444

d = margin of error = 8% = 0.08

Finally, data were collected from 154 student from two schools.

3.4 Sampling Procedure

The students were selected for this study using the convenience sampling method and the teachers selected for the FGD were done purposively.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The research method for this study was a survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The survey is the appropriate and convenient method for collecting data from a large sample size (Willson & Miller, 2014). The survey questionnaire consisted of a scale to determine bullying victimization. On the other hand, FGD is appropriate for exploring in-depth information and perception of the research participants (Salehi et al., 2016).

3.5.1 Interview method

The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts: (a) the consent form, (b) the socio-demographic variables; and (c) the Multidimensional Bullying Victimization Scale (MBVS). The consent and the questions in MBVS were asked by survey questionnaires with the selected students through convenience sampling. The socio-demographic questions were asked of the parents if they were present with the students during the survey. If the parents were not available during the survey, then the socio-demographic data was collected through phone calls and survey questionnaires sent to the parents.

3.5.2 Focus group discussion

A FGD guideline was developed to smooth conduction of the FGD. Informed consent was taken from the FDG participants, and discussion was recorded upon taking their permission. The author facilitated the FGD while a research assistant actively took notes. There were two FGDs conducted in two schools. The participants of the FGDs were the primary teachers who teach the grade three, four, and five students.

3.6 Role of the Researcher

The researcher always plays a crucial role in conducting impactful and methodologically strong research. The role of a researcher starts from the beginning of the study to writing the research reports. Thus, the researcher of this study had the following roles to conduct the study -

- Ensuring that the research participants selected for this study were representing the whole population statistically.
- Keeping a personal bias-free perspective during the data collection.
- Act as an insider during the data collection process.
- Ensure the Data collection, editing, code and entry are correct.
- Keeping personal bias and thought aside during the analysis, interpretation and writing discussion.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data were cleaned, coded and entered into Microsoft Excel 2019. Incomplete or inconsistent data were excluded from the analysis. The Excel file was imported into Stata 14.2 SE statistical computer software for statistical analysis.

Descriptive analysis was conducted on categorical variables to determine the frequencies and percentages. A bar graph and pie chart were developed to represent the graphical data on bullying types. The FGDs were converted into transcripts and translated into English for analysis. The transcripts were analyzed thematically.

3.8 Ethical Issues and Concerns

The research study has included students and teachers as its' research participants. Thus, the guideline stated in the Declaration of Helsinki was strictly followed throughout the study.

Additionally, the following steps were also followed to ensure that the study was conducted ethically -

- The research proposal was submitted to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and taken approval before the data collection.
- The research objective, purpose, and significance will be shared with the school officials, and official permission was taken from each school.
- The consent form was shared with the interviewees, and informed consent was taken from them. Parental consent was taken if the students were unable to provide consent.

3.9 Credibility and Rigor

The first author of this research study has two years comprehensive teaching experience in primary schools in Bangladesh. Additionally, the author has almost 5 years of experience in developing and executing quantitative and qualitative research study, and has published 6 research papers into different international peer reviewed journals. The author had experience to observe close the student's behavior in their school environment for two years. The author also had training on data analysis software such as Microsoft Excel, SPSS, and Stata. Relevant research studies published into peer-reviewed journal has been reviewed for develop the research methodology and literature review. Rigorous feedback was taken from the supervisor and proposal defense committee to finalize the research proposal. Students and teacher's identification were excluded from the final data analysis and transcript file to avoid author's personal bias.

3.10 Limitations of the study

Limitation of the study is an integral and compulsory part of every research study. Despite of having several strengths and novel findings through this study, the study also had a few limitations. The limitation of the study was following -

- The research participants for this study are from two urban schools, which might not represent the bullying picture of other schools in rural and sub-urban schools.
- The margin of error was considered 8% for this study. The sample size of the study is smaller comparatively other quantitative studies.
- The research participants of FGD and KII was limited due to a lack of availability and constraints in reaching bullying abuser.
- This study take opinion from only direct stakeholder of primary schools. Policymakers and other indirect stakeholders were excluded, which might have this study exceptional findings.
- The Study only considered the socio-demographic variables. However, other psychological variables and parent's opinions are not included in this study.
- The study only focused on bullying victimization. Nevertheless, the opinion and perception of the bully also need to be considered to create an inclusive school environment.

Chapter 4

The study collected quantitative data from the survey and qualitative surveys from FGDs. Quantitative data were collected from 154 primary students of grades three to five, and two FGDs were conducted among ten teachers from two schools. The quantitative data were analyzed through the statistical software Stata 14.2 SE, developed in tabular format and interpreted in this section. Additionally, the FGDs were analyzed thematically and interpreted under the themes of this result section. The result section was sub-divided according to the research question making the result interpreting more reading friendly. The sub-divisions of the result sections are: socio-demographic characteristics of the students, Prevalence and types of bullying victimization, Reasons and impact of bullying, and prevention of bullying in primary schools.

The study found that nine students out of ten students were victims of direct bullying. 79.87% of the students were the victim of indirect bullying, while 57.14% of the students were the victim of an evaluative bullying victim.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the primary students and teachers: The majority of the students (62.99%) were in grade four students, while 37.01% of the students were studying in grade 5. Most of the mothers were housewives (77.92%), and 22.08% were engaged in service and other forms of income-generating activities. Half of the mothers completed secondary education (48.05%), while only 1.95% of mothers did not have any formal education. 28.57% and 21.43% of the mothers completed primary, and higher secondary and above education. The fathers of the student's occupation were mostly government and private services (42.21%), business and others (37.01%), and day labor (20.78%). Almost half of the fathers (53.25%) completed secondary education while 29.22% of fathers completed education

higher secondary and above. 28.57% of the student's family had a monthly family income of less than 10,001 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT), while 29.87% of the student's family income was more than 20000 BDT per month. Four in every ten students' family income was between 10,001 to 20,000 BDT per month. Half of the families had less five family members, while 44.16% of the students were living with five family members or more than that (Table 1).

The teachers participated in the FGDs have two years to fifteen years of teaching experience. They have completed at least B.Sc and highest master's degree in education and currently teaching grade three, four, and five students.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the students and their families (n=154)

Variable name	Frequency	Percentage
Grade of students		
Grade 4	97	62.99
Grade 5	57	37.01
Mother's Occupation		
Housewife	120	77.92
Service and others	34	22.08
Mother's Education		
No formal education	3	1.95
Primary	44	28.57
Secondary	74	48.05
Higher Secondary and above	33	21.43
Father's Occupation		
Day Labor	32	20.78
Service	65	42.21

Business and others	57	37.01
Father's Education		
No formal education	3	1.95
Primary	24	15.58
Secondary	82	53.25
Higher Secondary and above	45	29.22
Monthly family income		
0 to 10000 Taka	44	28.57
10001 to 20000 Taka	64	41.56
>20000 Taka	46	29.87
No of family member		
<5	86	55.84
≥5	68	44.16

Prevalence and Types of Bullying Victimization:

The Multi-dimensional Bullying Victimization Scale (MBVS) explored three types of bullying victimization among primary students. All of the study participants has faced at least one type of bullying in their classroom or outside of the classroom. Nine students out of ten students were victims of direct bullying. 79.87% of the students were victims of indirect bullying, while 57.14% of the students were victims of evaluative bullying victim (Figure 2).

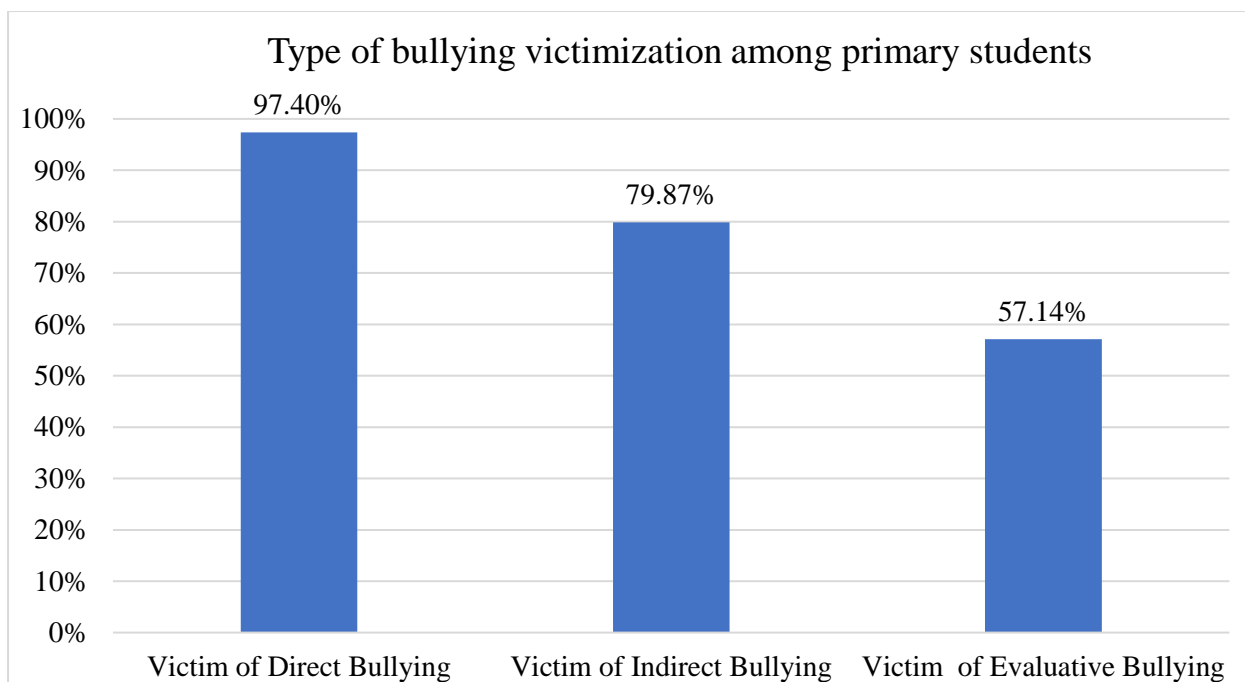


Figure 2: Type of bullying victimization among primary students

11.69% of the students faced at least one type of bullying in primary school. Four in every ten students were at least two types of bullying victims. Almost half of the students (46.1%) face all three types of bullying in their school (Figure 3).

The most prevalent bullying type was "Push or shove me," with (56.49%) reporting experiencing it sometimes, emphasizing the physical nature of this form of bullying. Notably, a considerable proportion faced "Call me mean names," sometimes (46.10%), faced teasing (47.4%), yelling (42.86%) and "Make fun of me type experiences" (45.45%). In total, more than half of them experienced these four forms of bullying. Conversely, few respondents reported "Make fun of my appearance" (0%) and "Make fun of my physical features" (0.65%) always, indicating less severe occurrences in those categories. Bullying involving leaving the respondent out or excluding them" stands out as a significant concern; more than one third (35.71%) reported experiencing it sometimes, while 8.44% faced it "Always," indicating a noteworthy level of social exclusion (Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency and percentages of bullying victimization experience by items (n = 154)

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Call me mean names	72 (46.75%)	71 (46.10%)	5 (3.25%)	6 (3.9%)
Spread rumors about me in text messages	104 (67.53%)	41 (26.62%)	8 (5.19%)	1 (0.65%)
Push or shove me	56 (36.36%)	87 (56.49%)	7 (4.55%)	4 (2.6%)
Curse at me	134 (87.01%)	16 (10.39%)	3 (1.95%)	1 (0.65%)
Make fun of me	64 (41.56%)	70 (45.45%)	12 (7.79%)	8 (5.19%)
Ignore my texts	96 (62.34%)	46 (29.87%)	8 (5.19%)	4 (2.6%)
Tease me	69 (44.81%)	73 (47.4%)	6 (3.9%)	6 (3.9%)
Punch or hit me	103 (66.88%)	39 (25.32%)	7 (4.55%)	5 (3.25%)
Bump into me on purpose	92 (59.74%)	44 (28.57%)	11 (7.14%)	7 (4.55%)
Call me stupid	115 (74.68%)	28 (18.18%)	7 (4.55%)	4 (2.6%)
Yell at me	76 (49.35%)	66 (42.86%)	8 (5.19%)	4 (2.6%)
Make fun of my appearance	126 (81.82%)	26 (16.88%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.3%)
Throw objects at me	122 (79.22%)	29 (18.83%)	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.65%)
Ignore me	119 (77.27%)	31 (20.13%)	3 (1.95%)	1 (0.65%)
Make fun of my size	119 (77.27%)	27 (17.53%)	4 (2.6%)	4 (2.6%)
Make negative comments about my clothing	131 (85.06%)	18 (11.69%)	4 (2.6%)	1 (0.65%)
Take, hide, or knock my things down	91 (59.09%)	49 (31.82%)	8 (5.19%)	6 (3.9%)
Make fun of my physical features	126 (81.82%)	22 (14.29%)	5 (3.25%)	1 (0.65%)

Make fun of my weight	117 (75.97%)	28 (18.18%)	4 (2.6%)	5 (3.25%)
Leave me out or exclude me	81 (52.6%)	55 (35.71%)	5 (3.25%)	13 (8.44%)
Make fun of me for my grades	115 (74.68%)	26 (16.88%)	9 (5.84%)	4 (2.6%)

Reasons and Impact of Bullying:

The FGD explored the reason for bullying among the students. The teachers mentioned that because of distinguished physical stature and attributes, family status and socio-economic conditions, academic result variation, handwriting, physical changes during puberty, and ethnicity. Sometimes, some teachers demean students in front of the other students, which also encourages the other students to bully that student. One of the teachers mentioned in the focus group discussion.

“Sometimes a student's family context can influence the chance of being a victim or being a bully. Besides, there are no special initiatives taken from the school to prevent bullying.”

The bullying is impacting the students in various ways, as mentioned by the teachers in the FGDs. The students losing their confidence in the classroom is one of the most concerning facts mentioned by the teachers. The phenomenon led to less attention in the classroom and ultimately decreased attendance in schools. One of the teachers added –

“Bullying is one of the major constraints toward the whole education process of a student.”

Additionally, bullying from classmates hampers the students’ mental health, makes them less confident about themselves. Sometimes, the students show depressive symptoms in extreme cases. Moreover, bullying events sometimes between parents were also found in the FGDs -

“Sometimes the guardians get into conflict.”

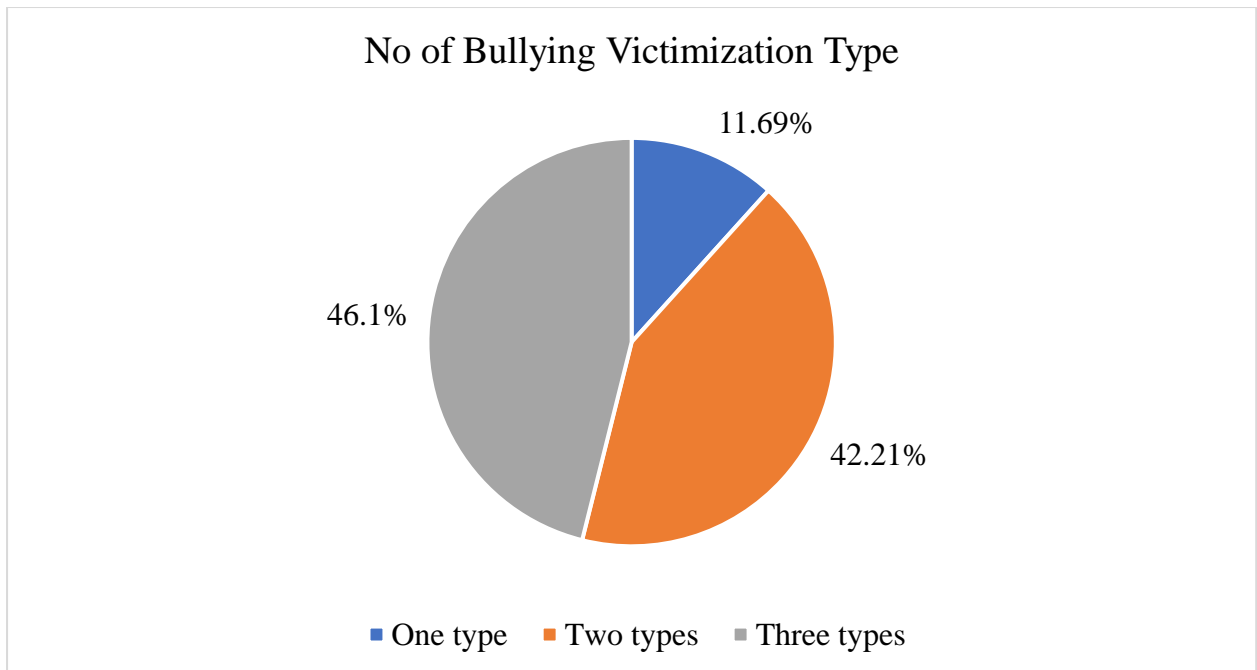


Figure 3: Number of different types of bullying victimized by the students

Current Practice to Prevent Bullying in School:

The teachers were asked about the current bullying practices conducted in their classrooms. In that regard, one of the teachers said

Traditional punishment is not a solution to prevent bullying in the classroom.

Thus, I have tried to teach empathy to the students who a bully. I asked them to feel if the other classmates bullied them.

Another teacher added-

I used to tell stories to students. In this story, I try to teach the students about socio-emotional learning so that they can understand how it feels to be sad.

Additionally, the focus group discussion explored that group work among the students and reaching out to the parents in severe cases were also common practices in the primary school to decrease bullying among the students.

Prevention of Bullying in Primary School

The teachers shared through the FGDs that they were currently incorporating classroom norms and motivating students to prevent bullying in schools. They also contact the parents when the extent of bullying is extreme. Additionally, the teachers also suggested a few approaches which can decrease bullying in the classroom. During the FGDs, one of the teachers added-

“The students bully each other. Those who are bullying victim are also bully other students. This is why a strong bond must be developed between the students to stop bullying.”

Another teacher added-

“Bullying is a very common phenomenon for her class. I had to solve the issues of classroom bullying almost every day, which is hampering my class time. I think the parents should also be aware about bullying, and they should also teach their children about moral values.”

There were a few suggestions the teachers recommended in the FGDs to prevent bullying in the school environment. After analyzing the FGDs, the suggested recommendations by the teachers were articulated in action points in the following-

1. Increase awareness regarding the impact of bullying among the students and their parents.
2. Engage students in group works, such as Developing colorful anti-bullying posters for the classroom.

3. Initiate classroom activities to increase the morality of the students.
4. Teachers should be kind towards students, and Teachers should not be judgmental towards their students. Additionally, teachers should never compare between students.
5. Discussion with the students on bullying to find solutions.
6. Group work can help to strengthen the bond between the students, which can help to prevent bullying.
7. Motivating students about the bad effects of bullying helps to prevent bullying.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

This study aimed to identify the prevalence and nature of bullying experienced by primary school students in Bangladesh. The Multidimensional Bullying Victimization Scale (Harbin, 2016) was used to determine the prevalence of bullying within the school premises, and hence, the scale was translated into the Bengali language. The three-factor interrelated structure of the initial scale remained consistent in the Bengali version, with items exhibiting stronger factor loadings. Additionally, the scale exhibited commendable levels of internal consistency reliabilities (alpha and omega), AVE values, and composite reliability. The study reported an alarming rate of prevalence of bullying at primary school. Almost all the students in this study experienced any one form of bullying at their school premises. Prior studies conducted among primary school students of Saudi-Arab, Iraq, reported relatively much lower (36.2%; 25%) prevalence than our study finding (Abdulrazzaq et al., 2021) (Haddad et al., 2020). A study conducted in Bangladesh among high school students reported that nearly half of its study population were victims of bullying at school (Ahmed et al., 2021). Potential variations in age and sociodemographic characteristics among the conducted studies could account for these dissimilarities. The individuals involved in this particular study were under the age of 11. Additionally, all the students included in this study belonged to an underprivileged demographic within the country. Factors such as financial status, parental educational background, and, notably, the absence of quality education within government schools located in disadvantaged areas of Dhaka city could potentially contribute to rendering the participants of this study more susceptible to becoming targets of bullying within the school environment. In terms of the nature of bullying, direct bullying, which includes making fun, physical assaults

and so on, were found to be more prevalent than indirect and evaluative bullying among the study population. It is well documented that these actions are primarily oriented towards amusement, and bullying within educational settings has often been viewed as a form of entertainment rather than a transgression historically, and this prevailing perspective has hindered its formal recognition as a punishable offense (Ahmed et al., 2021).

The present study tries to find out teachers' perception of reasons behind bullying among primary school students. The teachers reported several causes which contribute to bullying at school, including; student's physical appearance, family circumstances, economic status, and the school's environment. The teachers believed that the relationship of the students with their parents is linked to their aggressive behavior at school. This finding is aligned with research by Lereya et al., who found that troubled parent-child relationships often led to violent cases among children (Shams et al., 2017). Furthermore, the teachers perceived that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to experience bullying at school than those who were from privileged backgrounds. This observation is supported by Jank Auskiene, who highlighted that bullying is mostly perpetrated by students of middle class and wealthy backgrounds and disproportionately victimizes those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Shams et al., 2017). The teachers also mentioned that students who had unique physical traits, such as being overweight or underweight, as well as those from different ethnic backgrounds, were often targeted for bullying. This viewpoint showed consistency with UNESCO statement at the International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying in South Korea, which identified physical appearance and ethnicity as factors for bullying in schools (Bullies Target Physical Appearance, Ethnicity, Gender or Sexual Orientation – UN Reports | UN News, n.d.). In addition, our study participants believed that the teacher's disrespectful behavior towards the students in front of their peers also triggered bullying. A study focused on identifying reasons for bullying by teachers revealed the negative impacts of teacher's rude

behavior toward their students. The report categorized any form of demeaning towards students by the teachers as a manifestation of bullying and also highlighted such behavior as responsible for encouraging other students to bully the targeted student (Twemlow et al., 2006).

In this study, we inquired with teachers regarding the impacts of bullying on their students. According to the teachers, the primary and most immediate consequence of bullying on their students is its adverse effect on their academic performance. Presented that student academic performance was mainly affected by bullying at school. The teachers reported that the students who experienced bullied at school struggled to concentrate in their classes, leading to poor performance in their examinations. This finding is supported by the work of Dugasa et al., who highlighted that exposure to bullying can influence one's emotions and cognitive functions, which ultimately results in diminished focus in their daily life activities (Alemu Dugasa et al., n.d.). In addition it, the teachers perceived that the students subjected to bullying at school exhibited low self-confidence and in some severe cases even showed mental distress. Our study finding is supported by Rigby (1996), who reported that victimized children reported more health issues than non-victimized children (Craig, 1998).

In response to the question of what actions they have taken to prevent bullying within their classroom, the participating teachers highlighted some of the activities they adopted. Establishing classroom norms, teaching moral lessons and involving parents in severe cases were some of the activities taken by the teachers to prevent bullying in their classroom. Moreover, the teachers suggested a few approaches to prevent bullying at school. They suggested organizing awareness session for students, parents and teachers at school premises as well as engaging students in group work e.g., making colorful anti-bullying posters for the classroom and in activities to improve their morality. The above-mentioned suggestions are included in the 'Whole School Approach', and it is well documented that involving the whole school, including students, parents, teachers, staff and other relevant stakeholders, in tackling

the bullying issue is the most effective strategy to prevent bullying at school premises (What Is a Whole-School or Setting Approach? n.d.). They also suggested strengthening teacher-students relationship and insisted on the improvement of teachers' behavior, e.g., always speaking kindly with the students, never being judgmental or comparing one student with another. Therefore, the students will be able to talk with their teachers about bullying or other problems faced at school. A prior study in South Africa, which was aimed to identify effective strategies for mitigating the prevalence of bullying at primary school, suggested similar strategies. The study suggested in building a positive school environment where all the students will feel safe and able to talk with their teacher about their problems. It also suggested increasing co-operative activities between teachers and students, which is similar to our study (Grace, n.d.).

5.2 Conclusion

Bullying within educational institutions is a common phenomenon around the world. Socioeconomic status and educational background of parents emerge as factors that increase the susceptibility of school-going children to bullying, thereby exacerbating its prevalence. The troubled parent-child relationship, distinctive physical appearances of the students and demean language used by the teachers triggered the initiation of crime among this study population. The impacts of bullying reach further than just physical harm, causing notable psychological anguish that erodes self-confidence and disrupts academic involvement, eventually resulting in unsatisfactory academic achievements, and in some extreme cases, it even causes situations like school dropout. Creating a supportive school atmosphere that prioritizes student participation and fosters cooperation among students, educators, parents, and pertinent community members is crucial in addressing bullying within educational contexts.

5.3 Recommendations

To counteract bullying in educational institutions, authorities can organize informative training sessions and workshops for teachers, parents, students, and other concerned groups, emphasizing the adverse consequences of bullying for its victims. Broad-scale campaigns and media coverage can also sensitize people to confront bullying. Since this study seeks to identify strategies to address school bullying based on discussions with teachers, many of them proposed that a collaborative approach involving teachers, parents, students, and related stakeholders would offer a more effective solution. As a result, the highly recommended "Whole School Approach" emerges as a potent strategy to combat this issue, deserving the attention of policymakers. Additionally, further research can be conducted on teachers' attitudes towards their students to explore potential reasons and the impact of bullying on school-going children.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Consent Letter

Unique ID: _____

Date: _____

Name of the Participant: _____

I am Md Wahidur Rahman Nizum, a student of Master's in Educational Leadership and School Improvement in Brac University. I am conducting research on "**Promoting Safe and Inclusive Primary Schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh: Prevalence, Factors, And Strategies Addressing Bullying Victimization**" as a part of my master's.

I am inviting you to participate in my research study.

In this research study, I will ask you some questions related to socio-demographic and school and classroom experiences. The interview will take ten to fifteen minutes of your valuable time. Your cooperation will be greatly valued. You may refuse to answer any question or leave the interview at any time. If you refuse to go, you will encounter no difficulty. Your information will be kept strictly secret. Your privacy will be protected. Only study-related personnel will be permitted access to the data.

I'd appreciate your assistance. If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign below.

Investigator signature & date.

Volunteer Signature & date

Witness Signature/Thumb impression & Date

Appendix B. Interview Guide

Name of the student	Unique ID

Part A: Socio-demographic information

SL No.	Question	Responses	Code
1	Age of the participant (in years)		
2	Which grade do you read in?		
3	What is your mother's occupation?		
4	How many years of education did your mother complete?		No education = 0; Each completed class will be considered as the completion of one educational year.
5	What is your father's occupation?		
6	How many years of education did your father complete?		No education = 0; Each completed class will be considered as the completion of one educational year.

7	What is your religion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islam • Hinduism • Cristian • Buddhism • Others 	
8	What is your gender?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Not prefer to say 	
9	What is current household income?		
10	How many family members do you have?		
11	How many friends do you have?		

Part B – Multi-dimensional Bullying Victimization Scale

SL No	Bullying Type	Overall	Sometimes	Often Very	Often
1	Call me mean names.				
2	Spread rumors about me in text messages.				
3	Push or shove me.				

4	Curse at me				
5	Make fun of me.				
6	Ignore my texts				
7	Tease me				
8	Punch or hit me.				
9	Bump into me on purpose.				
10	Call me stupid				
11	Yell at me				
12	Make fun of my appearance.				
13	Throw objects at me.				
14	Ignore me				
15	Make fun of my size.				
16	Make negative comments about my clothing.				
17	Take, hide, or knock my things down.				
18	Make fun of my physical features.				
19	Make fun of my weight.				
20	Leave me out or exclude me.				
21	Make fun of me for my grades.				

APPENDIX – C

Focus Group Discussion Guideline

1. How long have you been teaching in primary schools? What do you know about bullying?
2. How often have you noticed bullying in your classroom or in school? Do you think bullying is making the school an unsafe place?
3. What are the reasons for bullying victimization? What is the impact of bullying on the students?
4. Have you ever encountered any bullying incidents? If yes, what actions did you take?
5. What is your suggestion to prevent bullying in school?

P.S: Probing questions will be asked according to the discussion and response from the FGD participants.