

CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLIES AND TYPES OF BULLYING AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

Bullying is a significant issue that may affect all ranges of human beings, regardless of age or ethnicity. Numerous studies on bullying in primary and secondary schools have been conducted, but few studies focus on bullying in early childhood. This study aims to examine the characteristics of bullies among 6-year-old children in preschool and to identify the types of bullying that usually occur in preschool settings. This research implemented Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods, which involves two data collection phases, quantitative and qualitative methods, to collect, analyze, and interpret data. The data collection methods used in this study are sociometric ratings, observations, and semi-structured interviews. This study involved 24 children in a 6-year-old classroom for the sociometric rating and observation. Then, this study also involved four children selected from the sociometric rating and observation for the interview session, which also involved two teachers from the 6-year-old classroom. The instruments used in this study are a sociometric rating scale, observation checklist, and interview protocol. This research describes the characteristics of bullies and the types of bullying that mostly occur in preschool. The findings of this study are consistent with the results and writings of previous research.

Keywords: Bullies' characteristics, bullying, preschool children, preschool.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying has been identified as an important problem in education. Although bullying continues to be common, there are only a few studies that focus on bullying in early childhood. However, there are studies from Humphrey (2013), Kirves and Sajaniemi (2012), and Monks et al. (2005) which have reported that bullying does occur among preschool children in preschool or early childhood settings.

According to Humphrey (2013), young children are learning to adapt to the social world around them during their preschool years, including what they observe in real life, media sources, or interactions with peers as they begin to develop behavioural patterns as they process their cognitive and skills during their preschool's life. As children enter primary school, these habits learned in early childhood are likely to continue unless they are interrupted by other peer interactions or adult interventions.

Furthermore, research indicates that bullying is a risk factor in children's growth, particularly in terms of social and emotional development (Eriksson et al., 2002). This can be supported by research from Arseneault et al. (2006), which reveals that young children who were victims at the age of 5 later had more psychological, social, and emotional issues at school when they became 7 years old. Therefore, this shows that bullying needs to be addressed in the early years when children are learning to engage with peers and adjust to new social behaviours. It is important to have a basic awareness or an understanding of bullying in early educational settings to stop the growth and occurrence of bullying. This study used sociometric ratings, observations, and semi-structured interviews to examine the characteristics of bullies among preschool children and identify the types of bullying that mostly occur in preschool.

Bullying in the Context of Early Childhood Settings

According to Jamalsafri Saibon et al. (2017), Lee (2020), and Olweus (1993), bullying is defined as behaviours by stronger or powerful preschool children that intentionally and repeatedly cause physical and psychological harm to the targeted victim who is weaker and unable to defend themselves.

Based on Humphrey (2013), bullying occurs as early as the preschool age group. Furthermore, a study conducted by Kirves and Sajaniemi (2012) discovered that 12.6% of early childhood children aged three to six years old were directly involved in bullying. In addition, research by Monks et al. (2005) discovered that a quarter of preschool participants were assigned to the position of aggressor, while 22% were assigned to the victim role via peer nominations.

According to research by Adams and Lawrence (2011), children who experience bullying in their early years are more likely to play the same roles as bullies or victims in their adult years. Rigby (2008) and Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) claimed that if bullying is prevented in the early childhood stages in children, these behaviours can be controlled to prevent them from worsening. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the early signs of bullying to prevent social and behavioural developmental issues.

Aside from that, Rose et al. (2014) discovered that children in preschools aged 2 to 6 years tend to be oblivious to the aggressive behaviours displayed by their peers. Furthermore, Sims-Schouten (2015) claimed that children do not know how to act if bullied. Thus, it is the responsibility of parents and teachers to understand this issue, guide the children about how to deal with bullying and inform the young children whether their actions classify as bullying.

In this study, bullying is defined as the behaviours of a preschool child or groups of preschool children who are stronger and repeatedly and intentionally hurting and causing injury to other children who feel powerless and weaker to respond or have trouble protecting themselves.

Preschool Bullies and Their Characteristics

Bullies among younger children, according to Vlachou et al. (2011), are children who exhibit aggressive behaviour towards another child with the intent to injure, humiliate, intimidate, or isolate the weaker child. In addition, from the definition of bullying by Jamalsafri Saibon et al. (2017), Lee (2020), and Olweus (1993), preschool bullies are children who are stronger than others who intentionally and repeatedly display aggressive behaviours towards other children who are weaker than them.

Preschool bullies are said to have characteristics which include impulsiveness and a tendency to dominate others. Bullies also appear to be lacking in empathy and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, they are unable to relate to the feelings of others and will have difficulty

trying to solve problems with peers (Alsaker & Nägele, 2008; Bullock, 2002; Nelson et al., 2010). Moreover, a study by Perren and Alsaker (2006) discovered that children who become bullies are more likely to be aggressive towards peers and lack prosocial skills such as helping and sharing with others. In addition, Bullock (2002) states that children who bully others have difficulty managing strong emotions like anger, as well as having difficulty in developing and maintaining positive relationships, and thus will be rejected by peers. Furthermore, Perren and Alsaker (2006) found that children who become bullies tended to have more leadership skills.

Types of Bullying

Four types of bullying will be discussed: physical bullying, verbal bullying, relational bullying, and cyberbullying. Some forms of bullying are obvious, but others are more subtle and difficult to detect. The most common forms of bullying that occur in early childhood settings, according to Vlachou et al. (2011), are physical and verbal bullying, as well as social exclusion.

1. Physical bullying

Physical bullying is regarded as the most direct form of bullying. Physical bullying involves hitting, kicking, pushing, pinching, grabbing or damaging someone's belongings (Gordon, 2021; Jamalsafri Saibon et al., 2017). Furthermore, physical bullying may include rough and intimidating play (Bullock, 2002). Thus, physical bullying can be perceived in an early childhood context when a child or a group of children exhibits behaviours such as hitting, kicking, pushing, taking toys from other children, ruining other children's things, and participating in very rough play.

According to research findings from Scheithauer et al. (2006), boys are more aggressive and directly involved in physical bullying (as cited in Jamalsafri Saibon et al., 2017). Therefore, boys have a larger tendency to physically bully victims at school compared to girls.

2. Verbal bullying

Verbal bullying is a direct kind of bullying that includes using verbal language or acts of verbal abuse, such as ridicule, name-calling, insulting, intimidation, threatening and teasing (Jamalsafri Saibon et al., 2017).

According to Jamalsafri Saibon et al. (2017), while verbal bullying could start without harm and physical effects, it can escalate to levels that begin negatively impacting the victims of bullying. Thus, it can lead to verbal violence that will cause serious harm to its victim and can escalate to physical bullying.

3. Relational bullying

Relational bullying or social bullying is an indirect type of bullying and is a type of psychological attack that sometimes goes unnoticed and is difficult for parents and teachers to identify. Psychological bullying is shown through acts such as preschool children spreading rumours and social exclusion, such as stopping someone from joining the group and ignoring or refusing to friend the victim (Gordon, 2021; Lee, 2020; Nor Junainah Mohd Isa et al., 2019).

A study by Kirves and Sajaniemi (2012) found that relational bullying, which involves social exclusion such as leaving others outside the group, was the most prevalent type of bullying seen in the study. In addition, Olweus (1993) asserts that girls experience more subtle bullying, such as social exclusion or being isolated from a group or other children.

According to Monks et al. (2005), some research found that girls are more prone to engage in relational and verbal aggression, whereas boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying behaviours.

4. Cyberbullying

According to Jamalsafri Saibon et al. (2017) and Storey et al. (2008), cyberbullying involves misusing technological devices such as computers, smartphones, instant messaging, social media, and other online platforms. Cyberbullying behaviours include spreading rumours via email, electronic and social media platforms, sending brief messages containing threats or abusive comments, and sending videos meant to humiliate or degrade the victim (Storey et al., 2008). However, this study does not focus on cyberbullying as this study concentrates on preschool-aged children's behaviours in the preschool settings only.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Bullying has gained recognition as a significant issue, especially in early childhood settings where research is limited compared to primary and secondary schools. Most bullying studies mainly focus on school-age children and older students (Humphrey, 2013; Monks & Smith, 2006). This research gap is notable in countries like Malaysia, where bullying studies mainly concentrate on primary and secondary school students (Junainor Hassan et al., 2016; Nor Junainah et al., 2019). In addition, the review of the literature found a lack of study on children's bullying behaviours and types of bullying that occur in early childhood settings, particularly in Malaysia. Thus, it is essential to explore this issue in the Malaysian context to raise awareness about early childhood bullying among young children and teachers in early childhood settings.

Based on the studies by Hanish et al. (2004) and Monks et al. (2002), aggressive behaviours resembling bullying are found in children as young as 3 to 5 years old. In addition, research indicates that children as young as 4 to 5 years old exhibit aggressive behaviours consistent with bullying (Crick et al., 1999; Perren & Alsaker, 2006; Swit, 2018). Moreover, studies by Lee (2020), Douvlos (2019), and Vlachou et al. (2013) confirm the occurrence of bullying among preschool children. Furthermore, Monks et al. (2021) observed bullying behaviours in 67.8% of their observations of 4- to 5-year-olds, with children initiating bullying in 40.5% of incidents and being victimized in 28.7%. Therefore, these findings suggest the need for more comprehensive research on bullying in early childhood settings to understand the characteristics of bullies among preschool children better so that preventive measures can be taken.

The impact of early childhood bullying on long-term development is substantial. Bullying has been identified as a risk factor in children's overall development (Eriksson et al., 2002), with studies suggesting that roles established in early childhood can persist into college years (Adams & Lawrence, 2011). Rigby (2008) and Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) suggest that early intervention can significantly reduce bullying behaviours, emphasizing the importance of recognizing early signs of children's bullying behaviours and types of bullying and taking preventive measures during formative years to mitigate long-term negative effects on children's well-being and development.

Young children cannot often differentiate between right and wrong behaviours while interacting with their peers. Rose et al. (2014) found that children aged 2 to 6 years old in preschools are often unaware of peer aggression. This lack of awareness extends to both perpetrators and victims, highlighting the crucial role of adults in educating children about appropriate behaviour. By understanding the characteristics of bullies and the types of bullying in early childhood educational settings, teachers and parents can provide early intervention and

implement effective anti-bullying strategies to promote positive social interactions and healthy development among young children.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of bullies in preschool children aged 6 years old and identify the types of bullying that often occur in preschool settings. Specifically, the objectives for this study are as follows:

1. To identify the characteristics of the bully among preschool children aged 6 years old.
2. To identify the types of bullying that are commonly found among preschool children.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Explanatory sequential mixed methods research is used in this study. This type of research design is a research approach which begins with the quantitative method of data collection and is followed by the qualitative method of data collection to help explain the initial quantitative data in more detail (Creswell, 2014). In addition, this explanatory sequential mixed methods design focuses on understanding the subject of study in depth by using quantitative and qualitative methods and implementing multiple ways to collect data, such as a sociometric rating scale, interviews, and observations. Besides, this approach will help further explain the topic being studied and answer the research questions. Therefore, this study aims to gain more information and understanding regarding examining the characteristics of bullies among preschool children and identify the types of bullying often found among young children of 6 years old in early childhood settings.

The explanatory sequential mixed methods research design involved two data collection phases, quantitative and qualitative methods, that were employed to investigate the characteristics of bullies among 6-year-old preschool children and the types of bullying that occur in preschool. For the quantitative phase, this study conducted a sociometry study method focusing on the sociometric rating scale. In the qualitative phase, this study employs a qualitative method focusing on observations and interviews. The results from the sociometric rating scale and observations were used to identify suitable respondents for interview sessions in the qualitative phase.

To conclude, this study uses explanatory sequential mixed methods research to explore and understand the characteristics of bullies among 6-year-old preschool children and the types of bullying that take place in preschool better.

Respondents and Sampling Techniques

24 6-year-old preschool children (13 boys and 11 girls) and two preschool teachers (class teacher and assistant teacher) from one preschool in Penang participated in this study. All the preschool children aged 6 years old (N=24) become the respondents for the sociometric rating scale measurement and observations. Then, this study included four children aged 6 for the children's interview session, which had been selected from the data obtained through sociometric ratings and observations. In addition, two teachers, the class teacher and the assistant teacher, become the respondents for the teacher interview sessions. Selecting 6-year-old children as respondents helped the study obtain better data and information because children of this age easily understood the questions posed and could provide better responses

and feedback than children younger than them. The class teacher and assistant teacher selected in the study were based on their experiences dealing with bullying or children's behaviours in the preschool. Thus, the respondents were selected to help gain more understanding of the topic.

This study incorporated intact groups for rating scale measurement and observations. The information from the rating scale measurement was used to focus on the observations. Then, by combining data and information from the ratings and observations, suitable respondents for the semi-structured interview session were selected.

Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents for the interview session. According to Devers and Frankel (2000), purposive sampling will help gain an in-depth understanding of selected individuals or groups' experiences as well as assist researchers in obtaining sufficient data by selecting respondents that provide the greatest insight into the research question. Therefore, in this study, purposive sampling was used to gain appropriate and sufficient data.

In this study, through the acquisition of information from ratings and observations from the four children, two children who displayed bullying behaviours and two children who became victims of bullying during the rating and observation were selected in this study. The selection of the children as respondents was also done after having confirmation with the class teacher regarding the selection of the children as participants and respondents.

As the qualitative study was done to explain the quantitative data in depth, the researcher implemented the recommended number of case studies within qualitative data collection methods. According to Creswell (2007), the recommended number of cases to be examined by the researchers in a case study is around three to five. Creswell (2007) states that this number of cases will sufficiently allow the researcher to identify the theme of the cases. Therefore, this study involved four respondents, the class teacher and the assistant teacher in the 6-year-old classroom.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the data is collected through the sociometric rating of the age of 6-year-old children. Then, the data is gathered through observations of the children's behaviour during playtime on the playground. Next, the data collection continued with semi-structured interviews with the preschool teachers and the selected children.

1. Sociometric Rating

Sociometric rating, which was developed by Asher et al. (1979), was conducted to obtain a measure of sociometric status for each child. This method involved each child being asked to assign photos of each classmate to one of three boxes, which were labelled with a happy face, a neutral face, and a sad face respectively to represent three Likert-type choice options.

The children were shown pictures of all children in the classroom other than themselves one at a time and were asked to assign those photos into the boxes according to the question asked, which was, "How much do you like to play with this person?" The three choice options have been explained to each child before starting the sociometric rating. The happy face means "I really like to"; the neutral face means "I kind of like to"; and the sad face means "I do not like to". The assigned values for the three boxes are: happy face = 3, neutral face = 2, and sad face = 1.

Data analysis for the sociometric rating was conducted to obtain sociometric scores for each child. The individual ratings that a child obtained from other children were summed. Next, total sums for each child were added to attain a total sum for the entire group. In addition, a

raw-score formula standard deviation was computed for the group total to assign each of the children to a single sociometric score, which reflected how their individual summed total compared to the group mean. The resulting rating scores were transformed into standard scores (Z-scores). Thus, the Z-scores will be obtained for each child, and therefore, a sociometric score could be assigned to each of the children.

Based on Asher et al. (1979), the ascribed sociometric status for the three scores were: 3 = high status (popular, accepted by peers); 2 = moderate status (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers); and 1 = low status (unpopular, rejected by peers). From the sociometric rating scale, which asked the children how much they like to play with each of their classmates, the researcher was able to obtain a measure of sociometric status for each child, whether the child is popular or accepted by peers, whether the child is neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers, or whether the child is unpopular or rejected by peers. Thus, the researcher will gain information on whether the child who becomes a bully is accepted or rejected by peers. This data was compiled and compared with the data obtained from observations to increase the quality of the data obtained during the interview session with the children.

2. Observation

Visits to the preschool were made to observe the children's behaviours during playtime. The observations were conducted towards all 24 6-year-old children in the preschool, focusing on the four children identified from the rating. The observations were conducted when the children were playing in the playground. The observations were conducted two times to gain consistent and more accurate information. The time interval between the first and second observations was one week.

The observations only focused on three types of bullying: physical bullying, verbal bullying, and relational bullying. Cyberbullying was not focused during the study because the study was done in preschool.

From the observation, frequencies of the acts or types of bullying and characteristics of bullies were obtained. The qualitative data gained from the observations was quantified during the data analysis. The frequency of the bullying behaviours displayed by the children was counted and tabulated in table form. The results obtained from the observations were compiled and compared with the data from the rating to select suitable respondents for the children's interview session.

3. Semi-structured interview

There were two semi-structured interviews conducted in this study, which were children and teachers interview sessions. For the children's interview, a semi-structured interview session with the preschool children was conducted during a storybook reading session. The participants read a storybook about bullying together, and their responses to the questions asked were recorded. Then, for the teachers' interview, a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the preschool teachers, which are the class teacher and assistant teacher, was conducted. Both the interview sessions were recorded using a voice recorder so that no information would be left out. As stated above, cyberbullying was not focused in this study as the study was conducted in the respective preschool.

Thematic analysis was used in this qualitative study to analyse the data. Firstly, transcription was done by converting the audio recording into text data to facilitate the data analysis. The data collected was reorganised and administered using an iterative process which involves revising the data. The iterative process assists the researcher in becoming familiar with the data and can identify potential themes among the data. Then, the data was categorized

into themes, and a report on the data was done according to the theme while linking to the research questions that guide the study.

Trustworthiness

According to Silverman (1993), researchers need to carry out triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness of a study. According to Creswell (2007), triangulation involves combining evidence from different sources, such as individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection, to ensure the credibility of the data and validate the accuracy of findings. Therefore, triangulation helps researchers obtain more accurate data and understand the research better.

In this study, the researcher conducted a sociometric rating scale, followed by observations and interview sessions, to ensure the accuracy of the collected data and to answer the research questions. The data collected from the sociometric ratings were compared with the data from the observations. Additionally, interview sessions were carried out to explain the quantitative data obtained further. Using these multiple data collection methods increases the credibility and quality of the data, resulting in more accurate findings.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Bullies

1. Findings from Sociometric Rating

Table 1 shows the data obtained through sociometric rating scale measurement for the question of how much the children like to play with each other. The table shows the sociometric status assigned to each participant. The study examined the sociometric status of 24 preschool children labelled P1 through P24. The sociometric rating was based on how much the children liked to play with each other. The results were categorized into three sociometric statuses: 1 (unpopular or rejected by peers), 2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers), and 3 (popular, accepted by peers). This classification was determined by comparing each child's standard score (Z-score) to the group mean.

Table 1. Sociometric Status among Preschool Children

ID	Z-scores	Sociometric status
P1	-1.28	1 (unpopular or rejected by peers)
P2	-4.28	1 (unpopular or rejected by peers)
P3	-0.08	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P4	0.52	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P5	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P6	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P7	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P8	0.32	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P9	0.32	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P10	0.52	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P11	0.72	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P12	1.12	3 (popular, accepted by peers)

P13	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P14	-0.48	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P15	0.72	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P16	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P17	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P18	0.52	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P19	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P20	-0.08	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P21	0.12	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P22	0.32	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P23	0.32	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)
P24	-0.08	2 (neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers)

ID child's identification as respondent, *Z-scores* standard scores

The data obtained from the sociometric rating scale provides valuable insights into the social interactions among preschool children. Table 1 reveals that two participants (P1 and P2) were identified as unpopular and rejected by their peers, as indicated by their sociometric status of 1. Their *Z-scores* were significantly lower than the other participants, with P1 having a score of -1.28 and P2 having the lowest score of -4.28. This suggests that these children are less favoured in social interactions than others. In contrast, only one participant (P12) achieved a sociometric status of 3, with a *Z-score* of 1.12, indicating that this child was popular and accepted by peers. This higher sociometric status reflects a strong positive reception from their peers.

Then, the data found that most participants (21 out of 24) were in the middle category, with a sociometric status of 2. This suggests that most preschool children in the study were neither strongly accepted nor rejected by their peers, implying a relatively neutral social standing within the group. These participants include P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20, P21, P22, P23, and P24. This neutral status reflects an average level of peer interaction, where these children do not stand out as particularly liked or disliked.

To conclude, two participants obtained a sociometric status of 1, and may deduced to be unpopular and rejected by their peers. Then, there was one participant who obtained a sociometric status of 3 and thus is popular and accepted by peers. Meanwhile, the rest of the participants gained a sociometric status of 2, which means the participants were neither strongly accepted nor rejected by peers.

The overall findings of this sociometric assessment show that only a small portion of the preschool group has significant social challenges or strong acceptance, while the majority remains neutral. This research is essential because it highlights the various levels of social integration among young children and can help guide targeted interventions. By understanding which children are at the extremes of social acceptance, educators and researchers can develop specific strategies to support those who are unpopular and enhance social skills among all children to establish a more inclusive environment. This sociometric status will later be explained after comparing it with the data obtained from the observations.

Findings from Observations and Semi-structured Teacher Interviews

From the observations during playtime, a few children were found displaying characteristics of a bully while also focusing on the children identified from the sociometric rating. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain more information and understanding of the characteristics of bullies among 6-year-old children. From the findings obtained through the semi-structured interviews with the class teacher (GA) and assistant teacher (GB), the two teachers' opinions were sought regarding the characteristics of bullies among preschool children of 6 years old.

From the findings obtained through observations and semi-structured interviews, the characteristics of bullies found in this study are dominant, impulsive, aggressive, tend to have more leadership skills, lack of prosocial skills, lack of empathy and lack of problem-solving skills.

1. Dominant

Dominant is when the children have the power to control and influence others. Based on observations during playtime, it was found that some children, particularly P1 and P2, exhibited dominant characteristics by controlling playground equipment such as swings and monkey bars. This aligns with the teacher interviews, in which GB emphasized being "dominant" as a characteristic of bullies. The alignment between observational data and teacher perspective strengthens the identification of dominance as a key characteristic of bullies in this preschool setting.

2. Impulsive

Impulsive behaviours are the tendency to act without thinking. During observations, P2 displayed impulsive behaviours, which included running without considering others and cutting in front of the line without consent. The teacher interviews support this finding, with GB stating "impulsive" as a characteristic of bullies. The alignment between observed behaviours and teacher insights validates impulsivity as a significant characteristic among bullies in this study.

3. Aggressive

Based on observations, P2 exhibited aggressive behaviours, such as kicking and hitting other children. Although aggression wasn't explicitly mentioned by teachers, GA's comment about bullies having "less control on their anger" aligns with aggressive behaviours observed in the playground. This triangulation suggests that aggressive behaviour is a notable characteristic of bullies, as exhibited by both physical acts and difficulty with emotional regulation.

4. Leadership skill

P1 exhibited leadership skills by directing other children's play and leading group activities. Interestingly, this characteristic was not specifically mentioned by teachers in their interviews. This discrepancy highlights the complexity of bully characteristics, suggesting that some traits may be more visible in certain situations or to certain observers.

5. Lack of prosocial skill

From the observations, it was found that children, particularly girls, had difficulties sharing playground equipment, indicating a lack of prosocial skills. While not explicitly mentioned by teachers, this could be inferred from GA's comment about difficulty following class rules. The indirect correlation between observations and teacher views suggests that a lack of prosocial skills is a relevant, if not always visible, characteristic of bullies.

6. Lack of empathy

P2 demonstrated a lack of empathy by hitting another child while attempting to climb the slide. This observation is directly supported by the teacher interviews, with GB specifically mentioning "lack of empathy" as a characteristic of bullies. The clear alignment between observed behaviour and teacher perspective strongly establishes a lack of empathy as a key characteristic of bullies in this study.

7. Lack of problem-solving skill

Observations showed P2 resorting to hitting instead of finding alternative solutions when faced with obstacles, indicating poor problem-solving skills. While not directly stated by teachers, this could be related to GA's comment about difficulty following rules. The indirect relationship between observed behaviours and teacher views suggests that poor problem-solving skills are a notable characteristic of bullies, though they are not often identified as such.

In conclusion, the researcher found two boys (P1 and P2) that obtained a sociometric status of 1, which was unpopular or rejected by peers. From the observation, the researcher found that those two boys (P1 and P2) also displayed characteristics of bullies during the children's playtime on the playground. Both P1 and P2 exhibited characteristics of bullies, such as dominating the playground equipment, being impulsive and aggressive, having more leadership skills, and lacking empathy, problem-solving and prosocial skills. Therefore, P1 and P2 can be considered as bullies in the study. Furthermore, as for the teacher interviews, GA and GB gave different answers regarding the characteristics of bullies among 6-year-old children. However, the answers given aligned with the data gained during the observation.

Triangulation of these findings shows a strong agreement between the observational data and teacher perspectives. Both sources identify dominance, impulsivity, lack of empathy, and lack of prosocial skills as key characteristics of bullies. The observations provide specific examples of these behaviours, whereas the teacher interviews provide a more comprehensive, experience-based perspective on behavioural patterns.

Some characteristics, such as leadership skills, were more prominent in the observational data but were not explicitly mentioned by teachers. On the other hand, teachers mentioned characteristics like having difficulty in controlling anger and having difficulty in following rules, which were not directly found in the observational data but could be inferred from the children's actions.

Types of Bullying

From the findings obtained through observations and semi-structured interviews, the types of bullying that are mostly found in this study are physical bullying and relational bullying, while verbal bullying is the least form of bullying found in this study.

1. Physical bullying

Physical bullying is a direct form of bullying which involves a child or group of children exhibiting behaviours or actions such as hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, pinching, shoving, grabbing toys, damaging belongings, and engaging in rough or intimidating play (Bullock, 2002; Gordon, 2021; Jamalsafri Saibon et al., 2017).

Physical bullying was identified as one of the most common forms of bullying, occurring 28 times during the observations. This type of bullying included actions such as pushing, kicking, hitting, and engaging in rough play. The observations revealed specific instances of children pushing others on slides and monkey bars, with P1 and P2 repeatedly engaging in these behaviours. Interviews with children identified P2 as a frequent physical bully, mentioning hitting and grabbing toys. The teachers' interviews supported these findings, with the class teacher (GA) and assistant teacher (GB) mentioning hitting, pushing, kicking, slapping, and taking things from others as common physical bullying behaviours. This comprehensive data provides strong evidence for the prevalence and nature of physical bullying in the preschool setting.

2. Verbal bullying

Verbal bullying includes children using verbal language or acts of verbal abuse such as ridicule, name-calling, insulting, intimidation, threatening and teasing (Jamalsafri Saibon et al., 2017). During the observation period, verbal bullying was observed less frequently, with only two instances noted. These involved ridicule and teasing, such as a child laughing at another for mispronouncing a word. However, children's interviews revealed a broader range of verbal bullying behaviours, including scolding, threatening, and teasing. The teachers' interviews provided even more extensive examples, with GA mentioning ridicule, teasing, insulting, threatening, and scolding and giving specific examples like children teasing others about their belongings. GB added that children would scold and threaten others over toy sharing. The mismatch between the low observed frequency and the reports from children and teachers suggests that verbal bullying may be more common than in the limited observation period captured.

3. Relational bullying

Relational bullying, also known as social bullying, is a type of psychological attack that is difficult to identify. It includes acts of preschool children, such as spreading rumours and social exclusion, such as preventing someone from joining a group and ignoring the victim (Gordon, 2021; Lee, 2020; Nor Junainah Mohd Isa et al., 2019).

From the observations, relational bullying occurred as frequently as physical bullying, with 28 instances noted. This type involved behaviours such as preventing others from joining playgroups, refusing to be friends, and ignoring peers. Specific observed incidents included girls excluding a boy from playing on swings and children complaining to teachers about being excluded from friendships. The children's interviews supported these findings, with P2, P3, and P4 mentioning experiences of being excluded from friendships or play.

The teacher interviews further confirmed these findings, with GA and GB mentioning exclusionary practices like preventing others from joining groups and forming exclusive "pacts" or teams. GB also noted that when a group member was absent, the remaining members would only play among themselves, excluding others.

The triangulation of data from observations, interviews with children, and interviews with teachers gives a comprehensive understanding of the different types of bullying in

preschool settings. Although physical and relational bullying was the most frequently observed, verbal bullying, while less common, was reported as a significant issue by both children and teachers. This multi-method approach helps validate the findings and provides a more detailed understanding of bullying dynamics in early childhood education settings, emphasizing the importance of using multiple data sources to capture the extent and nature of bullying behaviours fully.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the characteristics of bullies among preschool children and the types of bullying that mostly occur in the preschool setting. The findings of this study are discussed based on the objectives of the study that have been determined. In addition, the findings are discussed relating to previous researchers, literature review, or any writing related to the field of study.

Characteristics of Bullies

Two respondents had a sociometric status of 1, indicating that they were unpopular or rejected by their peers. Other respondents identified those two respondents as the ones who consistently exhibit bullying behaviour against other children. Thus, it can be concluded that the two respondents who became bullies were rejected by their peers per their bullying behaviours. This notion is aligned with Bullock's (2002) claim, which stated that "bullies typically have difficulties in maintaining positive relationships and are rejected by peers".

Then, bullies were also found to be dominant and impulsive, and tend to have a lack of empathy and problem-solving abilities. These characteristics are consistent with the studies of Alsaker and Nägele (2008), Bullock (2002), and Nelson et al. (2010), who stated that children who become bullies are impulsive, like to dominate others, lack empathy and have poor problem-solving skills.

Furthermore, bullies were found to be more aggressive towards peers as well as lack prosocial skills, such as not wanting to share belongings or toys with others. The characteristics identified in this study are aligned with the study by Perren and Alsaker (2006), who found that bullies tend to be more aggressive and lack prosocial skills such as helping and sharing with others.

Next, bullies in this study also appeared to have more leadership abilities, which is correlated with the findings of Perren and Alsaker (2006), who discovered that bullies have more leadership skills than others. In addition, this study found that bullies also display characteristics like having difficulty controlling their anger. This is consistent with the statement made by Bullock (2002), which states that bullies are often children who struggle to control powerful emotions like anger.

To conclude, the results of this study confirm some of the characteristics of bullies described above and are consistent with the findings of some previous researchers.

Types of Bullying

This study discovered that physical and relational bullying are mostly found throughout the observations, whereas verbal bullying occurred the least. In this study, physical bullying behaviours such as hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, and taking other people's belongings were identified. This study's findings of physical bullying are consistent with the literature review by Jamalsafri Saibon et al. (2017), who claim that physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, pushing, pinching, and grabbing others' belongings. Furthermore, the bullying

behaviours found in this study, which included children engaging in rough play, are in line with the point made by Bullock (2002), who claims that physical bullying includes engaging in very rough play.

Moreover, this study found that verbal bullying also occurs during the observation, such as ridicule, teasing and laughing at others, scolding, threatening, and demeaning others. This study's findings on verbal bullying coincide with a statement from Jamalsafri Saibon et al. (2017), who claims that verbal bullying comprises the use of verbal language or an act of verbal abuse, which includes ridiculing, insulting, threatening, and teasing.

Then, in this study, the relational bullying acts found among the respondents included stopping someone from playing within their group, refusing to friend someone, and ignoring someone. These relational acts of bullying are consistent with the findings of a literature review conducted by Gordon (2021), Lee (2020), and Nor Junainah Mohd Isa et al. (2019), who stated that relational bullying is a type of psychological attack, including acts such as social exclusion, preventing someone from joining the group, ignoring someone, and do not want to friend someone.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study shows that bullying does exist in early childhood settings. Another finding shows that the preschool bullies exhibit characteristics which include impulsive, dominant, aggressive, have more leadership skills, lack of prosocial skills, lack of empathy and lack of problem-solving skills. Then, the most popular types of bullying found in this study are physical bullying and relational bullying.

This mixed-methods study describes the characteristics of bullies and the types of bullying that mostly occur in a preschool setting. The results of this study generally align with the findings and writing of previous research. The information gathered about the characteristics of bullies and the types of bullying that most commonly occur in preschool and the result of this study helps the researcher to understand more about the topic.

From an international context, these findings are significant as they confirm that bullying is a widespread issue, even in early childhood settings across different cultures. This supports global research trends and emphasizes the need for early intervention strategies that can be adapted and implemented worldwide. The study's identification of specific bully characteristics and prevalent types of bullying (physical and relational) provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers globally. This information can be used to develop targeted prevention programs and teacher training initiatives, potentially improving early childhood education practices internationally and creating a more inclusive, safe learning environment for young children regardless of cultural background.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Since the data acquired from this study was limited, it was not feasible to go into further detail about bullying problems. Thus, it is suggested that future research should include more respondents, such as children of different ages and teachers from different classes.

Furthermore, because this study only focuses on one preschool, it is recommended that future research includes many preschools from different areas. This will help in gathering a variety of results and data findings.

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