



RESEARCH PAPER

Bullying, Anger, Forgiveness and Psychological Well-being in Early Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The present research project aims to assess the association between bullying, anger, forgiveness and psychological well-being of early adolescents. Bullying is a widespread problem among early adolescents and is associated with adverse psychological outcomes, whereas forgiveness has emerged as a potential protective factor that may help adolescents cope with bullying experiences and maintain positive psychological functioning. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used to collect the data from 400 participants (212 girls and 188 boys) using non-probability purposive sampling strategy. Revised Olweus Bully-victim Questionnaire (OBVQ; Olweus, 2006), Anger Expression Scale for Children (Steele et al., 2009), Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (Enright, 1993) and WHO-wellbeing index (World Health Organization, 1998) were administered to collect the responses. The results revealed significant positive relationship between forgiveness and psychological well-being. Anger and bullying were found to be a significant negative relationship with psychological well-being. Results of regression Analysis depicted forgiveness as the positive predictor of psychological well-being whereas anger and bullying as the negative predictor of psychological well-being and explained 8% of variance altogether. Group differences also showed that gender has a significant impact on study variables. School based interventions should incorporate forgiveness and social-emotional learning programs to reduce the harmful effects of bullying and promote well-being. Enhancing adolescents' capacity for forgiveness may strengthen resilience and foster healthier peer relationships and psychological adjustment.

KEYWORDS Bullying, Anger, Forgiveness, Psychological Well-Being, Adolescents

Introduction

Adolescence is a precarious developmental stage characterized by biological, psychological and social changes, during which individuals are particularly vulnerable to emotional and behavioral problems. Worldwide approximately 1.2 billion individuals are adolescent, the majority of whom reside in low and middle income countries (United Nations, 2023). Global evidence indicates that approximately one in three adolescents experiences bullying, which is strongly associated with anger, emotional dysregulation, anxiety, depression and poor psychological well-being (UNESCO, 2019). In Pakistan adolescents represent a large and growing segment of the population, with significant mental health and educational challenges (Khan et al., 2022).

Anger is known as emotional response that emerges when individuals perceive injustice, frustration, rejection, or threat. Although anger is considered a natural human emotion, persistent and poorly regulated anger can negatively affect psychological adjustment, interpersonal relationships and overall mental health. Among adolescents and young adults, heightened anger has been associated with aggression, hostility, impulsive behaviour, depression, anxiety and reduced emotional well-being (Yubero et al., 2017).

Contemporary psychological literature emphasizes that unmanaged anger, particularly in stressful interpersonal environments such as school and peer groups (Barimah et al., 2024).

Bullying has become a significant psychosocial concern worldwide and is increasingly recognized as a major threat to the emotional and psychological development of adolescents. Bullying refers to repeated aggressive behaviour involving an imbalance of power, where an individual or group intentionally harms another person physically, verbally, socially or electronically. Bullying associated with severe psychological consequences, including emotional distress, loneliness, fear, anger, depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. Recent evidence suggests that adolescents exposed to bullying victimization often demonstrate poor psychological adjustments and diminished subjective well-being (Peker et al., 2024). The emotional impact of bullying is strongly linked with anger and revenge-related cognitions. Victimized adolescents may develop hostile attribution biases, rumination tendencies, and aggressive reactions as a result of repeated peer victimization (Zhao & Zheng, 2024).

Forgiveness has emerged as a significant protective psychological construct that may reduce the harmful effects of bullying and anger. Forgiveness is defined as a conscious process of replacing resentment, hostility and revenge motivations with compassion, empathy, and positive regard toward the offender. Forgiveness is considered a strength that promotes emotional healing, resilience and interpersonal harmony (Liu et al., 2023).

Well-being is a multidimensional construct that encompasses emotional, psychological and social functioning. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in which psychological well being significantly influences academic performance, interpersonal relationships, self-concept and long term mental health outcomes. Exposure to bullying and persistent anger can substantially reduce wellbeing whereas positive emotional traits such as forgiveness and empathy, contribute to healthier psychological functioning.

Literature Review

Researchers have increasingly focused on forgiveness as a coping strategy that can buffer the negative psychological consequences of peer victimization and interpersonal conflicts (Liu et al., 2023). Recent research highlights that forgiveness and emotional regulation may act as protective factors against the negative effects of bullying on well-being. Adolescents who demonstrate greater forgiveness and coping abilities are more likely to maintain higher self-esteem, emotional stability and psychological adjustment despite experiences of victimization (Toussaint et al., 2024). Katsantonis et al., (2024) conducted a large cross-national study involving adolescents from 64 countries. Their findings demonstrated that bullying victimization was consistently associated with lower subjective well-being across different cultural contexts, highlighting bullying as a major threat to adolescents' psychological adjustment and life satisfaction. Marrin et al. (2024) examined supportive relationships as protective factors against bullying victimization. The study found that positive relationships with family, peers, and teachers mitigated psychological distress associated with bullying and enhances adolescents' emotional well-being and resilience. Consequently, examining the interrelationship among anger, bullying, forgiveness, and wellbeing is essential for understanding adolescent mental health and for designing effective psychological interventions and school-based prevention programs.

Current research intended to conclude the link between bullying, anger, forgiveness and psychological well-being in early adolescents. Importantly, it appeared that persons who bully others have elevated anger levels, which affect how aggressively they behave toward others. This study is based on to identify the severity of the bullying and anger and the levels of forgiveness and wellbeing so we can implement intervention and how forgiveness may reduce negative psychological impact of bullying. Therefore this research may contribute to the development of school based intervention programs and

psychological strategies to promote emotional health, positive coping and wellbeing among adolescents.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses for the current research study are as follows:

H1 There is likely to be a significant correlation between bullying, anger, forgiveness and psychological well-being in early adolescents.

H2 Bullying, anger and forgiveness are likely to be a significant predictors of psychological well-being in early adolescents.

H3 There is likely to be significant mean differences between bullying, anger, forgiveness and psychological well-being among early adolescents in term of gender.

Material and Methods

Research design

A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used to examine the relationship between bullying, anger, forgiveness and psychological well-being in early adolescents.

Sample

The non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used to collect the data from different government and private schools in Lahore and Gujrat. The sample was comprised of N= 400, (212 girls) and (188boys) school-going students age range between 11 to 14 years studying in the grades 6 to 8. Students can read and write in the Urdu language having no physical abnormalities. Early adolescents with physical disabilities or any psychiatric condition were excluded as their response could affect the actual intent of conducting the study.

Table 1
Socio Demographics Characteristics of the study sample

Variables	f	%
Gender		
Boys	188	47
Girls	212	53
Age group (years)		
11-12	187	46.8
13-14	213	53.3
Grade		
6 th	90	22.5
7 th	151	37.8
8 th	159	39.8
School		
Government	220	55
Private	180	45

Measures

Revised Olweus Bully-victim Questionnaire (OBVQ; Olweus, 2006)

The revised version self-report measure is comprised of 39 items with majority of the items representing both the transitory (in the past couple of months) and allocation references (school environment). The typical cutoff is regarded as "2 or 3 times a month" (marked as 3) The OBVQ clearly distinguishes between the four types of bullies among students: bullies, victims, bully-victim, and uninvolved. The revised version of the questionnaire capitulate high-reliability coefficient (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$ to $.90$). In the

present study the Urdu translation (Khawar & Malik, 2018) of the measure was administered to the participants comprising only the items on bullying and victimization. The reliability of bullying in the current sample is .86 and on victimization is .91

Anger Expression Scale for Children (Steele et al., 2009)

It is a self-report measure that is administered to the children using paper and pencil on a five-point Likert scale. The scale serves as a gauge for trait rage as well as many aspects of expression and management of anger. It was based on the adult version of STAXI-2. It is comprised of four factors that include trait anger, anger in/hostility, anger expression/out and anger suppression/control. The Cronbach's α reliability of its subscales trait anger was $\alpha=.84$, anger in $\alpha=.71$, anger expression $\alpha=.69$ and anger control $\alpha=.79$. Urdu version of the scale was used in the present study. The Cronbach's α reliability of its subscales trait anger on the current sample is $\alpha=.68$, anger in $\alpha=.56$, anger expression $\alpha=.60$ and anger control $\alpha=.57$.

The Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (Enright 1993)

The EFI-C is self-administered in individual or group settings. It is the short version of the adult scale. It is a scale that measures the frequency in which the victim forgives it offender who has hurt him deeply and in an unfair manner. Similar to the 60-item adult version, the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children is a 30-item scale. It is composed of six subscales behavior (positive and negative), affect (positive and negative) and cognition (positive and negative). The participants provide their responses on a 6-point Likert scale (where encompasses strongly disagree and 6 encompasses strongly agree). The negative items in the scale are reverse scored. The high score in each domain depicts a high level of forgiveness. The scale comprised of high Cronbach's α reliability. In the present study, the Urdu translation of the scale used which was translated by Batool (2021). The reliability on the current sample is positive affect $\alpha=.66$, negative affect $\alpha=.61$, positive behavior $\alpha=.79$, negative behavior $\alpha=.69$, positive cognition $\alpha=.82$ and negative cognition $\alpha=.77$.

WHO-5 Well-being Questionnaire (World Health Organization, 1998)

It is a brief self-reported assessment of present mental health. Children ages 9 and older can use the WHO-5. Respondents are asked to score the WHO-5's five assertions using the following scale (in relation to the past two weeks). Most of the time = 4, more than half = 3, less than half = 2, seldom = 1, all of the time = 5, most of the time = 4, and occasionally = 1. By no means = 0. The final score is calculated by multiplying the total raw score, which ranges from 0 to 25, by 4, where 0 represents the lowest possible well-being and 100 is the highest possible well-being. The Cronbach's alpha reliability is between .83 and .93. The Urdu version of the scale was used in the current study since it is translated into many languages and free for use to aid the general population in the domain of well-being. The scale was translated into Urdu by Shahzad et al. (2021). The reliability of the current sample is .75.

Procedure

After gaining approval of the topic from the board of studies at GC University Lahore, formal permission was taken from the authors of the scales to utilize their scales in the current study. An authority letter was issued from the Department of Clinical Psychology Unit, GCU Lahore to authenticate that the researcher was conducting the research as per the course requirement and for granting permission for data collection. After gaining permission from the head of different schools in Lahore and Gujrat data was collected. Since the participants were below 18 years of age assent was taken from them while written consent was taken from their parents and they were assured that their child's information will be kept confidential. After receiving permission from their parents, the scales were

administered to the participants individually. The nature and purpose of the research were explained. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study any time they feel inconvenience. The participant’s queries regarding the measures were answered and they were provided instructions about how to fill out each questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Table 2
Reliability, Mean and SD of Study Variables

Variables	a	M	SD
Bullying	.91	12.83	6.41
AESC	.71	54.10	7.60
EFI-C	.78	122.24	25.98
WHO-Wellbeing	.75	14.86	5.28

Note. α = Cronbach’s alpha; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; AESC=Anger Expression Scale for Children; EFI-C= Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children

As shown in Table 2 the Cronbach’s alpha of bullying (α=.91) has the strongest reliability whereas the scales of Anger Expression for children (α=.71), Enright Forgiveness Inventory for children (α=.75 the WHO-Wellbeing scale have moderate reliabilities.

Table 3
Pearson Product Moment Correlation indicates the relationship between bullying, anger, forgiveness and psychological well-being and their subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1-Anger	-	.63**	.53**	.46**	.54**	.04	.08	.00	.05	-.15**	.21**	.18**
2- trait anger		-	.56**	-.21**	-.16**	.00	.06	.01	.03	-.18**	.08	.13**
3-Anger out			-	-.16**	-.17**	-.06	-.04	-.10	-.08	-.19**	.25**	.26**
4-Anger In				-	.54**	.06	.08	.05	.07	.04	.08	.02
5-Anger control					-	.08	.05	.02	.06	.02	.09	.00
6-Affect						-	.53**	.54**	.86**	.07	-.03	-.01
7-Behavior							-	.66**	.86**	.13*	-.03	-.03
8-Cognition								-	.88**	.10*	-.15**	-.16**
9-EFI-C									-	.12*	-.09	-.09
10-well-geing										-	-.35**	-.22**
11-victimization											-	.64**
12- Bullying												-

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01. EFI-C= Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children, Correlation of the scale and sub scale of the study variables

Table 4
Hierarchal Multiple Regression to predict Psychological Well-being (N=400)

Variables	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R ²	Δ R ²
		LL	UL				
Step 1							
Forgiveness	.03*	.00	.05	.01	.18*	.01	.01*
Step 2							
Forgiveness	.02**	.00	.05	.01	.12**		
Anger	-.11**	-.17	-.04	.03	-.15**	.04	.03**
Step 3							
Forgiveness	.02*	.00	.04	.01	.11*		
Anger	-.08*	-.15	-.01	.03	-.12*		
Bullying	-.16***	-.24	-.08	.04	-.19***	.07	.07***

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

Table 4 shows the results of the hierarchal multiple regression analysis. The results revealed that Model 1 contributes significantly to the regression model, $F(1,398) = 5.51$, $p < .05$ and accounts for 1% variation in psychological well-being. Forgiveness is found to be the significant positive predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.35$, $p < .05$) whereas introducing anger in model 2 explains an additional 3% variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .03$) in psychological well-being and this change in R^2 is significant, $F(2, 397) = 7.55$, $p < .001$. Anger is found to be a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being. After introducing bullying in Model 3, the model explained 7% of additional variance in psychological well-being and this change in R^2 was significant, $F(3,396) = 10.34$, $p < .001$. Bullying is found to be the significant negative predictor of psychological well-being.

Table 5
Independent Sample t-test depicting gender differences in Bullying, Anger, Forgiveness and Psychological well-being (N=400)

Variables	Boys (n=188)		Girls (n=212)		t (398)	p	95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Bullying	15.37	7.23	10.57	4.54	7.83*	0.00	3.59	6.00	.80
Anger	56.03	7.25	53.37	7.50	4.96*	.00	2.21	5.12	0.36
Forgiveness	116.18	24.26	127.62	24.60	-4.67*	.00	-16.26	-6.63	0.47
Psychological wellbeing	14.15	4.80	15.48	5.60	-2.55*	.01	-2.35	-3.03	0.26

Note. * $p < .05$; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; CI=Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit.

The table 5 reveals significant mean differences among the study variables based on gender. It shows that significant mean differences exist among boys and girls on bullying ($t = 7.83$, $p < .05$), anger ($t = 4.96$, $p < .05$), forgiveness ($t = -4.67$, $p < .05$) and psychological well-being ($t = -2.55$, $p < .05$). The boys are more involved in bullying behavior and having anger problems as compared to girls. Similarly, the girls depict more forgiveness and have greater psychological well-being as compared to boys.

Discussion

The current study examined the relative strength of bullying, anger and forgiveness in predicting psychological well-being. In addition to that, it concentrates on assessing the group differences in terms of gender.

Initially, to fulfilled the assumptions of the regression analysis and to know the association of variables correlation analysis was run and the results were calculated. Most of the variables were significantly correlated with each other. The next step included the hierarchal multiple regression analysis to determine the relative strength of the independent variables (bullying, anger and forgiveness) in predicting the outcome variable (psychological well-being). Results depicted that forgiveness is a significant positive predictor of psychological well-being. Early adolescents with the virtue of forgiveness indulged in their personalities have better psychological well-being. The results of the present study are in close connection with the previous literature supporting that by forgiving other people significantly enhances the psychological well-being of adolescents (Hasan & Tiwari, 2019; Wulandari & Megawati, 2020).

Anger was found to be the significant negative predictor of psychological well-being indicating that adolescents having anger problems have diminished psychological well-being. The results are in line with the previous research indicating a negative impact of anger on the psychological well-being of adolescents (Wulandari & Megawati, 2020). Similarly, bullying was found to be another significant negative predictor of psychological well-being, indicating that the students involved in the bullying behaviors have compromised psychological well-being as a result of which they are not able to get pleasure

in their daily life activities. These findings are congruent with the study of Andreou et al. (2010) who investigated the impact of school bullying on psychological well-being and the results reported that participation in bullying activities lowers the psychological well-being of such individuals. Similarly, Bokhari (2020) study depicted the effect of bullying on psychological well-being and the results showed the negative relationship of bullying with psychological well-being. These results are consistent with the present findings.

There were significant mean differences that were observed based on anger among the boys and girls. The boys were more likely to express their anger as compared to the girls. These findings are inconsistent with the previous literature depicting that boys are more expressive in anger tantrums as compared to girls and have more anger problems as compared to girls (Su et al., 2024). Significant gender differences were also revealed regarding bullying behavior. The boys were more involved in the bullying behavior compared to girls (Prinstein et al., 2001).

There were significant gender differences regarding forgiveness. Girls were more likely to forgive others as compared to boys. These findings are consistent with the previous literature depicting that girls are more likely to forgive, boys, because they value relationships, being empathetic and agreeableness features embedded in their personalities ((Riek & DeWit, 2018).). Javed et al. (2018) study also found girls to have a higher tendency to forgive as compared to boys. Similarly, the present study found that girls have better psychological well-being as compared to boys. These findings are consistent with Akhter (2015) investigating that female students have better psychological well-being as compared to male students.

Conclusion

The study concluded that anger and bullying have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of adolescents, while forgiveness has a positive impact on psychological well-being i.e. it was a positive predictor of psychological well-being. The anger along with its domain as well as bullying were negative correlation with psychological well-being whereas forgiveness along with its domain was positively correlated with psychological well-being. Therefore, plotting and executing the anti-bullying forgiveness intervention in light of the present findings would be fruitful and beneficial for the bully-victim of early adolescents.

Implications

The present study revealed some salient predictors of psychological well-being that could be further probed qualitatively. First the study highlighted anger and bullying as significant risk factors that negatively influence adolescents psychological wellbeing. Study also focuses on the protective role of forgiveness in reducing the harmful effects of anger and bullying. Finally, the study provides valuable guidance for educators, parents and policy makers in developing compressive anti-bullying policies and mental health promotion strategies

Limitations and Suggestions

There are certain limitations in the present study that are in shear need to be acknowledged. Results are based on adolescents belonging to the age range of 11 to 14 years and admitted in grades 6, 7 and 8 so these findings cannot be generalized to the adolescent population in general thus limiting the generalizability of the results. The sample was collected from only a few schools of Gujrat and Lahore city in the future it is recommended to incorporate more schools belonging to various provinces of Pakistan.

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