School Bullying and Association with Somatic Complaints in Victimized Children: Authors' Reply

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To the Editor: School bullying is a serious public health problem globally, and is widely prevalent in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Unfortunately, most research on bullying has focussed on the victims and not much attention has been given to the perpetrators. Philip and Fahad have rightly pointed out that the experience of bullying adversely impacts both the victims and the perpetrators [1]. Several studies have found bullying perpetration associated with a longitudinal risk for externalizing problem behaviors (conduct problems, delinquency, weapon carrying, and anti-social behaviors) and consumption of substances (alcohol, cigarette, and illicit drugs) [2]. Bullying perpetration is also associated with continuity of aggression later in life [3]. Evolutionary theory suggests that victims, who graduate to becoming perpetrators, may be using their aggression as an adaptive strategy to escape their status as victims. However, this transition may be achieved at a great psychosocial cost, as bully-victims are reported to have the worst long-term physical and mental health outcomes [3].

The authors have raised the important issue of mediating factors such as the type of parenting that can modify the response to peer victimization in children. In fact, there are several risk and protective factors at the individual, family, school, and community level that are dynamically linked to the child's psychosocial response to experiences of victimization and being an aggressor. Some of the risk factors include presence of a neurodevelopmental disorder, low socioeconomic status, poor parental mental health, and family conflict [4]. Research has also identified several protective factors including prosociality, good academic grades,

and a positive school climate [4]. Since school bullying has grave consequences for both victims and perpetrators [5], it is imperative that schools implement effective violence prevention programs that help in early identification and prevention of school bullying. Programs that focus on reducing risks and enhancing protective factors hold considerable promise.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest None.

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